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Markland Blaicklock, executive director of hotel operations at **Wynn Macau**, was previously MD of **Raffles International**, based in Singapore and responsible for all 13 **Raffles**-branded hotels worldwide. He's now betting on bringing high-quality wines to the gambling masses ...

By **Fred Tibbitts**

HOW did you find your way to Wynn Macau?
I was approached by an executive-search firm to refer qualified candidates for this position. I agreed to give it some thought but, after giving them some names, I thought I could be a good fit and realised that I would like the challenge if given the opportunity. I applied, and was selected for the position. I report directly to the president and general manager of **Wynn Macau**, Grand Bowie.

When are you opening?

It's scheduled for Autumn 2006 – but we are ahead of schedule.

What will your restaurants be like and what role will wine play?

There will be seven, including a signature Italian restaurant with a name chef, Cantonese, Japanese, Macanese, a VIP [high-roller] lounge and dining area and an Asian food court.

Wine will play a significant role. Most of our customers will be Chinese – and the typical Chinese wine drinker from the mass market consumes low-end Chinese wine.

We will offer a value-priced Chinese alternative, but our restaurants and bars will be places where our guests will be able to learn more about wine, and experiment by the glass with a broad selection of wines from the new and old worlds, all chosen to match the styled

cuisine in each restaurant. Because Macau's import duties are far more reasonable than Hong Kong and most countries in Asia, our prices will be very attractive and will allow our guests to experiment and try new wines.

I see wines that excite the imagination: *sauvignon blancs* from New Zealand, South Africa and California; *pinot noir* from New Zealand, California and Burgundy; and *chardonnay* from Australia, California, Italy and Chile.

Given Macau's Portuguese history and traditions, a good selection of Portuguese wines by the glass will be important – especially the whites – and we will have an exceptional selection of ports.

I am hiring an Asian sommelier, someone who understands Asia and, particularly, our Chinese customers. He or she will oversee our wine programme.

I'm not willing to gamble with those odds ... so the traditional model is not acceptable for Wynn Macau

Besides a broad selection of wines, what other aspects of wine and wine service are important?

Wine training and wine preservation. Training is never finished – there is always turnover, so there are always new staff to certify that they have a minimum of wine knowledge. It's also a continuing education for the others.

The traditional model relies on the local distributors to carry out the training – but that is a hit-or-miss proposition. It works if you get the distributor's wine-education specialist, but if you get one of their salespersons, it doesn't work.

I'm not willing to gamble with those odds. So the traditional model is not acceptable for Wynn Macau.

I am evaluating teaming up with one of the world's few wine MBAs – from the University of Bordeaux – who is based in Singapore, but Hong Kong by birth.

He is fluent in English, Mandarin, Cantonese and



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French. He will be establishing a new standard for restaurant management and server-training across Asia, with centres in Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Macau, Beijing and Shanghai.

We will fund the initial tuition for all our opening restaurant and catering managers and servers, while seeking the support of our primary wine partners for continuing wine-education tuition, because it is in the best interests of all stakeholders for our staff to maximise our customer wine experience.

What about wine preservation?

We used the *Dual System Le Verre de Vin* at Raffles Hotel, as well as our other hotels and facilities in Singapore, with great success.

They preserve both still and sparkling wine for up to 21 days, allowing us to offer a *Freshness Guarantee* for every glass of wine we serve. This will also mean zero wine waste, because we know we can sell the rest of any open bottle within 21 days.

We can offer our high rollers a glass of their favourite Bordeaux or other *grand cru* upon arrival, or at any time. We can also sell as many ultra-premium wines as we choose to our most discerning customers without fear of losing a drop from an open bottle.

Are you going to offer your servers any kind of incentives to sell more of your better wines?

Yes – I firmly believe that server recognition – as in “What’s in it for me?” – is a very important ingredient of successful wine sales. Cash is always appreciated, but I prefer items in kind, such as accessories or vouchers-for-two for dinner, the cinema, shopping and non-gaming sporting events.

What are your favourite wines and why?

I prefer whites, mostly *chardonnay* – one of my favourites is *Chassagne Montrachet*. I also like *pinot noir* from Burgundy or New Zealand – *Cloudy Bay* is one of my favourite labels. Then again, I have plenty of favourites from Napa, especially the ultra-premiums and the *Screaming Eagles* for very special celebrations. □

