

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Professionals

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007

unforgettable corporate retreats p.21

Columbia Sussex pairs cocktails and small plates p.51

in-room wine menus do's and don'ts p.41

make training an adventure p.62

**5** trends for higher beverage profits p.44



## BROADMOOR BOOT CAMP

EMPLOYEE HIRING & TRAINING:  
A NEVER-ENDING STORY p.26

The Broadmoor: Assistant Director of Food and Beverage David Driscoll, Executive Chef Siegfried Eisenberger, and Director of Food and Beverage Craig Reed



Showcase your hotel events and win a HOTEL F&B banquet design award! p.64

# The World of Wine

BY FRED TIBBITTS

## HIGHER EDUCATION



Fred Tibbitts

New to Wyndham, VP F&B Fernando Salazar elevates training.

**Fernando, you just arrived at Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, a subsidiary of Wyndham Worldwide. At Omni, you successfully positioned food and beverage with your "Flavors" campaigns and unique promotions. How are the cultures of these two companies different, and do you intend to establish a similar format at Wyndham?**

My goal is to bring Wyndham's food and beverage department to a position of prominence. The formula is simple: surround myself with quality people, form a team that exudes creativity and passion, and drive everyone to be relentless in the pursuit of excellence.

There are similarities in the cultures. Both are driven to be the best by building a quality team to execute the brand vision. In my first week, I was involved in two hotel acquisitions. I love Wyndham's emphasis on growth. In terms of promotions, I plan to create an innovative series, designed to expose and teach chefs about world cuisines, as well as bring fantastic flavors and dining experiences to guests. I want to take key concepts I created with the Flavors of the World program, add new and unique components that fit with the Wyndham brand personality, and elevate it. The goal is to create excitement among chefs and food and beverage associates and generate enthusiasm among guests.

**What do you see as your greatest beverage challenge, and what is the potential for success based on your understanding of the industry?**

Both the challenge and opportunity are the same that exist in most companies: lack of training and education. That was my biggest push at Omni, and it made us successful. I am a big proponent of education and training. You cannot sell a product you do not know, so we cannot blame our servers for not offering wine or a particular cocktail consistently if we do not provide the education and training for them to better understand the product and offer it with confidence.

**What will be your immediate beverage agenda at Wyndham?**

I will focus on compliance of all Wyndham hotels with the established beverage program. It's necessary to ensure consistency throughout the brand. The other key focus is education by providing our food and beverage associates the tools to begin training on the products in our core beverage program.

**While your predecessor launched a system-wide wine, beer, and spirits program, the nonalcoholic beverage side was not addressed. What are your thoughts on this?**

It is a hugely underdeveloped segment of our business. I plan to implement specific nonalcoholic beverages. But I first want to address the basics and then concentrate on developing these types of programs.

**Wine must be addressed with passion, and every team member must play a role to guarantee success for the hotels as well as guests. How do you intend to inspire this passion, from directors of food and beverage, to restaurant managers, to servers, to banquet staff?**

One word comes to mind again and again, and that is "education." Let me offer an unrelated example that may help explain why I am so driven about it. Last month, after attending Vinexpo in Bordeaux, I went to Paris and visited the Louvre Museum. I had the good fortune to be joined by a friend who lives in Paris and is an artist in her own right. Her deep knowledge and understanding of art helped me appreciate the incredible works of art before me. Having that knowledge and insight was key to my experience and outlook. In other words, the education I received from her made the difference between simply looking at a work of art versus truly understanding what the painting was all about. Wine and spirits are the same, as is service. We must teach our servers so they can not just look at a bottle of wine but understand what that bottle of wine is about: flavors, provenance, main characteristics, etc. Only then can they confidently offer it to guests.

**You recently returned from Vinexpo Bordeaux 2007. What did you learn, and how will you apply these lessons and insights to improving the quality of Wyndham's wine program?**

Interestingly enough, through the end of September, guests will discover a casual way to enjoy French

wines through Wyndham's new Bordeaux and Wyndham Burger menu offering. Wyndham's executive chefs and the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB) created a menu of specially selected Bordeaux varietals to complement the signature all-American Wyndham Burger. Wine education is key to the success of our food and beverage operations, especially given wine's increased popularity with guests. I want to continue to evaluate innovative ways to deliver that experience to consumers.

**Wyndham has not yet formalized its wine training process. What are your plans in this regard?**

Once acclimated, I will develop online wine training modules to serve as the platform for training associates. Servers will be able to access a website where they can go through educational modules, then take quizzes and a final test. I used WineQuest for this purpose at Omni and will use them at Wyndham as well.

**Do you have additional thoughts to share on wine and your vision of "Wine Wyndham"?**

I am happy to see wine is increasingly a natural choice for guests, particularly among younger adults of legal drinking age. It has been demystified, and that is a good thing. And today's wine-savvy consumer pushes operators to have a knowledgeable staff.

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

I love wine in general. It is my beverage of choice. My favorite grape is Pinot Noir, but I love Brunellos and Barolos, Italian wines in general. If I had to choose one, I would take a bottle of Burgundy from French vintner Henry Mayer. It is the quintessential Burgundy. ☺

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## Imported Premium Beer

### BEYOND THE BEACH

Fun in the sun with sand and surf—what's not to love? As a brand, Corona Extra conjures images of pure relaxation on the beach. And, as the #1 imported beer in the U.S., it has quite a following.

"The Mexican beer category is extremely popular," says Roger Taylor, vice president of F&B at Columbia Sussex Corporation in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. "Corona Extra and Corona Light have experienced tremendous growth in a relatively flat beer market over the last several years. The brand identifies with all age groups."

But it's a favorite beer for young drinkers in particular. "The flavor profile of these beers is what younger beer drinkers are looking for," Taylor notes.

Crown Imports LLC imports, distributes, and markets an attractive imported beer portfolio across the entire United States. In addition to Corona Extra and Corona Light, the Crown portfolio includes Modelo Especial, Negra Modelo, Pacifico, St. Pauli Girl, and the Tsingtao beer brands.

"The print media and TV advertising for Corona is first class," says Taylor. "Crown Imports has a great national account team. They really keep me informed on what's happening in the beer industry, and their distribution support system is very good. Whenever we go into a new market, they're fully supportive of us." —ADK

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