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## VALLEY CHEESE & WINE: A shared passion

### Gourmet food store is couple's joint venture

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Newlywed husband-and-wife team Kristin Sande and Bob Howald each had a 16-year history in the specialty foods market before opening up Valley Cheese & Wine at 1770 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway.

Even their relationship started over food.

"We met at a cheese conference," Sande said.

Their combined history in the wine and food industries made it a natural decision for them to start a wine, beer, specialty food and cheese market in the Las Vegas Valley. Sande and Howald opened Valley Cheese & Wine in July, with a grand opening celebration on Sept. 9 and 10.

"Taste is our number one priority in selecting items," Howald said.

Valley Cheese & Wine carries about 150 types of cheeses and 400 kinds of wine, with some variation each month and season, he said.

Sande said she and her husband try every product in the store before deciding what to carry.

"We don't carry anything we don't like, because we have to eat it if we don't sell it," Sande said.

Many of the products come from small artisans and producers and are harder to find in the market, she said. Specialty foods range from coffees, teas, jams, chocolates and olive oils to handmade pickles from New York City.

Handmade salami, p?té, cured and baked hams and duck products can be found in Valley Cheese & Wine's meat case.

The cheese case in the store is filled with wheels of cheese, large and small, all different shapes and colors. The store carries not only U.S. cheeses, but dairy imports from places such as France, Spain, the Netherlands, England and Italy as well.

Prices are determined by the pound and range anywhere from \$8.99 to \$42.99. Sande said customers can try each cheese before buying to make sure it's the "right fit."

"There's nothing that sucks more than buying cheese, taking it home and then realizing it's not right for you," she said. "People have different tastes."

Valley Cheese & Wine's wine collection is just as varied as its cheeses, with California vineyard products to French wines. The average price for a bottle is \$25, Howald said.

"We pick wines that are interesting but not necessarily an arm and a leg (to purchase)," he said.

Sande said they focus on "everyday wines" that can be paired with daily dinners. She said the wines they choose are relatively unknown but are excellent and affordable.

The couple offers free wine tastings on Fridays from 4 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 12 to 7 p.m. In the future, Sande said they plan to teach wine pairing and tasting classes in the store's conference room.

Sande said she realizes the products offered in the store can be intimidating to a lot of people, and the couple adjusts their customer care accordingly.

"We're very much about performing for the customers," she said.

Sande said she and her husband suggest food and wine pairings, gifts and food items for customers who aren't sure what would be best.

The couple's familiarity with each product makes it easier for them to make suggestions to customers on which item would be best for them.

"We can direct customers because we know what everything tastes like," Howald said.

Howald and Sande chose to settle in Las Vegas after Howald's brother suggested the city was in need of their products. Ten months ago, they moved to Las Vegas.

"We looked into the market, and it was ripe for the picking," Sande said.

As a Minneapolis native, Sande said cheese and specialty foods were what she reacted best to.

"Cheese has been my life forever," she said.

Howald started as a waiter at a young age, and ended up cooking and working for a wine merchant.

"I've always been around food," Howald said.

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