

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Professionals

# Hotel F&B Executive<sup>®</sup>

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2006

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# The World of Wine

BY FRED TIBBITTS



Fred Tibbitts, the Globetrotting Wine Guy

Fred Tibbitts talks with Mark Shuda, Senior Director Food & Beverage, Wyndham Worldwide.

**Fred Tibbitts: Most are familiar with the Wyndham brand, but not everyone knows "Wyndham Worldwide." Please give us a company profile and the recent history of how Cendant acquired the brand.**



Mark Shuda

**Mark Shuda:** Wyndham is a brand with great heritage and a loyal customer base, spanning the major demographics and being both for business as well as leisure travellers. Cendant purchased Wyndham Hotels, which includes some 80 franchise hotels and 18 managed hotels, as well as the worldwide rights to the Wyndham brand for hotel and timeshare development.

The new Wyndham operates as a distinct entity focused on three key areas: the brand, its managed hotels, and franchise development. Accelerated expansion and enhanced performance will be the keystones of the Wyndham strategic plan. We are aggressively working with operators to optimize the return on their assets.

Wyndham Worldwide will transition from a pure franchisor into a diversified management and franchise company for the first time in its 15-year history. Because we are a global hospitality company and intend to have both company owned and managed franchised properties, plus the largest timeshare company in the world, we named the company "Wyndham Worldwide."

**FT: Tell us about your educational background and how it prepared you for this industry as well as your food & beverage experience.**

**MS:** I'm a Cornell Hotel School graduate. I always knew I wanted to be in the business and when I learned Cornell had the best school to prepare for a career in hotels, I set my sights on attending. I applied myself, knowing it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn things that would launch a career in the business ... and that some of what I would learn would not serve me well until I had attained an executive level. Thankfully, this came sooner than later for me. I was at Cornell during the glory days of the second generation of "greats" like Vance Christian, Peter Rainsford, Dean Beck, Professor Sherry. These are the legends people talk about, and I was fortunate enough to have them as mentors.

**FT: You are launching a dynamic two-year Beer, Wine & Spirits Policy for the company-managed Wyndham hotels and for franchisees who agree to follow the brand standards. Tell us about it.**

**MS:** We just launched a two-year Wyndham Worldwide Beer, Wine & Spirits Program. It was judged to possess such potential to enliven the senses that our Executive Committee made it one of the core expressions of our

brand essence and a requirement for every Wyndham hotel.

We are working with the most popular brands of craft, imported and domestic, to ensure our customers have an unmatched selection of the best beers available. And we enlisted the creative energies of the Boston Beer Company to drive employee training and help our bars and restaurants become fun beer destinations with excellence in food and beer pairing plus celebrity Master Brewer dinners and related events.

We developed a wine program offering guests a tremendous selection of premium wines from around the world by the taste, glass, and bottle. At most hotels,

I'm excited about the **WYNDHAM SIGNATURE MARTINI GLASS** Program.

We are working with architect Michael Graves to design an elegant, striking, and provocative signature Martini glass as the focus of our Wyndham Worldwide Ultimate Martini Service.

there will be 30 wines by the glass. We will feature three, two-ounce taste flights of Bordeaux blends, same varietals from different countries, and let customers choose which three they want as a tasting. We will have tasting place mats that can be used in our bars, restaurants, and banquets, that inform the customer and give them a place to write tasting notes.

Our spirits program is super, featuring virtually every major brand, focusing on premiums, super premiums, and ultra premiums— to be driven by a state-of-the-art drinks menu. We have aligned with a combination of standards like Jim Beam, Seagram's Seven Crown, Glenfiddich, and edge newcomers like SVEDKA, Hendrick's, and the DeKuyper Pucker Flavors.

**FT: Your Wyndham Worldwide Signature Martini Program will be a real focus. What are the components and how is it unique?**

**MS:** I'm really excited about the new Wyndham Signature Martini Glass Program. We are working with world-recognized architect, Michael Graves, to design an elegant, striking, and provocative signature Martini glass as the focus of our Wyndham Worldwide Ultimate Martini Service. The glass will be different every year, so customers will want the entire collection, which they can order at the hotel or online. And we will build the Martini recipes around three blockbuster brands: SVEDKA, a hip "hot" jet-setter, "Paris Hilton" crowd pleaser; ABSOLUT, the establishment choice in super-premium vodka; and Level, the ultimate perfection of what a smashing vodka is all about.

**FT: An adult beverage program is only as successful as its weakest link, and server training is one of the cornerstones of every successful program. How will you ensure that your training is entertaining, that you get and keep their attention, and that it's effective with a continuing education element?**



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**MS:** I couldn't agree more. We considered this when we chose our primary wine partners because we knew we would have to rely on them to get the job done. You must have a group training meeting to inspire everyone and train the trainers. In addition, every associate involved with the suggestion, sale, and/or service of wine must be able to learn as much as possible on their own, by CD or over the Internet or both. Individual learning is reinforced with wine tastings and server training by certified wine educators from either wineries or their distributor representatives (not distributor sales reps pushing their wines).

One of our foundation wine partners is Trinchero Family Estates. They have developed one of the best and most user-friendly wine education programs in the industry. The Trinchero program is built around the brilliant teachings of Barry Wyss, who is based in Napa at the company's headquarters and runs a wine school for their best customers. He has put the nucleus of his teachings on a CD every associate can to advance their wine knowledge, be they servers, restaurant managers, GMs, or banquet sales directors. He makes wine education fun and is a phenomenal resource. His program is "Vine to Dine" and the CD is "World Wine Challenge."

We will call on our other wine partners to complement this core wine training program with contributions we judge meaningful. So we will have the combined brilliance of some of our industry's finest wine authorities and organizations.

**FT: What are you dreaming up to wow your guests in terms of your beer, wine and spirits offerings?**

**MS:** Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. You don't inspire associates to create beer, wine, and spirit destinations by simply educating them about the products, although this is a prerequisite. You empower people to create beauty and romance and unique spaces where guests become friends and family and share magnificent concoctions designed by masters of mixology, craft beers as great tasting as their names are thought provoking, and wines that illuminate the palate and inspire intimacy by teaching them that these beverages are more than libations.

They are a means of uplifting the souls and spirits of all those who come through our doors. We are entrusted with the responsibility of enhancing the well-being of our guests while they are entrusted in our care. We will teach that creating these uplifting experiences with our beer, wine, and spirits offerings is truly a wonderful calling and one they must take very seriously and execute with excellence. By defining excellence in adult beverage service with caring professionalism that touches the very soul of our guests, we will become genuinely unique beer, wine, and spirits destinations with the new Wyndham Worldwide touch and flair.

**FT: With the public demanding more wines by the glass, the risk of serving a bad glass of wine increases exponentially as does the risk of wine waste. What is your wine preservation program?**

**MS:** Just as we are working with a specialist to design the ultimate signature martini glassware, we worked with a wine consultant to help formulate our wine program, which included virtually every aspect, including wine preservation. While there is no one answer to this question, in our case, based on our new minimum standards for defining wine handling, service, and consultative sales excellence, we chose the Dual System Le Verre de Vin, which keeps wine fresh for up

to 21 days and eliminates all wine waste and permits us to open any bottle in inventory, no matter how expensive, for the right customer. With the help of the manufacturer of the systems we are developing a Wyndham Worldwide Best Practices Policy for wine preservation and service.

**FT: Are you establishing minimum standards for wine glasses or specifying particular styles and sizes to ensure your wine presentation is uniform systemwide?**

**MS:** We are, but this component is still being finalized. We are working with one of the major glassware producers and marketers to standardize a set of superior wine glasses for our taste, glass, and bottle service. When the line is in place, our guests will know they have arrived at a wine destination and that the wine will have been stored properly, preserved with care, and that our service staff will have made the right suggestion so their wine is a great match for their meal every time.

**FT: Are you in favor of server incentives? What kinds of incentives work best?**

**MS:** Everyone deserves an incentive to define excellence and a reward in relation to their contribution to the team. Incentives are at best a combination of recognition and material rewards. I prefer goods, services, and trips to cash. A free massage that made the day and possibly a new friend will be remembered far after a cash award spent to pay the telephone bill. While we are formulating the various plans we will introduce for our servers and restaurant managers and banquet sales directors, we will take the best performers to Napa and Sonoma and to some of our wine producers around the world. It will inspire everyone who contributes to defining wine excellence at Wyndham Worldwide.

**FT: What are your favorite wines and why?**

**MS:** Now that is the question of the hour, no? The answer is no simpler than do I prefer blondes or brunettes or redheads. I appreciate beauty in any package and, likewise, I appreciate good wine no matter what the origin or grape variety or blend. It depends on the season, weather conditions, day part, whether I'm having wine with or without food, the company, or lack thereof, and of course if I'm buying. More than anything, I like to be surprised. I constantly try new wines from all over the world, looking to be as knowledgeable as possible in my position as F&B leader for our company. The other day I opened a bottle of 2004 KWW Cathedral Cellar Shiraz (Paarl, South Africa). It costs a hotel or restaurant about \$9.00. Wow! What a wine. It was as good as any Australian Shiraz I've ever tasted, but different. It had everything expected from a good Shiraz, but a complexity with subtle nuances of berries and spice I never expected from an under \$10.00 bottle of wine. I'm sorry I didn't discover it before I finalized our wine program, but you can bet it will be included at the first possible opportunity. Bon Appétit! 🍷

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

**Quoteworthy**

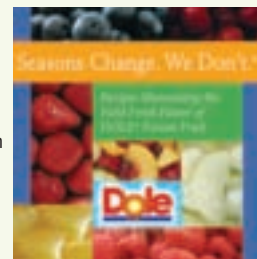
**"I don't see the \$75 to \$90 a person that I used to. Now it's \$35 to \$40."**

—Karen Friedman, F&B Director, Ramada Hotel & Conference Center, Amherst, NY, on Bar and Bat Mitzvah events, page 20

**key to the pantry**

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