

Vom Fass—it's all a matter of taste

It's the sights you notice first: balloon bottles filled with a rainbow of liquids, bins filled with wine, a tiered center island with earthenware jars, more jars mounted on the wall behind, and a stack of promising tapped barrels. Next come the aromas: the tang of fine vinegars, the pungent richness of aged balsamics, and the earthy headiness of cold-pressed nut and seed oils. Finally you notice the sounds: the appreciative sighs and curious questions of customers, the murmur of staff taking the time to really explain products and how to use them. The new Vom Fass store in the Shorewood Hills Shopping Center in Madison is more than a place to shop.



It's a sensory indulgence.

Vom Fass, meaning "from the cask", opened the first store about 13 years ago in Germany. Johannes Kiderlen, the founder, built on his family's experience with vinegar and spirits to create a unique sales system for his products. Vom Fass is now situated in famous department stores like Harrods in London and Galleries Lafayette in Paris and has 200 partners with shops in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, UK, France, Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Latvia, Japan, and New Zealand. They are now entering the U.S. market and Madison is host to the very first store.

Vom Fass General Manager David Eisner-Kleye pours a sample of single malt scotch.



Vom Fass USA is owned by father and son, David and Justin Gibson, who own the master franchise for the United States. Justin discovered Vom Fass while in Europe and his enthusiasm for the products and experience led them to bring home the business.

David Eisner-Kleyle, Vom Fass General Manager, explained why they selected Madison for the first store. "It's a great demographic. The people in Madison go to farmers' markets, they cook from scratch, and they're into the Slow Food movement. The Penzey's Spice store in this shopping center is the number one store in the United States. There's a huge food culture in Madison."

What sets Vom Fass apart from other gourmet food stores is that you can sample virtually everything they offer. The staff is happy to assist in the process and has a wealth of information on everything you'll try. They are more than happy to suggest pairings of oils and vinegars they particularly like and let you sample those, too. Once you decide what you want, you choose from a wide selection of bottles ranging from 50 milliliters to 1.5 liters. The staff fills the bottles straight from the bulk containers.

"Sampling gives people that confidence that the product they're trying is the same as what they are getting," explained David. "It also means you only buy as much as you need so the products stay fresh and it reduces packaging, which is good for the environment."

Vom Fass carries an impressive list of products. Many are available in the United States only from Vom Fass and all are from artisanal producers or produced by Vom Fass itself. After tasting these products you'll understand why Vom Fass usually buys up their entire stock and why they have such a loyal following.

The store offers an impressive selection of oils: traditional nut and olive oils, naturally infused oils, seed oils, and wellness oils. Their vinegars are outstanding and unusual. The traditional Aceto Balsamico di Modena vinegars are cask aged and range from four years old to a 25-year-old Maletti. You can also select from Waldburg flavor-infused balsamics, young cooking vinegars, exotic single malt scotches, aged rums, cognacs, Armagnacs, Calvados, brandies, and sherries. In February they expect to have all their liqueurs and grappas available once the import certification is completed.

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(TOP) Bill Flavin of Troy, Michigan and daughter Riley Hazelton of Stoughton, Wisconsin, checking out fine spirits. (ABOVE) Balloon bottles holding liqueurs. (LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE) Earthenware jars store fine oils and vinegars ready to be decanted into a uniquely shaped bottle from Vom Fass's wide selection.



Sampling of the wine and spirits is allowed under Wisconsin law because Vom Fass is licensed as a bar. Filling bottles on-site, however, is illegal so all the alcoholic beverages are hand filled in Madison by a licensed bottler in the same wide range of bottles as everything else.

Sampling Vom Fass style is a relatively new concept to most Americans and they are going to love it. Reading a description of pistachio oil is informative, but nothing beats being able to see the vivid, green oil in a spoon, smell the exotic aroma, and taste the smooth, silky, delicate flavor that is almost more pistachio-like than a pistachio. Forest Raspberry Balsamic is merely an abstract concept until it caresses your taste buds. You can study a single malt whiskey bottle all day and not learn as much as your palate can tell you with one sip. At other stores you look and imagine; at Vom Fass you taste and know.

• **IF YOU GO** •

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