

## Late-night bites

Capitol Hill's wee-hour haunts

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# The Seattle Times

## TO DRAW LATE-DAY CROWDS, COFFEEHOUSES OFFER LIBATIONS



### Retail Report

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Seattle Times  
business reporters*

When Fonté Coffee Roaster decided to include a bar at its downtown Seattle cafe, the idea was not to have young women pounding down shots at 9 a.m.

But Fonté opened last year near the Lusty Lady, and stripper hopefuls sometimes showed up at the cafe early, ordered tequila and sat down to fill out job applications.

"Some were giving themselves courage to apply for the job," said Will Tharreau, Fonté's general manager, who did not know if the morning application process included an audition.

Now the Lady has closed, and



*Manager Will Tharreau pours a glass of wine at Fonté cafe in Seattle.*

Fonté is back to its more traditional customers — people who drink its Georgetown-roasted coffee in the morning and start ordering flights of wine in the afternoon.

It's among a growing number of Seattle coffee purveyors adding alcohol to draw the late-day crowd. The trend reached Starbucks last year, when the mega chain opened two stores on Capitol Hill that aren't called Starbucks and sell

wine and beer. Now Starbucks has decided to sell wine and beer at one location under its own name, and unveiled the remodeled store last week at 1600 E. Olive Way.

Other coffee shops that recently received licenses to sell some kind of alcohol include Caffe Vita, Porchlight Coffee, Bird on a Wire Espresso, Cortona Café and Inner Chapters Bookstore & Café.

Don Blakeney, a Capitol Hill resident who visited the Olive Way Starbucks store, wonders if the trend will lead to more people drinking beer and wine at lunch, the way they do in New York, where he used to live.

"I'm wondering if, in the same way Starbucks brought coffee to the country, if it's going to bring the idea that you can have a glass of wine at 1 o'clock in the afternoon as a normal part of an adult's life," Blakeney said.

"We're really examining all these things," he said of alcohol consumption, pointing to two voter initiatives on the ballot that would put the state out of the liquor business and let private retailers sell liquor.

Cultural theories aside, alcohol  
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PHOTOS BY CLIFF DESPRAUX / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Customers Katie Butcher and Amber Treacy, both of Seattle, sip wine at Fonté Coffee Roaster Cafe & Wine Bar in Seattle. More coffeehouses are adding wine and beer to their menus.

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### COFFEEHOUSES ADDING LIBATIONS

#### Owners hope alcoholic beverages will entice late-day crowds

sales help pay the rent and typically mean higher-dollar purchases, said Matt Milletto, vice president of the American Barista and Coffee School and co-owner of Water Avenue Coffee in Portland.

The average coffeehouse transaction is about \$4.25, but when they add beer and wine it rises, especially in the evening, to \$6.25 to \$6.50, he said.

"A coffeehouse serving beer and wine provides an alternative to a bar or tavern or sports bar or dive bar," Milletto said. "They may opt for a local cafe, which is a little mellower."

Cafes with light food menus and alcohol also present a low-cost alternative to restaurants, he said.

"They can have a less expensive, light evening meal or appetizers and maybe add that extra glass of wine to their tab," Milletto said.

Inner Chapters Bookstore & Café in South Lake Union started carrying bottled beer and hard cider this summer as an alternative to coffee for its monthly open mic nights, and to encourage people to come by in the evenings.

The profit margin is higher than for coffee and pastries, too, said owner Kristina Barnes, partly because the latter are perishable and have to move fast.

Pendergrast said. "You go there with your laptop and occupy their table for hours. It would be logical to try to sell them more than a cup of coffee they can nurse."

The people who like specialty coffee are roughly the same demographic as those who like wine, he said. That's why Wine Spectator magazine has him write a regular column about coffee.

Pendergrast hopes that coffeehouses offering wine will lead consumers to think about why they pay so much more for wine than coffee, and what it means for the growers — who tend to live in developed countries for wine grapes but underdeveloped places for coffee.

People willingly pay \$10 to \$15 for a glass of good wine but rarely \$5 for good coffee, he said.

"Maybe they'd be more willing if they saw them in juxtaposition and made the mental connection," Pendergrast said.

Starbucks decided to offer wine and beer partly because customers were asking for it in focus groups, said Kris Engskov, vice president for the Northwest.

Its selection of Northwest wines creates a nice marriage with its locally roasted coffee, he said.

In Italy, Spain and France, he said, "they're not called espresso bars or coffee bars. They're just bars. At 7 a.m. that means you're getting espresso. At 7 in the evening, you're probably going there for a single malt or whatever."

His decision to offer food and a bar with liquor, beer and 140 wines was straightforward.

"Why wouldn't you put in a little more sophisticated operation that would be able to support itself in the evening as well as the morning?"

That does not mean it's a simple operation, or that we will see that format across Starbucks' chain.

"I don't know if I'd want to have a whole bunch of these around the country," Odom said.

— Melissa Allison