

HOTEL

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For hospitality professionals



Official Publication

What Makes A Great GM?

Asian managers who lead by example



Walk ON THE WILD SIDE

Mark Shuda, senior F&B director for **Wyndham Worldwide**, has put together a global wine programme designed to surprise and excite

By **Fred Tibbitts**

MOST TRAVELLERS ARE FAMILIAR with the Wyndham brand, but not everyone knows Wyndham Worldwide. How did Cendant acquire the brand?

Wyndham is a brand with a great heritage and a very loyal customer base, spanning the major demographics of business travellers as well as leisure and vacation guests. Cendant purchased Wyndham Hotels, which included about 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 our operators to optimise the return on their assets.

Wyndham Worldwide will now transition from a pure franchiser into a diversified management and franchise company for the first time in its 15-year history.

Because we are a global hospitality company and we intend to have both company-owned and managed, franchised properties, as well as the largest timeshare company in the world, we named the new company Wyndham Worldwide.

We already have franchisees around the world, and Asia – particularly China – is a key development target moving forward.

Tell us about your F&B experience.

Well, I'm a Cornell Hotel School graduate. I always knew I wanted to be in the business and at Cornell I applied myself, knowing that it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn things that would help me launch a life-long career in the business.

I knew that much of what I would learn would not serve me well until I had attained an executive level which,

thankfully, came sooner than later for me.

But I was especially fortunate, because I was at Cornell during the glory days of the second generation of "greats" like Vance Christian, Peter Rainsford and Dean Beck. These are the legends people talk about, and I was fortunate enough to have as real mentors.

I understand you are launching a dynamic two-year Beer, Wine & Spirits Policy for company-managed Wyndham hotels and for those franchisees that agree to follow the brand standards. Tell us about it.

The programme possesses such potential to enliven the senses of both our associates and our customers that our executive committee has decided it will be one of the core expressions of our new brand essence and, consequently,

a requirement for every Wyndham hotel – both company and franchisee – worldwide.

We are working with all the most popular brands of craft, imported and domestic beers to ensure our customers have an unmatched selection of the best beers available.

We have also enlisted the creative energies of the Boston Beer Compa-

ny to drive our employee-training and to help our bars and restaurants to become fun beer destinations with excellence in food and beer pairing, celebrity master brewer dinners and related events.

We have put together a fabulous wine programme that offers our guests a tremendous selection of premium wines from around the world by the taste, by the glass and by the bottle. At most hotels, there will be 30 wines by the glass available.

We will be featuring three two-ounce taste flights of Bordeaux blends and varietals from different countries, and will allow customers to tell us which three of our wines they would like to try as a tasting.

We will have simple tasting place-mats in our bars and restaurants, and even in banquets, that inform the customers and give them a place to write their personal

tasting notes for a great take-home piece.

We want to ensure a comfort zone of the most popular wines for our regulars, and then show them what a walk of the wild side might be like.

Our spirits programme features virtually every major brand name and focuses on premiums, super premiums and ultra premiums, all to be driven by a state-of-the-art drinks menu now in development.

We have aligned with a combination of timeless standards like Jim Beam, Seagram's Seven Crown and Glenfiddich, as well as newcomers like SVEDKA, Hendrick's and the DeKuyper Pucker Flavors.

So the programme is going to be a real focus going forward. What are its components and how will it be unique?

I'm most excited about the new Wyndham Signature Martini Glass Programme, featuring SVEDKA, as well as ABSOLUT and Level Vodkas.

We are working with world-recognised designer Michael Graves to design the most 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 over time our customers will be able to own the entire collection.

An adult beverage programme is only as successful as its weakest link, and server training is one of the corner stones of every successful beverage programme. How are you going to ensure your server training is both entertaining and effective with a continuing education element?

We took this into consideration when we chose our primary wine partners because we knew we would have to rely on them to get the job done.

You have to have a group-training meeting to inspire everyone and train the trainers. Then they need to have a means of continuing their wine education.

You must also have a means for every associate who is involved with the suggestion, sale and or service of wine to be able to learn as much as possible and on their own, either by CD or over the internet or both.

Individual learning is reinforced with wine tastings and server training by certified wine educators from either the wineries or their distributor representatives – not distributor sales reps pushing their wines in the programme.

We are very fortunate because one of our foundation wine partners is Trinchero Family Estates, which has developed one of the best and most user-friendly wine-

education programmes in the industry.

I'm not saying it's the only one that's good – of course, all the major wineries have what they consider to be the premier wine-training programme and they market it in that way.

This is good for the industry because, tomorrow, we may inherit a key employee from another hotel brand and the more they already know about wine, the better.

We will also be calling on our other wine partners to complement this core wine-training programme with contributions we judge as meaningful, which will give us the combined brilliance of some of our industry's finest wine authorities and organisations.

As a result, Wyndham Worldwide will be at the forefront of wine education for all our associates who par-



ticipate in wine service for our customers.

How will you “wow” your guests in terms of your beer, wine and spirits offerings?

They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and I don’t believe you can inspire your associates to create beer, wine and spirit destinations by simply educating them about the products, even though this a prerequisite.

You empower people to create beauty, romance and unique spaces where guests become friends and share magnificent concoctions designed by masters of mixology, craft beers as great tasting as their names are provoking, and wines from near and far 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 that 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 unique beer, wine and spirits destinations with the new Wyndham Worldwide touch and flare.

What other beverage-related innovations are you incorporating into your new programme in terms of hi-tech systems?

If our initial tests prove as successful as anticipated, we will be rolling out the new *Beverage Metrics Third Generation Wireless Internet Inventory and Revenue Enhancement System* at all locations.

This will immediately increase beverage revenues by at least 20 percent and provide a variety of management reports that will allow us to be far more efficient and profitable.

It is completely secure in terms of data collection and transmission and 100% compatible with Micros, Infogenesis and any of the major restaurant hub software packages our company managed or franchisees may have installed.

Are you establishing minimum standards for wine glasses or specifying a particular style and sizes to ensure your wine presentation is uniform systemwide?

We are working with one of the major glassware pro-

ducers to standardise a set of superior wine glasses for our taste, glass and bottle service.

Trust me, 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 and preserved with care, and that our professional service staff will have made the right suggestion so that their wine is a great match for their meal every time.

What kinds of server incentives work best?

Everyone deserves an incentive to define excellence and a just reward in relation to their contribution to the team results. Incentives can take a multitude of forms, but they are at best a combination of recognition and material rewards.

I prefer goods, services and trips to cash. A free massage, for example, will be remembered long after a cash award has been spent to pay the telephone bill.

What are your favourite wines and why?

Do I prefer blonds, brunettes or redheads? I appreciate beauty in any package and – likewise – I appreciate good wine, no matter the origin, grape variety or blend.

It depends on the season, weather conditions, whether I’m having wine with or without food, the company or lack thereof and, of course, if I’m buying, how much I’m prepared to spend at that moment.

I’m constantly trying 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 happened to open a bottle I had not previously tried, a 2004 KWV Cathedral Cellar Shiraz (Paarl, South Africa). It costs a hotel

or restaurant about US\$9.

Wow! What a wine. It was as good as any Australian shiraz I’ve ever tasted, but different.

It had everything I expected from a good shiraz, but also a beautiful complexity with subtle nuances of berries and spice I never expected from a bottle of wining costing less than US\$10 a bottle.

I’m really sorry I didn’t discover that one before I finalised our wine programme, but you can bet it will be included at the first possible opportunity. □

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