



DISTRICT OWNERS (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) CHRIS VANCE, JON D'ANGELICA AND RYAN VANCE; (BELOW) IN THE FORMER WAREHOUSE, THE BAR IS FRONT AND CENTER.



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The South Beach Diet

OFFERING UP A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING, DISTRICT IS HELPING TO DEFINE THE CITY'S SLEEKEST NEW NEIGHBORHOOD.

BY JESSICA BATTILANA

Even on weeknights, District is busy. In the sweeping former warehouse located on the ballpark stretch of Townsend that's fast becoming South Beach's restaurant row, couples head for tables along the brick walls while, beneath the exposed wooden beams, long-legged blondes grab seats at the central U-shaped bar.

Despite having a trio of first-time restaurateurs as owners, District hit the ground running. Brothers Chris and Ryan Vance and their partner, Jon D'Angelica, each contribute their expertise: Chris was most recently the GM at Ace Wasabi in the Marina, Ryan has a background in marketing and D'Angelica is a former Wall Streeter.



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"We wanted to create a great, unpretentious neighborhood place," says Ryan, "not a bar with a group of guys doing shots of Jagermeister." They got what they wanted—now if only there were a term for it. Not strictly a bar (District only has a wine-and-beer license) nor a full-on restaurant, District might best be described as the wine bar that has it all: a staff eager to educate, a well-edited wine list featuring esoteric selections and a menu of way-better-than-bar-food—plus a flat-screen television for sports viewing.

But what make District unique are the two young women who run the show. The ebullient Caterina Mirabelli, District's 29-year-old wine director, is a native of Rome who came to SF by way of Providence restaurant in L.A. The world traveler and skilled sommelier has created a wine list that's arranged in a straightforward, uncomplicated way, featuring 32 wines by the glass, a reserve list of bottles and 10 different flights. Thirty-nine-year-old chef Jen Solomon (formerly of Asia SF and Bizou) has created little dishes of Mediterranean-inflected food that provide the ideal backdrop for wine. Besides cheese and salumi plates, she sends out *arancini di riso*: crisp, greaseless risotto balls filled with a molten Fontina center and set in creamy tomato sauce with a bit of chile heat. Steamed Prince Edward Island mussels luxuriate in a cream-rich broth spiked with Pernod and accented by spicy pieces of Italian-style pork sausage.

Most nights, Mirabelli can be found working the crowd, opening bottles or stopping to talk to, say, the former head of Paramount Pictures, an old friend. D'Angelica greets a neighbor with a hug, and Ryan moves chairs to accommodate a growing party. It feels for all the world like one big house party, hosted by your favorite wine-loving buddies—no matter that there's not a word for it. Judging by the crowds, San Franciscans are drinking it up. x