

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Professionals

Hotel F&B Executive

MARCH/APRIL 2006

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The World of Wine

BY FRED TIBBITTS



Fred Tibbitts, the Globetrotting Wine Guy

VINEXPO OR BUST

It began as "What if..." with Dan Hoffman, wine buyer for Marriott International. What if I put together an elite team of national account executives, planned a wine excursion extraordinaire to Vinexpo Bordeaux 2005 in June, and recruited a group of quality French wine and spirits producers willing to help fund expenses, which would include visits to top

vineyards and lunches, dinners, and entertainment to die for.

Dan said he would be my first victim, guaranteed. My mind raced ahead, trying to catalogue influential French wine guys. I just had to assemble a collection of key chain hotel and restaurant executives and the support would follow.

Before I knew it, I had the team:

- Dan Hoffman, Dir., Equipment & Beverage Specifications, Marriott International
- Debbie Allison, Dir., Beverage & Food Procurement, Darden Restaurants
- Roberto Deiacco, Exec. Chef, Cipriani USA
- Fernando Salazar, Corporate Dir., Food & Beverage Operations, Omni Hotels
- Jean-Marc Jalbert, Corporate Dir. of Food & Beverage—North America, ACCOR

In a blink it was 17 June, and we were on Air France to Bordeaux. And then the party, I mean work, began: Off to Chateau Leoville Poyferre in St. Julien with a tour of Deuxieme Cru/second growth, followed by dinner at Chateau Le Crock in St. Estephe (Cru Bourgeois), hosted by Guillaume Cuvelier, managing director, Spirits Marque One.

The next morning we had breakfast at the Mercure Bordeaux Airport, our haven in Bordeaux from all the lavish treatment. It was our daily lull before the storm.

We went to the Vinexpo site and strolled about for the rest of the morning. Next was lunch at the Club des Marques, the tent of Baron Philippe de Rothschild, hosted by Olivier Lebrez, president, Baron Philippe De Rothschild USA, and I think the grandson of the old boy, who was every bit as debonair as expected.

The president of Vinexpo, Robert Beynat, and Jean-Marie Chardennier welcomed us at the Commissariat General. We pledged to be Ambassadors of Bordeaux, and they promised to revitalize the French wine business.

It was then off to Cognac, hosted by Hennessy with the one-and-only Cyrille Gautier-Auriol for a tour of Quais Hy and Fondateur cellars for an interesting tasting. They treated us like royalty at Chateau Bagnolet, a little castle of a chateau on the river whatever, former home of the Hennessy family.

It was Monday morning, and we explored Vinexpo before going to lunch at Marguax: Chateau Lascombes, Chateau Duhart Milon Rothschild, and then Chateau Lafite

Rothschild. The cellar is a cathedral to winemaking, and the untold perfect barrels are the celestial choir on high.

That evening, DIAGEO's car deluxe was at our door for the trip to Chateau Magnol and a big party. Tuesday morning took us back to Vinexpo. For lunch, it was back to Club Marques and one of the most elaborate stands on the Marche, Concha Y Toro. Before long, we're off to another legend, Chateau Lynch Bages, where we toured the facility and learned its history.

It's off to the evening's main event at Chateau Ormes des Pez. Jean-Michel Cazes, the eternal showman, has engineered plenty of surprises to delight his guests. Everybody enjoyed being a player at yet another Cazes spectacular.

The next morning we were on the road to Marguax again. We visited the lovely Chateau Labegorce-Marguax, more like an elegant resort than winery. But the Baron is real, as is his impeccable wardrobe, and everybody took away a CD of the experience and having tasted their best.

A trip to Vinexpo is incomplete without a journey to St. Emilion, which restores one's confidence that at least some of the small traditional family wineries of France are alive and well. It is a magnificent rural setting that contrasts with the Bordeaux mega development. We visit, taste, and dine several courses of country foods, complete with rich sauces and tasty carbs at Chateau Dassault.

The evening took us to Vinexpo Club Cars to Brasserie des Quincones in Bordeaux, hosted by the Bordeaux Wine Council. We were then entertained at the Grand Theatre de Bordeaux, followed by another lavish wine tasting.

Thursday arrived and, knowing this dream trip to wine tasting heaven is over soon, everyone intensified their search for new products, wine and spirits suppliers, and tasting, tasting, tasting. DIAGEO hosted lunch at their nearby (BG) Chateau Magnol.

That evening, Remy-Cointreau whisked us away to the north of Bordeaux, landing us at Bordeaux Castle, a medieval castle—now a lavish country inn. Dominique Jouson, international brand ambassador, and Vincent Gere, director produit and head cellar master of Remy Martin, hosted us to an evening of culinary delight with a Cognac for every course, followed by a proper Cognac tasting.

Our last day included a cultural tour of Chateaux Pichon Longueville and Chateau d' Arsac, followed by lunch prepared by the resident chef at Chateau d' Arsac. We beat it back to the Mercure to freshen up for a final assault on Cognac, courtesy of Kobrand.

And then we were at Cognac Delamain. Like a graduate course in the history of Cognac, we enjoyed a simple dinner at a B&B and drank Cognac Delamain.

The real meaning of the trip was seven souls becoming one for a week on what amounted to an F&B fantasy that could only be arranged by FTA and its client base. Bordeaux did what Bordeaux does best: It opened its heart and soul to the faithful with warm hospitality, Hollywood-like sets with castles, private baronial residences, elaborate gardens and ponds, and an endless parade of French haute cuisine ... the ultimate working holiday of which one would dream.

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SAY IT WITH CHAMPAGNE

BY GERALD D. BOYD



Champagne is the ne plus ultra of luxury beverages. So special is it that Champagne (or sparkling wine) is guaranteed to brighten the moment and add a touch of class, no matter the occasion or celebration. For as long as anyone can remember, Champagne has been the most requested celebratory wine. Mind you, the Champenois are not complaining about this compartmentalization of their precious bubbly, but they would like you to know Champagne is not just for holidays and special occasions.

There are many reasons to say it with Champagne, but the fact that the world's classiest sparkling wine has a style that goes with any kind of food may be all the hotel beverage director needs to know. From dry to sweet, white to pink, there is a range of Champagnes to appeal to all tastes and occasions.

Contrary to popular opinion, Champagne is not a generic term for all sparkling wine, but an exclusive French wine made only in a delimited region northeast of Paris. However, there are many excellent sparkling wines from other regions such as California that are made using the traditional Champagne method.

MÉTHODE TRADITIONELLE

Méthode traditionnelle (or as it is sometimes called, méthode champenoise), the traditional method of making Champagne blends together three grapes: Chardonnay for finesse, Pinot Noir for structure and (Pinot) Meunier for nuance. A classic cuvee (blend) is 60 percent Pinot Noir and 40 percent Chardonnay. For years Meunier was considered a second-rate grape in Champagne, but lately a growing number of Champagne houses are blending in a little Meunier to give their cuvee dimension and nuance. The art of blending is vital to obtaining the "house style" vintage after vintage.

Stylistically, Chardonnay lovers can enjoy Blanc de Blancs (white from white grapes) Champagne, made entirely from Chardonnay. Although red sparkling wine is illegal in Champagne, there is Rosé Champagne, a delightful drink made mainly from Pinot Noir, sometimes blended with a little Meunier, although Rosé Champagne is often made by blending white and red wines. Blanc de Noirs (white from black) is a style similar to Rosé, made by lightly macerating the Pinot Noir and sometimes Meunier on the skins to obtain a light staining.

Because the base wine for Champagne is high in acidity, a dosage is added to balance the wine. The specific level of dosage is very important to the balance and overall taste of the wine. Dosage is the addition of a measured amount of cane sugar and sometimes reserve wines, to add depth, character, and balance to the wine.

At the driest end of the Champagne range there is Brut Natural, Ultra Brut, or a handful of other terms that mean the wine is finished bone dry. Next is Brut, which generally implies the wine is finished with between 0 to 1.5 percent residual sweetness, from the dosage. The term Extra-Sec is a little confusing since sec in French means "dry," while the wine is, in fact, off-dry finished with between 1.2 and 2 percent sweetness. Sec, Demi-Sec and Doux move progressively from medium dry to very sweet, but these sweeter Champagnes are not often seen in the U.S. market. ➤