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HOTEL Asia Pacific

Balancing act

Ichigo Umehara, chairman of **Pan Pacific Hotels and Resorts** is in charge of 25 hotels in 11 countries in Asia Pacific and North America



By **Fred Tibbitts**

WITH YOUR TWO BRANDS, Tokyu Hotels and Pan Pacific Hotels, it must be a difficult balancing act. Are the two brands very different, and how do you differentiate between them?

The Japanese market is very attractive, with 125 million well-off people, most of whom know the Tokyu name, which is well established in Japan. The Asia Pacific region, of course, is a growing market and will be for some time, so I plan to integrate the Tokyu and Pan Pacific brands in a way, leaving them with separate brand identities, but as close partners.

What future growth are you expecting, and are the two brands going to be competing in any of the regions for business?

We are very fortunate in that we are doing business in growing regions and countries, so there is plenty of room at the moment. After we have worked on the clarification for brand strategies for Tokyu and Pan Pacific, we plan to grow both of these brands in Japan and Pacific Rim countries. We are still working on how that will be done. As to how much growth we plan, well, that's still to be announced

What are the fine-wine expectations of your guests?

Japanese and Oriental cuisines are delicate, based on balance, on harmony or contrast, and they differ quite a lot from most Western cuisines. But gradually, our cuisines are being enjoyed all over the world, more in the way we would prepare it ourselves and not in the "adapted" style of the past. Our challenge is to work on the right combination of wine and Japanese or Oriental cuisine for our guests, whatever their nationality.

What sort of system do you have for your choice of wines? Are you supplying more local and house wines or fine wines?

I like to divide quantity and quality, and work with them separately, treating them in a different way. House wine should be a company-wide core wine selection under corporate supervision and direction to give a familiar

feel for our guests in different locations. However, each hotel can also offer local speciality wines, and if there is a demand for something and it is available, then we'll look at getting it in.

Training and knowledge are obviously becoming more important as guests become more knowledgeable, so how do you currently handle wine training?

This is an important issue. There are more and more discerning wine drinkers, and I feel that it is very poorly handled at the moment. At this point, we rely upon each hotel's judgement, or simply the judgment of an individual, but I plan to put together a global programme for integration between wine and local cuisine, which will be reflected in all our hotels

Once you have this programme in place, how many different wines by the glass do you anticipate offering, and what type of wine will be available?

Guests, especially young ladies, seem to want to try a variety of wines during dinner and, fortunately, technology is solving the problem of keeping wine after the bottle has been opened. I believe that offering a wider range of wines by the glass will become usual in the near future in Japan and the Asia Pacific region.

I understand that you also enjoy a glass of wine. What are your favourite wines and why?

I started my appreciation of wine in Perth during the early 1970s while I was working there, so my experience of drinking wine has paralleled the growth of wines along the Margaret River. Wines such as cabernet sauvignon from Chateau Xanadu, which is very rich and powerful, with almost an Oriental flavour. I also like a chardonnay from Cape Mentelle – it's fresh at first taste, but it also keeps that freshness to the last sip. □

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● **Fred Tibbitts** is a global wine consultant to some of the world's leading chain hotels and restaurants. Email: fredbev@fredtibbitts.com