

Caveau

Wine Bar & Deli

Bree Street, Heritage Square
Cape Town
021-422-1367

Vibe and decor It's easy to feel at home in this mid-city setting – you can unwind and enjoy a glass of your choice. With a style best described as 'rustic-chic', the warm colours and comfortable seating strip all pretence from this relaxed, down-to-earth wining experience.

Crowd From corporates to ladies' groups, you'll find a reflection of Cape Town's diversity here. Breakfasts, business lunches and snacks on-the-go are common – phone ahead, and the chef will have your order ready on arrival.

Music As much part of the atmosphere as the brick-work and the cushioned seats, the music is unobtrusive: there's no need to raise your voice to be heard. Laid-back lounge and house mixes create a contemporary ambience.

Best time to go Any time, Monday to Saturday. The hard-working team of Jean-Yves Muller and Brendon Crew open their doors at 7am for breakfast (from R15), or a premium espresso (single R8) before work. Lunch will be buzzing, filled with suits catching a break from the surrounding offices. Pop in for an after-work drink (or three) – but if you want to make a party of it, booking is a good idea.

Wine list Created by Jean-Pierre Rossouw, the wine list is a novel approach to presenting wine. It was on its way to being intimidating before the decision was taken to make it accessible to even the greatest wine ignoramus. Do yourself a favour and give it a read: it's full of menu suggestions, occasion options, reds, whites, pinks, bubbly and hard-to-find gems. Caveau's unique by-the-glass policy will have you sampling more than you'd expect, and if the concept of wine still gives you the shivers, get Brendon or one of the waitrons to fill you in and suggest a complement to your mood from the extensive cellar.

Food The emphasis is on wine, but Caveau's food is top quality and simply innovative, so you always know what you're eating. The menu changes daily, though some favourites are firmly grounded. Your choices run from traditional bread and tomato soup (R20) to cheese platters (sold by weight; R50 gets you the perfect selection for a long wine evening), charcuterie platters (R40-R50, sold by weight) and the Caveau version of bolognaise (R39). If you feel overwhelmed by the options, just ask for a Jean Sandwich (from R26)... You still have to choose between white, brown

and herb ciabatta or baguette, but Jean will do the rest. Whatever else you might eat during your visit, make sure you try the bread-and-butter pudding (R12): it's made from croissants and served with homemade vanilla ice cream. Heaven – or cholesterol on a plate, whichever way you choose to look at it.

Best seat in the house No seat is better than another; it's just like being at home – you feel comfortable everywhere. The cushioned seats along the wall come highly recommended: they're perfect for a lengthy lounge after the wine starts taking effect.

Smoking The smoking section is open and airy, so it's fine if you bring your Cubans to compliment the reds. In case you're worried about getting cold, don't be – in addition to the wine, a gas heater is at hand to chase the early-spring chill away.

Next time... Try and wangle a tour of the wine cellar – the word 'impressive' doesn't quite cover it and the interesting cooling system might put industrial refrigeration giants out of business. If you're a regular and have special food or wine preferences, you'll know to phone before you visit: Jean and Brendon are thrilled to accommodate you as long as you let them know what you want. Avoid disappointment – the bread-and-butter pudding might not be on the menu if you decide to drop in one day, so phone ahead. And have some truffles (R2.50 each) with your coffee. Words fail...

Final word If you're planning a small birthday party, get 20 of your more civilised friends into this intimate space – with a management

team as passionate about their service as the Caveau lot, you'll feel fantastic in no time. If you want to have a quiet drink – be it for recovery, warming up, cooling down or any other reason – this is one of Cape Town's most sophisticated choices. And since the glassware is under a lifetime warranty, you can maintain that all-important eye-contact during the clink-clink without worrying about breaking the goods. Perfect. ■ **Ania Rokita**