

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Operations

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A BIG PART OF THE MIX

John Q. Hammons Hotels & Resorts Encourages Chef Communication and Custom Menus to Drive Banquet Business

Embassy Suites, Rogers, Arkansas:
(L-R) Marcus Easley, executive chef;
Adam Price, sous chef; and Vito Palmietto,
corporate director of food and beverage and
procurement for John Q. Hammons.



175 Drinks Entered, 2 Winners Selected in 2007 MIXIE Awards **p.53**

The World of Wine

BY FRED TIBBITTS

beers, wines, and spirits. There becomes an apparent chemistry. Other components to notice are initial aromas and salty, bitter, sweet, or sour tones. Take a whiff, a small sip, discard, and try a spoonful of the dish.

This is an excellent way to understand the chemistry of food against the chemistry of a beverage. I also research vegetable chemistries and how beverages are made. Understanding why eggplant can be bitter when cooked or why Scotch smells smoky and peaty is helpful.

TASTING

For the tasting, I looked at a variety of alcohol levels and range of beverages including: Scotch, vodka, white wine, red wine, dry and off-dry rosé wine, and mildly hoppy to light-styled beer. All were inexpensive labels, with no wine over \$15. Since the idea was to challenge the concept of vegetables, I had to understand the variety of flavors and textures, including raw, that make vegetables attractive. Included were singular items and vegetables integrated into plates—from vegan or vegetarian to side dishes.

PROCESS I sampled sips of each beverage at each trial. The dishes included:

- Simple sliced, sautéed domestic mushrooms.
- Side dishes of cashew-glazed green string beans, white and red cabbage, carrots, spinach, and tomatoes—all cooked and uncooked.
- Appetizers using individual purées of white bean, sundried tomato, and roasted eggplant with crostini.
- Thai Spring Roll Wrap with Basil, devised as a quick, light snack.
- Simple lemon and olive oil mixed green salad alongside a cauliflower burrito.
- Coal-fired mild whole-wheat pizza crust topped with simple yellow onions, garlic slivers, rosemary, and sliced red chili.
- Burger of brown lentil with shredded romaine, fresh tomato, and chickpea hummus.
- Eggplant parmesan entrée.
- Hand-rolled red bean pot stickers swimming in a vegetable broth spiked with soy and ginger.

RESULTS I rejected the higher-alcohol Scotch and vodka, even diluted with mixers on a second round. They overpowered the subtle vegetable flavors. Another striking “no” was the off-dry rosé and the IPA beer. Both left a significant lingering taste. Oaky red wines embittered the raw vegetables and vice versa. Most heavier tannins conflicted. Yet, if I armed my BYOB assortment with a carefully chosen Barbera or a lighter version of Petit Syrah, these fared well with most cooked vegetables and kept their character when using labels of alcohol at 11.5 to 12.5 percent.

My number-one favorite was Tocai Friuliano. At 11.5 up to 13.0 percent alcohol, it was dry but packed with aromatic fruit. Fermented dry in these cases, the Tocai Friuliano had a round mouth complexity with depth and significant tartness but possessed balance to even out the lightest to most-developed vegetable dishes. ●

Michael Foley, a celebrated American chef, has three decades of owner/operator hotel, winery, and restaurant experience. Based in Chicago, he travels for the U.S. government, highlighting American products with regional and creative cooking.



Fred Tibbitts



Tom Maier

The Future Is Now at Red Lion

Tom Maier, VP hotel operations, discusses his wine world view.

Tom, tell us how you entered the food and beverage business and hotels in particular.

I entered the food and beverage business with Starwood Hotels (then ITT Sheraton) in the Hawaiian Islands. I held positions as dining room manager and director of food and beverage at the Sheraton Kauai Resort, Poipu Beach, and the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Waikiki.

What are the most important elements and why for a successful hotel wine program in

2008 and beyond?

The most important elements are server training and product awareness. The more integrated the direct selling personnel are between the customer and the wine products, the better the opportunity for a customer experience to be meaningful and enjoyable.

When is Red Lion launching its new wine program? Do you anticipate major changes, or are you looking to fine-tune what already works?

Red Lion's wine program constantly evolves to align with our customer profile and segmentation strategy. We have excellent relationships with major wine merchants and rely heavily on their product awareness and marketing capability to position the ideal wines for our customer taste and pricing profile.

Wine Flights are attracting a great deal of interest around the world. Will you include a wine flights minimum standard when updating your wine policy? If so, how might the wine flights work?

We do not offer a wine flights program; however, we allow for property-specific programming in that regard.

Hotels often do not spend enough on server training because, they rationalize, they are training servers who may soon be working for a competitor, given industry turnover in this position. What is your approach to wine training, and how do you ensure that it is being done and done well?

We have a very strong relationship with Patrick Henry Creative Promotions. Their role is significant in the development and execution of our wine program. They also provide ongoing property-level wine training in conjunction with our selected wine merchants. At the property level, we rely on our food and beverage managers, restaurant managers, and chefs to groom high-potential associates for growth opportunities when demonstrating interest, competency, and creativity in wine sales and service.

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 let the decision be made at the property level?

At this time, we do not specify a particular system but would be open to considering one in the future.

While California wines are the largest selling type in the United States, it is suggested that this country will be the world's top imported wine market by 2010. French wine 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, led by the likes of Yellow Tail, continues to take on all comers. Do you think in terms of “New World” and “Old World” wines when developing a wine program or in terms of country by country, regardless of the latitude and longitude of the appellation?

It is important to consider all variables. Depending on the customer profile, one may find better awareness by labeling “New World” and “Old World” wines. However, as the market evolves, openness and flexibility in marketing approach are essential. Traditionally speaking, region by region and country by country may be the most balanced approach. Also, wine may be marketed by both flavor profile and price point, depending on the audience.

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

I see the wine business continuing to evolve at the pace of culinary and other specialty beverage trends. More and more talent and innovation are being infused into the wine and food industry than ever before. Wine will continue to be a focal point of product differentiation in dining, banquet, and specialty outlets. Servers will continue to be the key sales point of interest since they have the most contact with the customer. Restaurant and banquet managers will need to perform in key leadership roles in terms of product offering and alignment with targeted customers. Wines from all over the world will be commonplace as the global economy continues to prevail. However, specific regions will remain strong and well-received because of consumer loyalty and geographical recognition.

What are your favorite wines and why?

My favorites are from all over the world. Which part of the world I'm traveling in determines my selections, as well as the season and weather. I love to have a glass of Champagne to begin a meal. When drinking whites, I enjoy Yellow Tail Chardonnay, Chateau Ste. Michelle Riesling, and Nobile Sauvignon Blanc. When drinking reds, I prefer Jacob's Creek Shiraz, Hogue Genesis Syrah, and Rex Hill Pinot Noir. Of course, one can never turn down a good glass of Bordeaux. ●

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.