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FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

Beer and wine vie for top honors at Rancho Bernardo Inn.

BY ASHLEY BROWN ALLEN

On September 27, 2007, El Bizcocho restaurant at Rancho Bernardo Inn Golf Resort & Spa, San Diego, California, hosted the fight of the century in order to answer the question: What pairs better with fine cuisine, beer or wine?

"The idea of a beer versus wine-pairing competition was brought to us by Stone Brewing Company's co-owner and CEO, Greg Koch," says Mark Eberwein, food and beverage director at the wine-centric inn. "So in the spirit of fun, we hosted a six-course dinner and asked guests to taste selected beers and wines with each course. They wrote down their preferences after each tasting, and the results were tabulated at the end of the night."

In the beer corner, brewery CEO and all-around beer enthusiast Koch painstakingly chose craft brews to best complement the flavors masterminded by the inn's Chef de Cuisine Gavin Kaysen. In the wine corner, Barry Wiss, certified sommelier and VP of communications and trade relations at Trinchero Family Estates, selected fine wines from all over the world to pair smoothly with each culinary creation. The final players in the game—the

esteemed judges—consisted of 69 diners who paid \$125 for the awesome responsibility of determining a winner.

The challenge began with English Pea Soup, whose sherry, truffles, and morels were paired with the Konings Hoeven-Dubbel, a Dutch beer, as well as the Trinchero Napa Valley Reserve Chardonnay (Vista Montone Vineyard 2005). The second course, Hamachi with Mango, Fennel, and Basil, was washed down with Russian River Damnation golden ale and Napa Cellars Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley 2006). Next, Soft-Shell Crab with Tomato, Brioche, and Tartar went with Avery Brewing Company's White Rascal wheat ale and Angove's Nine Vines Grenache/Shiraz Rosé (Tea Tree Gully, Adelaide Foothills, South Australia 2007). Lamb with Foie Gras, Truffle, and Eggplant followed with Stone's 07.07.07 Vertical Epic Ale and Angove's Vineyard Select Shiraz (McLaren Vale, South Australia 2004). Then, Petit Basque with Cherries, Arugula, and Walnuts was matched with Forêt Organic Saison farmhouse ale, as well as the Montevina Sierra Sunrise Nebbiolo/Syrah/ Zinfandel Rosé 2005. For the finish, guests were served Panna Cotta with Lavender, Rhubarb, and Strawberry alongside the Stone Imperial Russian Stout 2004 and the Montevina Terra d'Oro Moscato 2005.

The results? They might surprise you. "It was close [by a margin of six votes], but beer took home the victory," says Eberwein. "It was a shock to some people. In all fairness, beer affects the taste of wine adversely, so it's hard to get a comprehensive taste when you're drinking them so close together. Still, the beer fans were triumphant."

So triumphant, in fact, they are touting their victory with a celebratory DVD. Fans can relive the night, which was filmed complete with tongue-in-cheek pre-fight interviews of Koch, Kaysen, and Wiss, a trash-talking press conference (à la Mike Tyson), and a blow-by-blow description of each course, courtesy of beer-enthusiast website www.thelocalbrew.com. Aside from these multimedia bragging rights, the spoils of the evening included a \$500 donation from the loser (Wiss) to the winner's (Koch's) favorite charity.

"Win or lose," adds Eberwein, "it was the most fun I've had at an event in probably my whole career." ●

Ashley Brown Allen is a frequent contributor to HOTEL F&B.

The World of Wine, Beer & Spirits

BY FRED TIBBITTS

The Big Picture at Interstate



Fred Tibbitts

Don Stanczak, senior food and beverage executive, Interstate Hotels & Resorts, looks beyond outlets to catering sales.

How did you enter the food and beverage business and hotels in particular?

I was raised north of Pittsburgh in a small steel town. But I traveled quite a bit and stayed in some upscale resort hotels and thought this would be a great way to make a living. After graduating from Cornell, I went to work for the Interstate United Corporation in the restaurant division and settled in Chicago as opening managing director of food and beverage operations in the Sears Tower.



Don Stanczak

What are the most important elements for a successful hotel wine program?

You must be better than the rest. That means having a diversified wine list with both traditional and New World selections and an aggressive wine-by-the-glass program with wines handled properly and served at the correct temperatures.

Do you rely on intuition in terms of looking over the horizon to position hotels as a wine destination, or do you just look at the facts?

One key point is to recognize the difference in the degree of sophistication and wine preference between markets and offer enough flexibility to satisfy those demands.

When is Interstate launching a new wine program? Do you anticipate major changes, or are you fine tuning what already works well?

It's being launched in March and will be in effect for 12 months. There will be a greater emphasis on boutique and New World wines.

Wine flights are attracting a great deal of interest. Will a wine flights minimum standard be included when updating your wine policy?

We are considering offering wine flights in our upscale properties.

Often, hotels don't spend enough on wine training because they rationalize they are training servers who may soon be working for a competitor. What is your approach to training?

We offer wine training on our First Choice website but typically expect training support from our beverage partners. A major 2008 initiative will be a training program for catering sales staff. We feel too much emphasis is placed on outlet sales and not nearly enough on potentially profitable catering sales.

Wine preservation is an issue when a hotel expands its by-the-glass and/or by-the-taste offerings. Do you specify a preservation system, or is the decision made at the property level? If you specify a system, does one shoe fit all, or do you draw on a variety of approaches?

We recognize the need for a program due to the increased demand for extensive wine-by-the-glass offerings and hope to implement one in 2008. We favor Le Verre de Vin, although it's a little pricey.

While California wines are the largest-selling type in the United States, it is suggested that this will be the world's top imported wine market by 2010. French exports to the United States increased in 2006 for the first time in years as a result of new packaging, more fruit-forward blends and varietals, and a greater awareness of how to speak to the U.S. wine-consuming public. The Australian wine machine continues to take on all comers. Do you think in terms of "New World" and "Old World" or in terms of country by country, regardless of the latitude and longitude of the appellation, when developing a program?

Most wine companies get absorbed in their own spin and lose touch with the customer. Generally speaking, consumers are much more knowledgeable about wine than they were even five years ago, but it's important to recognize the degree of sophistication. For example, this question is a bit confusing: How can you compare a longitude and latitude decision to Yellow Tail? A majority of the market recognizes the value of Yellow Tail because of the off-premise marketing

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effort. Unless you operate in an upscale market, I can't imagine that longitude and latitude are part of this discussion. It's a country and product decision, with a balance between New and Old World. I would also suggest that, while the masses do not recognize the New and Old World monikers, the *Wine Spectator*/*Wine Advocate* groupies probably do.

What levels (value, premium super-premium, ultra-premium) of spirits do you mandate for bars and restaurants? What about catering?

We mandate all four product levels for both outlets and catering. We also incorporated benchmark pricing in 2007 due to the increasing number of items and cocktails that fall into the ultra-premium category.

Do you have a national drinks menu, or do menus vary by hotel? What about spirits promotions? What kinds do you offer, and for how long?

We offer two tiers of lounge food and beverage menus, plus a seasonal drink menu. We just released a lounge promotion called "Wired," featuring a large selection of wines by the glass, wireless connectivity, and upscale menu items. We also offer two major food and wine promotions annually. Our next one is "Great Chefs Great Seafood," featuring menu items from Interstate's most successful executive chefs matched with wines by the glass and a special cocktail.

What spirits are the most popular? When will the next spirits revolution happen, and what will it be like?

Margaritas remain the most popular cocktail and probably will continue to be so. The trend toward better and fresher ingredients will become a standard at all levels of operations. An area we feel has been ignored in hotels, but not by the casual chain restaurants, is upscale nonalcoholic drinks. One of our 2008 objectives is to create a series of creative drinks that can be served either with or without spirits.

Are shooters alive and well, or have they reincarnated into a new form? Are mini-shot flights gaining popularity similar to mini-wine flights?

Shooters are generally not a popular fit in most hotel environments but rather in the high-energy bar segment. I see a growing market for infused drinks, flavored ice, etc.

What about beer? Is the trend to new drafts or bottles or both?

We dedicate the majority of our draft heads to imported or boutique brands, particularly those with custom glassware.

Are microbrews gaining or losing momentum? Do microbrews from big brewers have the greatest market share of the category, or is it a combination of all the local microbrew favorites?

It's market driven, but, in general, imports have taken a bigger share in most markets. I'm not sure that the micros the big brewers offer should be included in this.

What about the light category? Is it still gaining market share? Heineken has come out with Heineken Premium Light. They feel they have taken the light category to a new "luxury" level. Do you agree?

Light beers will remain popular. I believe that there is a market for luxury light if there is an acceptable product.

What is the next big thing in beer on-premise? Any chance it will be tasting flights of microbrews?

Tasting flights of micros is not new. We did it on Martha's Vineyard 10 years ago with great success. Tasting flights have great appeal, but, from an operator's perspective, tasting flights can slow down service and in some cases reduce sales.

You also provide food and beverage direction for other hotel chains. Describe the other chains you assist and what kinds of programs you do.

I work with several hotel management companies, all of which operate properties under the major flags. While all of the brands offer wine programs, they are not mandatory for franchise operators. Therefore, they are free to create their own wine programs. Most management companies have not addressed this issue, so their programs tend to be property driven. My direction is to work with the wineries to develop a core program for these properties and alter it to suit the location.

In five to ten years, how do you see the hotel wine business changing? Will wine continue to increase its share of the beverage alcohol business in bars, restaurants, in-room dining, and banquets? Will the wine knowledge of restaurant managers, banquet sales managers, and servers be greater? Will imported wines have a greater share of sales, or will California maintain its market share?

Yes to all of the above, but the California market share will be value/price driven. For example, reasonable French Burgundies are competitively priced with California and Oregon Pinots. More and more of the higher-end California Cabs and Blends are priced at the same level as high-quality reds from Italy, France, and Spain.

What are your favorite wines and why?

Properly aged French Burgundy, Bordeaux-Drouhin, Jadot Grange, California Cabernet or Meritage, Silver Oak, Lancaster, Paul Hobbs, Insignia, Northern Côtes du Rhône Chave Hermitage, Portuguese Duoro, French Sauterne, Duval-Leroy Champagne. I have been fortunate to travel to most of the world's great wine-growing regions, and my favorite wines are selected both by taste and experience. Wine is about more than a rating or taste; it's a total experience. ☘

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.

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STRIKING GOLD

Think you can't tell one brand of tomato juice from another in a Bloody Mary? Think again.

"We were using Red Gold Sacramento Tomato Juice when I started at Tavern on the Green as director of food & beverage 13 years ago," says William Zambrotto, now the famed restaurant's general manager. "Then we tried cutting costs with another private label tomato juice. But it wasn't nearly as good. Not as thick. It didn't have the rich, full tomato flavor of Sacramento Juice. And the cost savings were minimal.

"Since then, we have consistently and exclusively used Sacramento Tomato Juice," he adds. "It's the best-quality product out there with the best real tomato flavor. It's thicker and has a better consistency than other brands. We have never had a complaint or issue with Sacramento."

For hoteliers seeking premium juices, ingredients, and mixes for signature cocktails and Bloody Marys, Zambrotto can't recommend this hotel tomato juice vendor highly enough. "At Tavern on the Green, we always try to procure the highest-quality product available at the best price. We'll take a chance with another product if the quality is comparable. But for tomato juice, it can only be Sacramento." —ADK
CONTACT: 877-748-9798 ext. 1630, www.redgold.com



"Sacramento" Margarita
*Tavern on the Green,
New York City*

1-1/2 oz tequila
1/2 oz triple sec
1/2 oz lime juice
3/4 oz Sacramento
Tomato Juice

Glass: rocks glass
Garnish: cayenne pepper and kosher salt rim