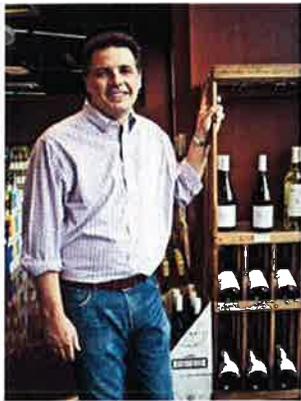


The City Paper

Belle Meade's Wine Chap welcomes with British charm

Thursday, April 30, 2009 - William Williams



London-born Richard Payne has opened The Wine Chap Wine & Spirits in West Nashville.

The geography and climate of the United Kingdom may not be suitable for winemaking.

But that's of no worry to Nashvillian Richard Payne, a British expatriate who fondly recalls the homeland but so loves his adopted city of 15 years he decided to celebrate with wine.

Actually, with a wine store.

Playfully called The Wine Chap Wine & Spirits, Payne's newly opened retail shop shares a building with the Belle Meade Publix. Like its grocery neighbor, TWC offers a sleek and contemporary interior space that borders on big-city hip, its personality clearly not to be confused with the austere demeanor of a traditional British butler.

As to the name, Payne said his wife (Barbara Keith) concocted it several years ago as her husband's email address.

"It stuck with me," said Payne, who was born and raised in suburban London. "I like it."

Those browsing The Wine Chap for a bottle of vino will too.

"We really wanted to create a customer-friendly environment with plenty of room for customers to move around and find what they need," Payne said. "The building has

great windows and natural light with almost no direct sunlight into the space.”

Payne enlisted Southeast Venture LLC interior designer Ginny Caldwell to give the Chap a proper, shall we say, suit fitting.

“Ginny did a great job of putting our thoughts on paper, choosing colors and materials, and helping think through the layout,” Payne said. “We are really pleased with how it turned out.”

Helping ensure a fine interior finish, Payne said, is the fact that Hill Realty’s The Hill Center at Belle Meade is an eye-catching development that has transformed the former site of the generic strip center long home to the Hill grocery. Combined with the Belle Meade Town Center across Harding Road, the two high-profile developments have transformed this bustling West Nashville commercial node.

“We want everyone at every price range to feel welcome to come and just browse the space,” Payne said.

That welcoming feeling stems, in part, from the wine merchant’s feeling so accepted in Music City. Payne met Barbara in the U.K. while the two were working as aviation insurance brokers at Lloyds of London in the early 1990s. Later, he also worked as a pension planner.

“[Barbara] is a Nashville native, and we decided Nashville would be the best place to raise a family,” Payne said. “Anyone that knows us will know that she decided, and I agreed.”

Payne traded insurance work for wine sales, landing a job at Nashville Wine & Spirits. That Belle Meade institution — credited by many within the city’s wine retail community as having introduced Nashvillians to non-mainstream wines — provided Payne the chance to learn about the business before venturing out on his own. He toiled for 10 years at the venerable shop — an experience for which he said he is “grateful” — before opening The Wine Chap.

“[NW&S] was a fun place to work, [but] it was always my plan to own my own store,” he said.

While at NW&S, Payne met Will Motley, who opened Woodland Wine Merchant in East Nashville’s Five Points district in the fall of 2007.

“Will was very generous and helpful when I called for advice in getting the store going,” Payne said.

So now, Payne will, to an extent, compete with both Motley and his friends at Nashville Wine & Spirits. However, much like there has always been fan support shared by legendary British rock bands Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones and The Who, Nashville

has emerged the past few years as a sophisticated city with a large enough population of wine drinkers to patronize numerous quality wine shops.

Specifically, Payne said there is “plenty of business” for both The Wine Chap and NW&S to thrive along the Harding Road commercial strip. “With two new grocery stores in the area (Publix and a soon-to-open Harris-Teeter), there will be even more people coming to this part of town every day.”

And those wine lovers looking for a distinctive bottle in this fast-changing Belle Meade commercial district will find it at The Wine Chap.

“About 20 percent of our wines are non-mainstream, we do have several good organic wines, [and] we are always trying new wines coming into Tennessee,” said Payne, who does not list a wine preference but does note that “a red Burgundy when it is good is unbeatable.”

Payne hopes customers consider his inviting West Nashville shop “unbeatable,” as his wait for this opportunity has been humbling and can be dated to 1995 when he and Barbara Keith married.

“[My wife] remembers me telling her on our honeymoon that I really wanted to open my own store,” he recalled. “I don’t think she thought it would take me 14 years.”

Like a tasty wine properly aged, the opening of The Wine Chap will have been worth it.

The Wine Chap Wine & Spirits

4322 Harding Pike

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Thewinechap.com

8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fri.-Sat.