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Review for...

## Go Vino

242 Victoria St

Hamilton

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### Bar Fly

1<sup>st</sup> July 2006

Tracey Cooper

Chief Reporter - - Waikato Times

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ANY new bar in Hamilton is likely to get the thumbs up from Barfly but it's particularly pleasing when they offer something a little different from the rest. Go Vino \_ the food side of which was reviewed by Stir It Up columnist Louise Belay last week \_ fits that bill.

On Barfly's first visit, the gas heater outside was working overtime and, before we got in trouble, Barfly and the Aucklander chatted to a couple who'd just got engaged before they shot off to practise their pre-nuptial agreements. She reckoned the Aucklander should dye his hair but otherwise they were friendly enough.

The low platforms out front where we sat are only just big enough for a table and a couple of chairs, but a word of warning; don't sit on the outside corner. One slightly misplaced chair leg and you'll go arse over kite on to the footpath. Barfly likes seeing outdoor seating to the edge of the road because it makes for a more social atmosphere, especially when there are several bars-cafes in a cluster doing the same thing.

In this case, Sohl's on one side and the artsy new La Commune Cafe on the other, where Judeez Master Kebab shop used to be. It's all very convivial. It was in the former kebab shop where some scumbag hid out before Big Reece \_ recent recipient of an ent. Onya \_ got on the perp's tail and brought him to justice after he'd boofed a woman.

Go Vino itself was an Indian restaurant not too long ago. You can still see the faux-Indian scrolls in the walls inside the new bar-wine shop. It's not a big place; long and narrow with the stainless steel bar taking up most of the left-hand wall.

The opposite wall displays a healthy selection of wines, which you can take home or drink on site for an extra fiver a bottle. Couches either side of the doors provide the bulk of the indoor seating, aside from a few bar stools and a couple of window seats.

The lack of room might become an issue if it's busy and you're wanting to settle in for a while. And it's the sort of place you could easily settle in for a while, when it's not busy.

Barfly was immediately attracted to the **Porfidio** tequila, widely rated as the best in the world. Of course, there's nothing wrong with Jose and Pepe, but **Porfidio** a pure agave tequila that comes in hand-blown glass bottles with a small cacti statue inside is something special.

**Porfidio** comes in the distilled, clear Plata version or the barrel-aged Anejo. The Anejo is actually made by pouring the Plata into oak barrels and storing it for at least a year. It takes two litres of Plata to make one of Anejo, which probably explains the price differential. At \$9 for the Plata and \$15 for the Anejo - That's for quite a fat shot - it's not cheap. You sure wouldn't want to be knocking them back with lemon and salt unless you had a fairly generous benefactor on hand.

The Plata is quite sharp on the tongue, slightly metallic and not too far removed from what most people would be used to drinking here.

But after however many years in an oak barrel, the edges have been smoothed away and the Anejo comes out smooth and lush in a rich brown hue. Tequila lovers should make the trip, if just for one shot.

There are several other bottles stashed up beside the chiller that look worthy of inspection, not

least the Brazilian Cachaca, a cane spirit, also aged in oak barrels. There may not be a more appropriate time than now, with the World Cup on.

Inside the chillers, the surprises continue with the rows of Moa beer. The Marlborough brew is highly rated in all its three or four versions.

For sheer novelty value, the beer brewed in the "methode traditionnelle" style (the same way as champagne is made) looks likely with its wired down cork lid. There's a non-standard line up of other bottled beers as well and top-quality spirits lined up at the bar.

Sticking with the quality line-up, the cigar box sitting over the bar contains some tasty looking specimens all the way from Cuba. You can get the very same Romeo y Juliet cigars Winston Churchill toked on for \$45 or something smaller for \$4.

With all that, groovy beats and a welcoming atmosphere, it could easily turn into a dangerous sort of place for a Barfly. Just as long as it's not too busy.

In a word: Connoisseurish.

Best feature: **Porfidio** tequila.

House speciality: Quality drinks selections.

Loos: They've got real cloth hand towels.

Go Vino, 242 Victoria St, Hamilton.

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## Delicious bites and great wine

SATURDAY , 24 JUNE 2006

By LOUISE BELAY - Waikato Times

### **WHO said Hamiltonians couldn't embrace anything new?**

Go Vino, the former Victoria street wine shop, recently morphed into Go Vino, the tapas bar, and it's doing just fine, thank you.

Go Vino's new venture, a combined wineshop and tapas bar may be new but already its big soft, chocolate-brown sofas are prime position on most nights. When owners Ryan Laird and Shaun Kay decided to move across the street they welcomed the chance to retain the existing wine shop while adding a bar and tapas menu. Furthermore, competing with existing wine retailers was not on their list. Enter Shaun Rolten, chef, who runs the kitchen side of the business, producing tapas-style small plates and platters. It's a combination which works well.

A few sofas and groovy tunes make a night at the Go Vino lounge a welcome break from the chill outside. Small is beautiful, and perhaps because the seating is limited and the welcome warm, the effect is of being in someone's lounge.

Enter the bar, and Ryan is on hand to advise on the extensive and well-chosen range of wines at wineshop prices. Wines are categorised, so finding something especially exotic or compatible with a curry is no problem. Either take a bottle or three home, or pay \$5 corkage and enjoy your wine in the bar (that also sells wine by the glass, spirits and beers) then you can do the Spanish thing and order from the tapas menu.

The Go Tapas menu changes weekly at the whim of Rolten. Already some favourites are emerging, like the very moreish New Zealand scallops pan fried in karengo butter with anchovy paste and caramelised fennel (\$8) I tried last week, along with the balsamic mushrooms (\$6) and the stylish vegetable ratatouille bruschetta (\$6.50).

Tapas here are as they should be, small bites. Flavours are predominantly European, often with a New Zealand twist. Go Tapas are entree-size, carefully constructed and cooked portions which are just enough for one but enough to share if you order a few courses.

When I visit again this week, last week's fat Greek olives stuffed with feta are now fried (\$5), an unexpected but delicious treatment. Three of us try the well presented tasting platter (\$20) including breads, fried olives with aioli, a sample of Whitestone Windsor blue cheese with roasted persimmon, duck liver pate, marinated wild pork, salmon and chicken from the menu.

To wash it down we ordered a surprisingly good Villa Maria cabernet sauvignon merlot (\$22 a bottle) from the wine side.

This week Go Vino has gone Christmas. The midwinter Christmas menu boasts a dish of very moist turkey breast with an almost meaty porcini stuffing (\$12) and roasted pork belly stuffed with dried apples figs and muscatels (\$12). We add some crunchy fried potatoes with pipiriri chilli aioli (\$6). Sweet teeth can enjoy a crispy filo pastry fill with six kinds of nuts (\$8.50).

The pork with its syrupy pan juices and melt-in-the-mouth texture is an immediate favourite; so tender it could be eaten with a spoon. The subtly flavoured pipiriri aioli was another, and it's hard to leave when a glass of Brick Bay Matakana Pharos 2002 red (\$32 a bottle) is offered. Go Vino's service is faultless, the music funky, the decor stylish and the tapas are pretty damn good too.

In a nutshell: Food. Small but perfectly formed and big on flavour.

Service: Knowledgeable and right there when you need it.

Bonus: Great wine at wineshop prices with a \$5 corkage.

Hours: Tuesday by arrangement, Wednesday to Saturday midday to late, Sunday 3pm-8pm.

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