



April 29, 2009

So I went to Pourtal and decided to give machines a second chance

You've seen those [EnoMatics](#), right? It's basically an [Automat](#), but for wine, and you use a debit card instead of coins because this is the 21st century and like coins could buy you anything. I've always liked their gee-whiz value (press button! get wine! whee!) but found there was an inverse relation to its charm and the number of times you punched the button. Automat wine means no waiter; no waiter means you are getting exactly one ounce of wine (and who wants that?), context free; there's no one and nothing to tell you why the owners liked this wine or why it might be worth \$4.65 per ounce.

Stephen Abramson's [Pourtal](#) has solved at least part of the problem: His schtick is to group the wines by style (three-grape blends; whites; Pinot Noirs), order them by three- or four-bottle flights and, best of all, have **Peter Birmingham** as a secret weapon. LA knows him best as the sommelier of [the late, lamented Norman's](#), but he's possibly the most passionate, pan-alcohol geek I've ever met. (Wine, beer, gin -- he loves and knows it all.) And on those nights he's not guiding tours at Pourtal, there's handy little printouts to tell you what you're drinking, with a little why thrown in.

Also: Fancy-wine appropriate bar snacks with a heavy emphasis on [Andrew's Cheese Shop](#), including a warm crostini topped with **Grevenbroecker blue cheese and heirloom chocovivo chocolate**. Sounds insane, but it was perfect with a Atalayas de Golban Temperanillo. Also: They have a selection of wines sold by the full glass and sell all the wines retail, which is great news because Peter's knowledge runs far and wide; you'd have a hell of a time finding many of these anywhere else. **104 Santa Monica Blvd., 90401; (310) 393-7693.**

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Automat Now Eliminates Bartender

BAR tenders are eliminated by a new automat bar recently introduced in London. By means of a slot and dial, the customer is enabled to procure himself any drink on the list. Dialing the drink number delivers a "shot" from a spigot. At left are soft drinks, while on right are wines.



Dialing number of soft drink or wine delivers a shot from the spigot, thus eliminating customary bar tenders.