



W INNING INES

Martin B. Jones, newly appointed GM of the W Seoul Walkerhill and Starwood's director of F&B for Asia Pacific, reveals his beverage strategy

First, tell me about the new hotel – will it be another W success story?

Absolutely! It will have 253 rooms, a 5,000sqm spa, 1,000sqm bar and three fantastic restaurants – a W Cafe, an Asian-influenced restaurant (but not fusion) and a spa restaurant with food that is not just healthy but actually tastes good, too.

What is Starwood Asia Pacific doing to increase wine sales and to encourage guests to drink better quality wine?

We are building hotels with restaurant concepts that focus on operating like independent restaurants rather than the typical hotel restaurants that basically service the eating needs of in-house guests.

Our restaurants are an integration of design with atmosphere in mind, style, texture, and decor that inspire the consumption of wines and great cuisine.

They should encourage you, even seduce you, into drinking more and enjoying more through great variety, a great place to enjoy wines by the glass – or just through the great value we offer.

At the new W, we call it *An Indulgence Of The Senses* and we achieve our beverage focus with extras like sake cellars, wine cellars and a premium selection of bottled waters. We plan to offer our guests something unique: our own pure, bottled water from nearby Mount Sorak.

Restaurants have to be fun and comfortable with great food, service and, of course, value for money.

You have just re-launched your *Wines of the World* programme across Asia Pacific. How many Starwood hotels will it reach by year's end, and over the next two or three years?

By year end, we should have 80 hotels participating in *Wines of the World* and we hope to be opening a number of new hotels each year that will also participate.

It's a great programme and, with our new wines-by-the-glass menus, our guests have an even better selection from around the world that goes well with every cuisine we offer.



What is the real strategy of the *Wines of the World* programme?

It's a very good selection of wines from a number of origins that work well with our range of different speciality concepts, whether Western, Chinese, Japanese or Indian.

Our wine consumption is steadily increasing because our guests are better travelled today. They know a good glass of wine and demand variety in terms of where the wine comes from, as well as the style, dominant element and mouth feel.

We are constantly educating our guests with our menus, coordinated merchandising and displays and they, at the same time, are educating us by what they choose.

Our wine selections are predominantly New World, such as Penfolds from Australia, Matua Valley from New Zealand, Luis Felipe Edwards

from Chile and Terrazas from Argentina.

They show forward fruit, they're well balanced and easy to drink and they all go well with or without food.

This is why many of the Australian and New Zealand wine makers – I think they call them the "flying wine makers" – are now consulting with the French to change the style of their fighting varietal wines to better match what the New World countries are putting out.

You just can't beat the value, the flavour and the complexity for the dollar of the New World wines.

What about Champagne? Is that New World, too?

It's both. Our Champagnes are some of the top *grande marques*, including Moët & Chandon Imperial Brut, Dom Perignon, Veuve Clicquot and Krug Grande Cuvee.

But our sparkling wines can be New World, such as the *Eclipse by Chandon Brut Australia* or, if the guest prefers a European sparkler, we offer *Eclipse by Chandon Spain Brut Cava*.

But, here again, if you tasted the *Cava* blind-folded, you would insist it was New World because Chandon has taken the New World style they produce in Argentina, California and Australia and brought it to their Spanish sparkling-wine facility.

The result is a delicious way to refresh the palate with raisins and citric flavours on any occasion.

It sounds like Starwood is doing a lot to satisfy its guests.

Like I said earlier, we are creating concepts that are focused on our local communities, and are as exciting – or more so – than many free-standing restaurants.

They are not just "hotel restaurants" anymore – that idea is just not good enough – and, as such, our customers keep coming back. ■

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