

A HEADY BREW

Mayfair is now home to undoubtedly the most luxurious wine and spirits shop in London. But as **Neil Ridley** finds out, Hedonism Wines is so much more than just a swanky off-license to pick up a bottle of your favourite vintage Claret



Lying at the heart of Mayfair, Davies Street is no stranger to luxury. Vivian Westwood, Alfred Dunhill and Sunseeker all have smartly appointed shop fronts here and the gleam of a Porsche dealership dazzles passers by as the road meets the north of Berkeley Square, rounding out the list of extravagances like a wonderfully lavish Who's Who of luxury brands.

But the news is that there is another addition to the this list of refined vices, and for those of you who are particularly partial to fine wine, Hedonism Wines is likely to become your new home-from-home.

Opened in mid-August and generously laid out over two floors, Hedonism is perhaps best described as more of a mecca for the wine and spirits enthusiast than simply an off-license. In fact, Hedonism's burgeoning shelves boast over 3,500 different wines, as well as over 1,000 spirits, ranging from every day tipples to serious collectors' bottlings.

'The name Hedonism was a really important word for us,' explains Tatiana Fokina, executive manager for the shop. 'It's a word that is associated with good food and drink and we've hopefully re-branded it into something so much more.'

Taking over two vacant adjacent properties, Fokina and her team have spent over two years completely redesigning the shop's interior, stripping it back to bare brick and creating an oenophile's dream in the process. 'Our plan was always to create an outlet which makes wine more accessible to everyone, taking away its stuffiness and creating an inviting, open environment,' she says.

The idea came when the shop's founder, Yevgeny Chichvarkin, founder of Russia's largest



mobile phone retailer, tried (in vain, I may add) to get a bottle of his favourite wine from any of London's other premier wine dealers. 'He was amazed that no one would offer to help source it for him, so as a result, he decided to create Hedonism, thinking there's actually a gap above the market,' says Fokina.

The results have clearly been time consuming, but the small team behind Hedonism, headed up by ex-Harrods wine buyer, Alistair Viner, is overjoyed with the results. '80% of our staff are actually ex-sommeliers so they have a really high level of knowledge about wine and spirits,' notes Fokina, 'but also have the mentality and approach of a concierge – nothing is too difficult for us and no matter what you're looking for, we can usually find it.'

And just by taking a quick scan of the bespoke wooden shelving upstairs, there's absolutely no reason to doubt her. From the incredible selection of single-malt whiskies (the shop's centre-piece is the exceptionally rare bottle 'No.1' of 55 year-old Glenfiddich, priced at £123,734) to the 16 different vintages of Montrachet white wine, Champagnes, dessert wines and other rare spirits, the ground floor of Hedonism is a treasure trove all on its own. But descend the staircase to the basement (more bespoke design on show, this time wrought iron and cast in Wales, taking five months to build) and things start to get a little bit ridiculous.

'We work with over 180 suppliers, including auctioneers Bonhams and Christie's to source our stock of fine wines and provenance is really important to us,' says Fokina, which should give you an idea of what's in store. Walls of first-growth Bordeaux and Burgundy from seemingly impossible vintages are immaculately presented, the environment of the room all temperature and humidity controlled, to emulate the perfect conditions of a wine cellar. 'If customers get a little cold down here we have Cashmere throws to warm them up,' laughs Fokina as I gaze enviously at an entire wall of Chateau d'Yquem, the varying colours of the different vintages all beautifully highlighted by backlighting.

Head past several large format bottles (the largest being 27 litres), vertical flights of Sassicaia and Ornellaia Super Tuscans and a complete collection of Californian Sine Qua

Non vintages (the owner's favourite winery with something of a cult following from enthusiasts) and the lower-ground floor suddenly becomes a laidback tasting area, complete with a record player and racks of vinyl for customers to select a suitably hedonistic playlist. There's even a children's play space with iPads and games. 'Ironically, it seems that it's the parents who struggle to get their kids to leave,' says Fokina as we head over to the brand new Enomatic tasting machines that allow customers to try 32 different vintage wines and Champagnes, which are updated regularly – think of them as a

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– Tatiana Fokina, Hedonism Wines

brilliant way to 'try-before-you-buy' on a range of wines that you would struggle to find in most Michelin-starred restaurants.

The final room is kept behind a sturdily barred door with a huge padlock – probably just as well, for it contains Hedonism's rarest and most expensive wines. 'Where do I start,' says Fokina as she hands me a priceless bottle of d'Yquem from 1811. My heart almost skips a beat as I realise that in this small space alone is perhaps London's most highly prized – and valuable wine cellar: a Magnum of 1937 Krug, signed by the winemakers sits next to a bottle of Hungarian Tokaji from 1860, a case of 1947 Cheval Blanc and the shop's oldest bottle of wine, dating back to 1774.

'Yes, we have a lot of exceptional and highly prized products, but we also have over 500 wines and spirits that are priced under £30,' she says, which really sums up the Hedonism ethos. At no point does one feel remotely intimidated by what's on offer here and there's no doubt that whether you're a connoisseur, collector or simply a wine-loving hedonist on the way to a dinner party, you'll find a visit to Hedonism a truly enriching experience. ☑

Hedonism Wines, 3-7 Davies Street, W1K (020 7290 7870; www.hedonism.co.uk). One-hour delivery service within London on selected products.