

HOTEL

A S I A P A C I F I C

For hospitality professionals



Reality Bites

Opportunities and challenges in the *Year of the Dog*

Divided Loyalties



Hilton reignites its brand image



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HOTEL Asia Pacific

Educating a whole new generation

Rene Schmitt, Kempinski's senior VP in China, is determined to boost the group's revenues by educating local clients on the finer points of wine

By **Fred Tibbitts**

UNDERSTAND YOU ARE EVALUATING ways to organise a core wine programme as a means of anticipating the increased interest of your guests. How important is this initiative to Kempinski and why?

The core wine programme is very important to Kempinski in the future to stimulate increased sales especially to our local customers. The training of our staff is a very important part of the programme, since they have to convince our guests to select wines with their meals. Increased wine sales equal increased revenues and profits for Kempinski.

Although the great majority of wines sold in China continue to be locally produced, there is an increasing interest in drinking better-quality, imported wines. Is this new demand coming from Westerners, locals or both?

In general, there is interest among our local guests to choose better wines than before, whether local or imported. Better wines are chosen by well-to-do Chinese guests for important functions, while expatriates choose the wines they are familiar with. Our market in the future is the local guest who, with time, will be more familiar with wines and more comfortable in choosing them. Education is important not only for hospitality staff, but also for local customers.

Your *Paulaner Brew Pub* is one of the most popular beer destinations in Beijing. Are your beer-enthusiast



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customers also ordering a glass or two of wine with their meals?

The Paulaner Brauhaus is the number-one Western restaurant in China after the fast-food outlets, and is well known for its fresh beer and its large portions of Bavarian food. The majority – 70-75 percent – of our customers are Chinese, and they always order beer, although expatriates at times order wine.

You have decided to engage a professional wine trainer from Singapore to write a wine-training outline with basic certifications that will ensure Kempinski is a leader in bringing quality wine service to China. What special qualifications does this person possess? Will the training be in English or Chinese, and when do you hope to complete the first phase of training?

Tommy Lam is an outstanding wine connoisseur who is making the study of wine an art. He is extremely qualified to be the Kempinski trainer in passing on his knowledge to our staff in Mandarin, with the main selling

points in both Mandarin and English. The first phase of training should be completed by December 2006.

What kind of incentives work best with your servers?

The best incentive remains cash for the number of bottles/glasses sold, with a yearly grand prize per hotel – a trip to a well-known wine producing country.

From your experience, what is the best way to market and merchandise wine in your restaurants and bars? How often do your banquet-sales succeed in trading-



Rene Schmitt, above, and Tommy Lam, below, are giving Kempinski staff in China extensive wine training.

up customers to better wines with their functions?
The best way to market wine to local customers is for information to be available on the table and to have well-trained staff. Our banquet staff has been selling wines for our major banquets for many years, but it's mainly local wines for local customers. Upselling at this time is only possible for special functions.

I understand that 95% of the wine sold in China today is Chinese. What will finally change this, and how many more years will it take for imported wine sales in China to really start becoming significant?

You will only change drinking habits if you change the mindset of the young Chinese through wine classes and tastings in universities, wine bars, etc.

How many years it will take is anybody's guess, but probably for imported wines another five to 10 years. Just look at how long it took to change the American taste from Gallo in a paper bag, Mateus Rose and Blue Nun.

What are your favourite wines and why?

Sauvignon blancs, semillon blancs and merlots from the US, France, Australia and Chile. Of course, I never say no to a nice white wine from my home area, Franken in Germany.

All of them are uncomplicated and easy to drink – so do not take my taste in wines as the future direction in China, which will continue to concentrate on red wines for a long time to come. □

