

Corking good way to enter the business and roll out a barrel

DIY wineries

Margaret Rand on how you can make your own blend

The phrase "and this is a bottle of my own wine" used to be a sure way of bringing any festive evening to a rapid and resolute end. Oh, is that the time? Gosh, must run.

Nowadays, though, you could find investment bankers and city lawyers crying after you, as you hasten to the hall, that it cost 30 quid a bottle and it's from St Emilion and look, click on this link and you can see it fermenting.

Thirty quid a bottle? It had better be good. And it does seem to be, though comparisons with other Bordeaux on price alone would be pointless. You're not paying just for a bottle of wine: you're paying for fun, for exclusivity, for the adventure of being in the wine business. Collecting first growths is fine, but do you get to sit at a table at Château Mouton-Rothschild and put your own blend together? You do not. So you join Crushpad.

Crushpad ([wine.com\) opens winemaking to those not in the business. City Winery \(\[citywinery.com\]\(http://citywinery.com\)\) is similar, but at the moment based only in New York, while Crushpad has an operation in Bordeaux as well as in the Napa Valley.](http://crushpad-</p>
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The company started in San Francisco, with a winery to which grapes were trucked at harvest to be vinified by its members.

The winery has since moved out to Napa, but the principle is the same. As a member you may choose to do some of the cellar work or leave it to the staff. You'll have discussed in advance the sort of wine you want to make, where your grapes will come from, and what the winemaking options are.

When the time comes to make your blend, you can go there, experiment with the various options and tailor your wine to your precise tastes. You can design your own label, and Crushpad will handle the bottling.

If you decide to turn it into a commercial operation, Crushpad will help you do that, too. Some Crushpad wines have been favourably reviewed by Robert Parker and the Wine Spectator. And what you do

not want to do in person you can follow online – even the fermentation.

Unless you spend a lot of time in California, making wine at Crushpad in Napa is not practical for anyone based in the UK.

But Bordeaux is a lot closer, and in 2008 Crushpad linked with Jonathan Maltus in St Emilion. Mr Maltus is a Brit, a winemaker by profession and an entrepreneur by nature; his winery at Château Teyssier



'Part of the appeal is taking a taxi to the winery'

Michael Dorf

is now the base for Crushpad Bordeaux.

Adrian Chopin an investment banker went there to blend the barrel of wine he is making with a couple of friends, and it was, he says, "fantastic fun".

"It's given me greater insight into how you can alter a wine with light tweaks to the base wine. We tried three or four blends, and the one we all liked turned out to be 10 per cent different from the original base blend, though it tasted very different."

His wine will, he reckons, work out at £30 a bottle including tax but excluding shipping. In Bordeaux, Mr Chopin met other City people, entrepreneurs, and quite a lot of Americans who had already done Crushpad in Napa. "It was very sociable, and very well organised," he says.

If, however, your travels take you to New York or Chicago a lot, you might consider City Winery. Again, you make a barrel of wine, either alone or with friends. Founder Michael Dorf says that sometimes it is a law firm or media company organising an evening of blending as a corporate outing or a private event, and then splitting the wine.

"Most people are based in New York," says Mr Dorf, "as part of the appeal is being able to take a taxi or the subway to the winery."

"But some travel through New York from all over the world, and having a sort of club there is convenient for them."

In 2011, City Winery will open in Chicago, and after that European cities could be targets: Mr Dorf mentions Paris or Berlin, or even London.

It could give a whole new slant to popping out for a bottle of wine.