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The World of Wine, Beer & Spirits

BY FRED TIBBITTS

HOW IT ALL FITS

Mark Weiss, regional VP of operations international for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, defines fundamentals for beverage profitability.



What makes a beer, wine, and spirits program successful?

First, it's about price point value for money. There must be an "even spread," meaning a great value for moderate price. We should not price wine menus unreasonably. Second, always offer wines that are fun and a good value by choosing origins like India and the Middle East. Make it a fun experience without being excessively expensive.

Beer programs are becoming fashionable, beginning about two years ago with beers such as Belgian honey beers. At around \$9 to \$14 a glass, prices are nearing those of by-the-glass wines.

It is important to serve beer in appropriate glassware. For example, five-star hotels can serve beer in wine glasses. The trend is to show as much dedication to beer as wine.

country of origin, regardless of the appellation's latitude and longitude?

Both. New Zealand, Australian, and U.S. wines are great, as are Old World wines that represent a certain taste or time of year. We are aware of all elements and carefully position each wine and country as Old World or New World, ensuring a good balance. Internationally, considerations are more diverse. Old World retains an image of price and status. It is about being seen drinking an expensive big red. New World wines (South Africa, etc.) are brands that Asian and Middle Eastern markets easily identify with.

How do you see the hotel beer, wine, and spirits business changing for the international market?

As Asia's population grows and its wine and beer education increases, our wine growth potential will increase as well. There is a widespread desire in Asian communities to learn about wines. It is necessary to educate our banquet managers and sales/operations teams about great beer and wine. Our employees' knowledge, which has already doubled from 10 years ago, will continue to increase. Previously, they would reference wines by style (full-bodied, etc.); today they speak about grape varietal.

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Describe your wine and food flights programs.

Wine flights are not a fundamental part of our beverage program, but we do create wine flights using particular brands throughout the year. We may choose a certain month with a particular company to do a flight, or we offer verticals of wines. Guests find it interesting to taste vintages from different countries, side by side.

We see bar menu trends and sharing foods as a huge part of our lounge and bar operations. Thus we match certain types of food flights with wine flights. On our menu, we might list hot appetizers next to suggested wine flights.

What is your approach to beverage training?

In the international markets, there is a tremendous amount of loyalty when working for a well-known brand such as Ritz-Carlton. We are known for intense training, which is why we have less turnover than others. Today's guests are often as knowledgeable as servers, banquet managers, and sommeliers. If guests appear to know more about the wine or beer than their server, it is perceived as a lack of service.

Do you think in terms of New World and Old World wines when developing a wine program, or do you think more about

How did you enter the hospitality business?

My parents owned a hotel in the Netherlands, where I learned to cook and work all aspects of the hotel restaurant. I attended culinary school in the Netherlands before immigrating to New Zealand and joining the former Four Seasons Regent Hotel Auckland. Banquets were my first love. I then traveled throughout Europe for a year learning the wine industry by visiting every wine region, getting involved with wine making, and picking grapes in France.

What are your favorite wines and why?

At times I will drink a dry Riesling for weeks and then switch to a Gewürztraminer. But then suddenly I will only drink Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. I love reds as well, like a great Cabernet or Pinot Noir. In the Old World selections, I love Chablis and Sancerre wines because of their earth tones.

Fred Tibbitts & Associates Inc. is a leading wine-by-the-glass consultant, working with and promoting chains around the world. Contact Fred at fredbev@fredtibbitts.com.



FOR THE LOVE OF BEER

A website for beer connoisseurs is www.herestobeer.com. Developed by Anheuser-Busch but not designed as a commercial website, it covers all things pertaining to beer. Check out the Pocket Beer Guide, which lists popular varieties of lagers and ales, along with proper glassware and serving tips.



"It is important to serve beer in the appropriate glassware," according to Mark Weiss, of Ritz-Carlton. Here, a medium-large ridged glass is deemed best for Pale Ales.

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