



Franco

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There's a new bar in Soulard, and it is a definite departure from the existing lot of friendly taverns throughout the affable neighborhood.

Franco, located on the ground floor of the Soulard Market Apartments building at Eighth and Carroll streets, is a French bistro and bar that offers an inviting place to linger over cocktails. Since opening in November, the eatery has become a popular gathering spot for many of the area's young professionals, as well as a mixed bag of downtown workers and residents. The restaurant's warm and inviting setup is decidedly upscale but manages to maintain a casual and friendly atmosphere.

The back of the bar serves as a divider between spacious dining and cozy bar areas, as well as a wine rack. A tiled bar anchors the space. Along an exposed brick wall, oversized cocktail tables line the perimeter, and large windowsills double as seating areas, complete with upholstered cushions and throw pillows.

Named after the owner's nephew, the restaurant features an oversize black-and-white photograph of its wee namesake that hangs on the wall behind the hostess station. A cocktail is named after the youngster, and a menu of specialty drinks combines unique pairings of spirits and wine. The Franco is a blend of Idol grape vodka distilled from chardonnay and pinot noir with Lillet Blanc. A French Margarita includes a combo of fresh-squeezed citrus, tequila, Cointreau and a drizzle of red wine.

For those who prefer their wines straight up, there are 10 varieties available by the glass (\$6-\$10), and 19 reds (\$20-\$117) and 16 whites (\$24-\$68) by the bottle. There are more than a dozen imported and domestic beers, as well as a good selection of scotches and after-dinner liqueurs.

The lunch and dinner menu changes frequently — depending on the chef's mood — and any of the appetizers, salads and entrees can be ordered at the bar. A full-service outdoor wine garden is scheduled to open in the spring.