Virtual Sommelier
By Chuck Lenatti

Ordering wine in a restaurant or buying a bottle in a shop can be a daunting experience. Unless you carry a copy of *The Wine Spectator* around with you, it’s hard to know anything about the wine besides what’s written on the label.

To take some of the guesswork out of buying wine, Australian wine importer Lion Nathan Wine Group, in partnership with Scanbuy, launched a platform last September to educate, entertain and virtually connect wine drinkers to wineries around the world. The company’s Cellar Key program promises to “bring the experience of a winery to the palm of your hand” through the use of QR codes. By scanning the Cellar Key icon featured on a bottle’s neck tag, shelf display, wine menu or other location with a smartphone’s QR barcode reader, users can instantly access winery videos, read reviews, learn about the winemaker and explore food and wine pairings. Users can also share and engage on social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter.

Cellar Key initially featured six wines: Argyle Pinot Noir and Vintage Brut from the Willamette Valley, Oregon; St Hallett Faith Shiraz and Poacher’s Blend from Barossa, Australia; Wither Hills Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough, New Zealand; and Argento Malbec from Mendoza, Argentina.

“Cellar Key is a giant step toward bringing my story and the story behind the wine directly to the consumer, establishing an instant connection to the wine through the palm of their hand,” said Argyle Founder and Winemaker Rollin Soles. “Innovation is critical in any business and Cellar Key is a perfect example of how we can and should adapt to an evolving consumer who is interested in exploring the world of wine.”

“Premium wine consumers desire to learn more about the wine that’s in the bottle. We are very excited to be at the forefront of innovation in delivering consumers the experience that they deserve by putting them in the driver’s seat,” added Lion Nathan USA General Manager Steve Myers. “Cellar Key not only lets us connect with our consumers, it effectively conveys a sense of place, personality and deeper understanding of the wine’s region and the winemaker.”

The Cellar Key wines are currently available in retail outlets, restaurants and hotels nationwide. Plans to expand Cellar Key to other wines are slated for this year and beyond.

Scan the codes for a virtual tour of the wineries without having to get in a car or on a plane. ☛