

Let's Drink! Inside the Vision of Buvons Wine Bar and Shop

By Matt Valerio

Inspired by shops in Paris where visitors can purchase wine to take away or drink on-site, Alicia Kemper had long dreamed of creating a space that focuses on wine and community. In 2021, she made that dream a reality when she opened Buvons (pronounced “boo-VOHN,” meaning “let’s drink” in French) Wine Bar and Shop in Long Beach’s Zaferia neighborhood. Kemper—a former wine director and director of operations for the restaurant Fundamental LA—wanted Buvons to provide a casual, visually appealing atmosphere with a patio and a diverse selection of well-organized wines.

Buvons does just that, focusing on small-production, natural, and low-intervention wines. Their philosophy is to offer wines that are made consciously and sustainably without additives or chemicals and to support small producers. “We want to offer wines that we feel proud of,” says Kemper.

After meeting Marie Delbarry while working at the highly regarded Saturne restaurant in Paris in 2017, Kemper discovered that they both shared a passion for wine, so they would explore wine bars and restaurants together in their free time. Delbarry was planning to



Owner and wine director Alicia Kemper (left) with manager and sommelier Marie Delbarry (right)

move to New York City to work on a different project in 2022, but after she came to Long Beach to help open Buvons, Kemper convinced her to move to Long Beach instead so they could work together. Delbarry is now a manager and sommelier at Buvons. “When we started, I was working by myself for the first 5 or 6 months, with some friends helping out here and there,” Kemper recalls. “It wasn’t until Marie moved here in July that we were able to do more, and we’ve continued to grow.”

The shop had a soft opening in November 2021 and fully opened on December 15th. In its first year, the space has changed dramatically. Starting with just five tables and some outdoor seating, they’ve added three communal tables, a large outdoor built-in bench, hanging plants, two turntables, and Advent speakers, along with wine bottle-lined walls and a small retail area with wine-related gifts and snacks. “I try to invest in the space every month,” Kemper says, adding that they’re planning more pop-ups, collaborations, and classes.

Buvons has about 750 different wines in stock at any given time, including natural wines, Champagnes, and rare bottles. They also offer a selection of cider, beer, and non-alcoholic drinks. “Even if you’re not drinking, you can indulge in something delicious and be social at a fun spot,” Kemper adds. A variety of snacks are also available from local collaborators. They’ve partnered with cheese shop Oh La Vache and Gusto Bread to provide cheese and charcuterie plates, and they serve tinned fish that has become quite popular. Marie also makes a Croque Monsieur with brioche from Hey Brother Baker that Kemper says is “deeeelicious.”

Another thing that sets Buvons apart is their wine club. “When I was working at Fundamental, I wanted to be able to share wines with people and connect with them in a different way, so we’d host monthly wine tastings where people could taste the lineup and take bottles home,” Kemper explains, adding that she wanted to keep that going at Buvons. Tippler Club members receive hand-selected wines each month to explore at



MARCH 2023 EVENTS

- March 2: Wine class (sparkling wine)
- March 3: Port + Loafers vinyl night
- March 5: Pizza pop-up with Sal’s ‘N Pals
- March 8: Women Winemaker Tasting with At Her Table on International Women’s Day
- March 10: Reggae with DJ Skinny Pablo
- March 11: Saturday Sips wine club tasting
- March 16: Wine class (rosé)
- March 17: Vinyl + Vintages with DJ Cory Matthews + Lonely Creeper
- March 25: Disco with Dimitri + Manu (winemaker at Champagne Jacques Lassaigne)
- March 30: Wine class (Champagne)
- March 31: Twin Harbors vinyl night

home or sample at their monthly Saturday Sips events. As an added bonus, members don’t have to pay the corkage fee when purchasing a bottle to drink on-site.

Buvons is also increasing their roster of events, which range from DJ nights and wine classes to food pop-ups, with plans to bring more unique experiences to the shop. When asked about plans for the future, Kemper said she hopes to increase awareness of Buvons’ existence, which she says is one of the challenges of being located on a mostly residential side street. Overall, Kemper is excited about continuing to share her passion for natural wines and building community.

“It’s the kind of place I want to hang out in,” Kemper adds. “It’s a chill, unpretentious, fun environment that provides access to amazing wines. There isn’t a long list of wines for you to read; instead, you can browse the shelves or chat with one of the three somms who work here for recommendations.”

Entering its second year, Buvons’ future looks promising as it becomes an even more vibrant space for the Long Beach community.

[Buvons Wine Bar and Shop](#) is located at 1147 Loma Ave. in Long Beach and is open Thursdays through Saturdays from 12 to 10:30 p.m. and on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 12 to 9 p.m.

Matt Valerio is an artist, writer, musician, and all-around creative living in Belmont Heights. He has run the music and art blog, [The Bomarr Blog](#), for many years, and is a regular contributor to the Belmont Heights Community Association newsletter’s art column.