

# Wine Spectator

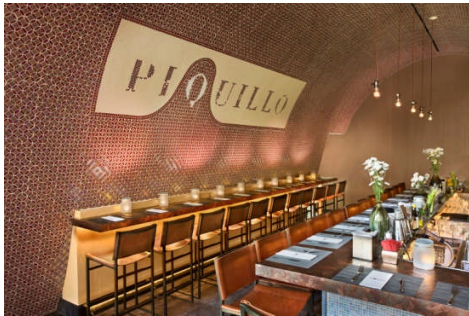
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## JFK Airport's Terminal 5 has Sky-High Ambitions for Wine

Air travelers can enjoy fine dining at several restaurants in new terminal and can even bring wine bottles on board their flights

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Airplane food and wine have been a punch line for years, and that was true even before the 2006 TSA security restrictions on liquids took away the option to bring one's own bottles on board. Rising fuel prices and curtailed business travel are keeping airlines focused on cutting costs rather than elevating customer service. But a recent wave of creative airport restaurant openings suggests that a revolution in mile-high meals might take root from the ground up.

From the Gordon Ramsay outlet in the new British Airways Terminal 5 at Heathrow to the Vino Volo wine stores/wine bars at nine U.S. airports (and counting), travelers are having an easier time finding quality wine and food while waiting for a flight. JetBlue's brand-new digs in Terminal 5 at JFK, unveiled last month, takes this progress a step further with 17 restaurants and bars, several of them upscale, and a wine program of more than 400 selections the venues can draw on for their lists. The wine program holds the promise of changing not just how wine is consumed in the terminal but also in the air—passengers can take unfinished wines onboard their flights.

Michael Coury, concept chef for OTG, the management company behind the food service in the terminal, doesn't consider Terminal 5's dining options to be airport restaurants. "We have restaurants that happen to be at the airports," he said. And certainly, the list of consulting chefs involved in the more upscale dining establishments read like a who's who of top Manhattan restaurants. For example, Mark Ladner of *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning Del Posto designs the menu for an Italian trattoria-style restaurant, while Michael Schulson of Buddakhan devised the sushi for Deep Blue.

But the restaurants are fundamentally geared toward air travelers, and not just because there are plastic knives in the otherwise formal table settings. Naturally, there's a heavy emphasis on being able to purchase food to go. But at Terminal 5, that means everything, including the wine, is available for take away. Unfinished bottles from the restaurants can be taken onboard JetBlue flights. The process works like this: A customer can request that an unfinished bottle be recorked and put in a sealed bag with a receipt. They then carry it with them on the plane and give the bottle to the flight staff to serve to them en route to their destination.

Rick Blastein, OTG's CEO, said that orchestrating the take-out wine option was largely a matter of studying the regulations. Since the restaurants are beyond the TSA security checkpoints, the liquids ban doesn't apply. The recorked bottles and sealed bag approach complies with New York State liquor laws that allow patrons to take unfinished wine home from restaurants in sealed "doggie-bags." And as for any objections from JetBlue in terms of clashes with their onboard wine program? "I haven't heard any conflicts about it," said Blastein.

He expects that this model will be replicable at other airport terminals in New York. He's currently working on a plan for his properties at the new American Airlines terminal at LaGuardia and a wine bar in Terminal 8 at JFK.

"We really wanted to have something for everyone," said Coury, on the coordination of the 17 venues' lists. At the fast-food outlets, like the Boar's Head sandwich shop, the choices range from a glass of Nicolas Potel Cuvée Gerard Bourgogne Rouge for \$12.50 (bottle for \$49) to Nobile Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand for \$8.50 a glass (\$33 a bottle).

The more formal restaurants have wine lists tooled to their respective cuisines. Steakhouse 5ive Steak focuses on hefty reds, including Paul Hobbs Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2005 for \$135 and Château Pétrus 1999 for \$2,400. Tapas restaurant Piquillo offers a Spanish selection, including Álvaro Palacios Les Terrasses 2005 by the glass for \$18.75 or a glass of Vinicola Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla Sherry for \$7.75.

Coury says that the pricing is structured to be equivalent to what one would find at a Manhattan restaurant. But wired customers can confirm this for themselves. The entire list is available at the mobile-phone compatible T5wines.com with links to the wineries' websites and reviews for advance research. Unfortunately for wine geeks, vintages are not yet available on the website for the majority of the wines.

The emphasis on hi-tech is echoed around the terminal. With the exception of the sit-down restaurants, all ordering is done on touch-screen terminals. Using computer outposts at each gate called ReVive, customers can even purchase food remotely and have it delivered to them at the gate. So far, due to Port Authority regulations, only beer can be delivered at the gates. But Blaststein said he plans to explore winning approval for wines at the gates.

In light of increasingly fierce competition for passengers, is something like this ambitious program enough to sway those choosing between airlines? Time will tell. On a recent Wednesday afternoon, the terminal was bustling and seats were about half-filled at restaurants despite the off-peak midday time.

Coury said he himself has taken advantage of his program. "I had to fly out to Vegas on Friday," he said. "I got a to-go order from Aeronuova and they opened a nice Gavi di Gavi, and I took it with me."