

# VINO 101

## The Atlanta Wine School's **Roswell Wine Room** Brings Vine Sophistication to the Suburbs

[ WRITTEN BY BRE EDMONDS ]

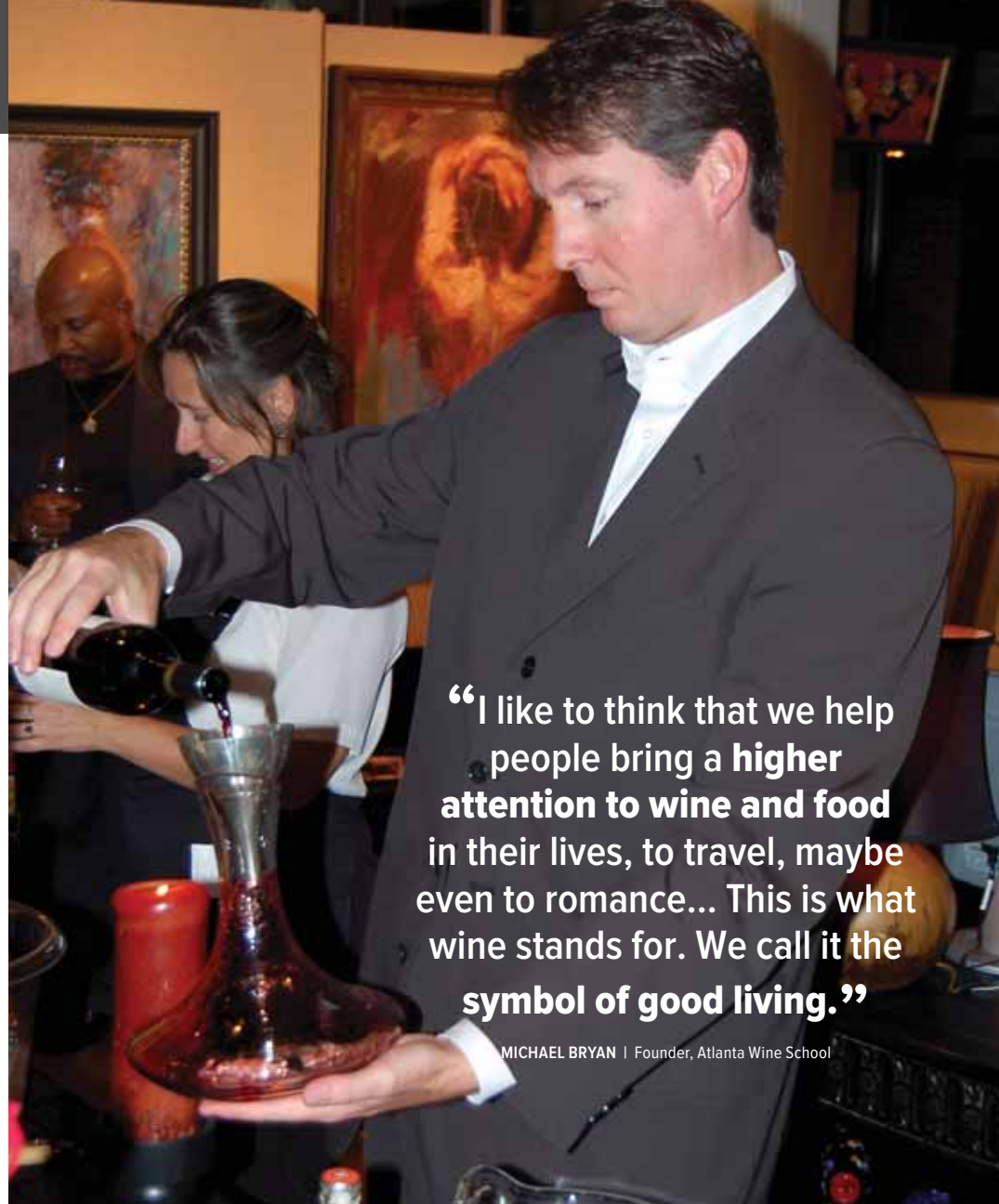
I've mentally prepared myself for an evening of learning and come to class with notebook in tow, but this is nothing like the educational experience I remember from college. Instead of a tweed suit, my instructor wears a sport coat, and my fellow classmates are dressed smartly in slacks or casual evening attire. Most have come in pairs — for many couples in the room, this is a date night, possibly even the celebration of an anniversary or a birthday, but the majority in attendance are sets of friends here for a girls night out, and a few are here alone. Low lighting and candles create an appropriately romantic ambiance to set the stage for our subject matter. Tonight, we are studying wine.

We sit at tables of eight, and mine hosts an eclectic mix of individuals from various backgrounds with a common goal: To broaden our horizons and gain a deeper appreciation for the libation we so enjoy. At each seat is a tasting placemat, various pieces of Riedel stemware and a plate of artisanal cheeses, an accompaniment unique to this particular Wines & Cheeses course. We'll be tasting eight wines tonight and eight complementary cheeses, but for now, I casually sip on a glass of aperitif and take in my surroundings as I wait for class to begin.

The room is small and cozy, with a handful of tables lining the room from front to back. Along one wall is a bar hosting a row of wine bottles — during courses that do not involve cheese tasting, this is where you'll find a buffet of hors d'oeuvres in case you didn't have time to grab dinner. The décor is simple but appropriate, with vineyard scenes and grape vines splashing the walls. This is the Wine Room in Roswell, the newest venue and first permanent home to the Atlanta Wine School, and it's opening last June granted suburbanites like myself the opportunity to learn from the wine experts in our own backyard.

PHOTOGRAPHY  
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SCHOOL





“I like to think that we help people bring a **higher attention to wine and food** in their lives, to travel, maybe even to romance... This is what wine stands for. We call it the **symbol of good living.**”

MICHAEL BRYAN | Founder, Atlanta Wine School

Michael Bryan decants a bottle of red wine

### Striking Gold

The Atlanta Wine School (AWS) is the brainchild of Michael Bryan, a man who, eight years ago, had no experience whatsoever in the wine trade. What he did have was far more important: An infatuation with wine he'd been fostering since college and very good timing. Following the advice of a success coach to “stand in his passion,” Bryan began offering wine seminar services to corporate America in 2000, conducting professional yet entertaining wine tastings during downtime at business conferences. “I had no idea at the time we were entering the golden age of wine in America,” he admitted, but the positive feedback he got while considering the venture gave him a good feeling, which proved correct — wine consumption in America has increased year after year for more than a decade, and in 2008, the United States became the biggest import market in the world, surpassing the United Kingdom for the first time in history.

The success Bryan found with corporate America gave him the notion to offer services to the general public. “[I realized that] in this city of 5.5 million people, there was no place for people to go to learn more about wine,” he said. So he gathered together some fellow wine experts in the area (by this time, he had three different wine credentials under his belt to



warrant the professional label), and founded AWS in 2003. Since welcoming its first students in September 2004, AWS has amassed 4,000 enrollments, and the vino continues to flow freely.

### Suburban Sophistication

In the beginning, AWS rented facilities in midtown, Dunwoody and Vinings, but the temporary format left them unable to provide a consistent experience between the venues. So, in June 2007, the school purchased an outlet on Holcomb Bridge Road in Roswell, giving it a permanent place to hang its hat.

This is “vinotainment,” Bryan told us as he called our class to order. “We’re here for part education and part entertainment.” He taught about the wines and cheeses on an individual level, including tidbits on the history, region and makeup of each, and also opened the floor for discussion about each pairing. We sampled *Epoisses*, a French cheese made from cow’s milk, along with a 2004 Hangtime Pinot Noir from California (my personal favorite) and *Robiola Lange*, a blend of cow and sheep milk from Italy, with a 2005 Rietvallei Cabernet Sauvignon from South Africa. We took note of the texture and flavor of each cheese, and Bryan offered tips on where to buy them and how to serve them. We discussed the character of each wine — the aroma, the texture, the acidity, even the color. At the end of the night, I was excited about my newfound knowledge and anxious to share it with friends; I even ventured next door to pick up a few bottles at J’s Beverage Depot, where AWS attendees can purchase most labels from their classes at a slight discount.

This particular course has been designed to cater to individuals with varying levels of wine knowledge, but perhaps the most popular courses are “For Beginners Only.” In fact, the school offers a one-time crash course by that very name twice a month. Here, you’ll learn general terms and principles, including how to describe aroma and the basics of food pairing. For those who want to delve deeper, eight-week “Intro to Wine” courses offer astute learners the chance to immerse themselves in the study of wine, with resources such as tasting guides and course books to

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supplement instruction, and even the presentation of a diploma at the program's conclusion. Other course options include "Food & Wine Pairings," "Wine & Chocolate" and those focused on a specific type of wine, such as "Romance of Italy."

Course prices range from \$50 for basic, one-time classes to \$499 for an eight-week introductory course to \$999 for a Certified Specialist of Wine (CSW) Credential training program. AWS is also the only institution in North America to offer this

type of CSW training program, and the Wine Room has hosted 34 individuals in the wine trade hoping to obtain this prestigious credential, including wine retailers, sommeliers and even a winery owner.

#### **Libations for All Occasions**

But despite its new presence in the suburbs, AWS does not neglect its city dwelling or corporate clientele. The school's primary business still involves corporate events similar to those Bryan worked with in the beginning. They also work with residential events, such as book clubs and wedding receptions, customizing their involvement to suit the clients' individual needs. The school can send staff onsite, or host private events at the Roswell facility, or even at area art galleries. Occasionally, AWS partners with wine and food festivals to promote and facilitate events such as the Discover Series, which includes regionally themed parties involving wine, cuisine and culture.

In addition, AWS still offers 30 classes a year downtown in The Piedmont Room above Park Tavern, a facility that allows wine school students to gaze over Piedmont Park and the Atlanta skyline as they learn. Since this venue tends to draw a younger crowd than its suburban counterpart, AWS has created a program called "School Nights" that caters to wine-lovers under the age of 35. The classes, which are taught by AWS junior instructors of the same age group, are a bit cheaper than those in Roswell and carry a more informal air. With themes such as "Down Under Thunder," which focuses on Australian wines, "School Nights" classes begin with a half hour period for participants to mix and mingle with a glass of reception wine and hors d'oeuvres, after which they sit down at rounds of six to eight people that allow for easy conversation. "This is,

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Vintage Port class at the Roswell Wine Room

**TIME FOR TASTING**

Want to learn a little about wine, sample a variety of labels and possibly discover a new favorite? Visit these local wine shops for casual wine tastings.

**Feddeaux**

This unique shop combines delectable bakery treats with fine wine, and hosts wine tastings every other Friday from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. for \$8 per person. Includes appetizers and 6 wine samples, with themes such as “Simple Pleasures of the West Coast” and “Argentina Spectacular.”

3521 Braselton Hwy.  
Dacula  
770-904-2212  
[www.feddeaux.com](http://www.feddeaux.com)

**Marietta Wine Market**

Boasting a collection of gourmet foods, wine accessories, glassware and more than 250 wines from around the world, the shop hosts wine tastings on Wednesdays from 5 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 2 to 4 p.m. Enjoy complimentary samples and hors d’oeuvres; donations benefit local charities.

18 Powder Springs St. SE  
Marietta  
770-919-1574  
[www.mariettawinemarket.com](http://www.mariettawinemarket.com)

**Vino 100**

Featuring a “Great Wall of Wine,” Vino 100 offers more than 100 brands for \$25 or less and hosts wine tastings every Saturday from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. for \$10, a portion of which is donated to charity. Enjoy live jazz and appetizers while you sample several affordable wines.

131 S. Main St.  
Alpharetta  
770-343-8010  
[www.tinderboxvino100atl.com](http://www.tinderboxvino100atl.com)

**WineStyles**

By organizing wines by “style” based on general impressions, flavor and food pairing, WineStyles makes wine selection simple. Check out “Tuesday Tastings” for six themed samples (\$6), “Drink in Style Thursdays” for 12 samples, appetizers and wine education (\$12), or “Weekend Wine Down” for eight samples and light appetizers (\$8).

4511 Olde Perimeter Way  
Atlanta  
770-393-1110  
[www.winestyles.net](http://www.winestyles.net)

dare I say, a fun, sophisticated and professional way for them to meet others,” Bryan said

Looking into the future, Bryan hopes to open an Epicurean Center that will encourage Atlantans to nourish their appreciation for food as well. After all, appreciation for the finer things in life is what AWS is all about. “I know I can change people’s lives by helping them discover a new dimension,” he said. “And it’s not just the wine, it’s really all about good living. I like to think that we help people bring a higher attention to wine and food in their lives, to travel, maybe even to romance. I don’t want to overstep my boundaries, but this is what wine stands for. We call it the symbol of good living.” **PN**

**CONTINUING EDUCATION**

Find more information or register for these upcoming AWS classes at [www.atlantawineschool.com](http://www.atlantawineschool.com).

- May 5:** Bordeaux for Everyday, Piedmont Room at Park Tavern
- May 19:** Whites and Rosé, Piedmont Room
- May 22:** World of Reds, Roswell
- June 2:** Spring into Burgundy, Piedmont Room
- June 11:** Beginners Only, Roswell
- June 16:** Make Your Own Margaritas, Piedmont Room
- June 19:** Wines & Cheeses, Roswell
- June 23:** Introduction to Wine (8 Weeks), Roswell
- June 25:** Beginners Only, Roswell
- July 9:** Beginners Only, Roswell
- July 21:** Wines by the Pool, Piedmont Room
- July 22:** Wines & Cheeses, Roswell
- July 30:** Beginners Only, Roswell

