

ERIC ASIMOV reviewing TASTE

For the last few years, Eli Zabar has been seeking the right formula for a restaurant at Eli's Manhattan, his big food market on the Upper East Side. He has tried a self-service cafe by day and an elegant restaurant by night, but neither ever felt like a natural fit within the market. Now he is trying again with Taste, a restaurant and wine bar, and this time the formula may be working.

The menu changes nightly, but always includes exceptional salads and a few oddities, like warm veal tongue with chicory and shallots, or a roasted partridge with braised cabbage and quince. I opted for a more conventional braised pork shoulder, the meat soft and tender yet full of flavor. Other selections one recent evening included roasted whole branzino, a Mediterranean fish, with brussels sprouts, and a mixed grill of lamb chop, quail and Italian sausage served with onion pudding and beet tapenade.

This time, though, Mr. Zabar has added a twist, a wine bar that offers a fine list of wines by the glass, at surprisingly reasonable prices, along with a menu of small plates intended to accompany particular glasses of wine. If you have ever been curious about whether a red Hautes-Côtes de Nuits is the best match for grilled quail with figs and frisée, here is your chance to experiment.

The proximity of Mr. Zabar's restaurant to his market has always connoted a sense of seasonal freshness. Perhaps to convey a similar synchronicity with his wine bar, he has opened a wine shop, W.I.N.E., as part of the complex. New York laws create an administrative fire wall between retail wine shops and restaurants, so you will not find waiters running next door to get a bottle of wine that might have caught your eye in the shop. But you will find a well-priced, intelligently selected list that strives more for good matches at the table than for status power.

Taste, 1411 Third Avenue, at 80th Street, Manhattan, (212) 717-9798. Appetizers, \$8 to \$16; main courses, \$19 to \$35; desserts, \$8.

