

# WINEBIZCONFERENCE

28 July 2011



The picture opposite is inside pages of our Wine Tasting Journal, which available for purchase on our online store.

## Wine Listings for Restaurants

By Nikki Dumas

### UNDERSTANDING RESTAURANT WINE LIST MANAGEMENT

Generally speaking, a good wine list should have approximately 100 items available which includes the wine, sherry, port and brandy. Other spirits like whisky, bourbon, vodka, tequila etc are not included in the main body of a wine list and should be separate. Wine bars and venues with maturation cellars and more storage space have larger lists and there are other exceptions. Restaurant wine lists should be designed during the months of May, June and July, most white vintages are released and some reds, there is more time available during winter to explore, examine and decide. Updates and vintage changes in November for season.

#### REPEAT LISTING

The main criteria for re-listing wines, is sales based. Most restaurants should assess the performance of each individual wine when redesigning the list. Wineries should ask the restaurant concerned how the wine sales are progressing on a regular basis in terms of bottle totals as opposed to the monetary sales, preferably monthly from inception. These totals can be further analysed by the ratio of wines sold by the glass to the full bottles sold.

During the off-season period, restaurants may purchase direct from the farm, from a retailer, or from another source. Sales mixes or itemised records from the establishment will give a more accurate record of the wine that has been sold as opposed to tracking your sales through your invoices and distribution houses.

#### NEW LISTING

When designing a new list the person in charge of the list will begin with what they know, prefer, as well as what they have experienced in the past at a previous employment. They also take into consideration the owners preferences. This constitutes about a third of the list.

The next part is account applications. Because restaurants are more food focused, they do not hesitate in sourcing the best product for their dishes on the food menu. Most restaurants prefer to deal with wine distribution houses that can offer them a one-stop shop for their wine list - which is less paperwork and less delivery problems. Another third gone if your wine is not on a distribution list. There are exceptions where restaurants prefer to deal with the farms direct who may offer a better price and service.

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### UNDERSTANDING RESTAURANT WINE LIST MANAGEMENT CONTINUED

The last part is probably pure luck. You may have caught the manager on a good day or you are in the right place at the right time. Speaking of timing lets have a look at the acceptable time for representative visits.

Time of the week:-

Monday & Tuesday – worst days in restaurant management. All the administration work, which most managers despise, has to be completed, as well as managing the floor during service. Even though the restaurant may not appear busy with guests on these days, behind the scenes preparation is in full swing for the busier days ahead.

Wednesday & Thursday – not so frantic for management, as they should be well prepared for the weekend by this time

Friday, Saturday & Sunday – ‘no go zone’ for representatives, unless there is an emergency

The time of the day is also important. There is a 45-minute window of opportunity after the restaurant is set up, ready for service and before guests arrive, where management is more open and responsive to suggestions. This is the right time for representatives to approach a restaurant without an appointment.

These intervals occur throughout the day at round about the following times: -

- ✓ 08.30am to 09.30am
- ✓ 11.30am to 12.30pm
- ✓ 15.00pm to 16.00pm
- ✓ 17.30pm to 18.30pm

Prepare your visiting schedule and diaries around these times.

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### ROLE OF THE WINE TO THE RELEVANCE OF THE FOOD MENU

Chefs love summer and winter menus so that they can create different dishes for whatever produce is available during the relevant season. Your wine should complement at least one item on the food menu.

Find out the chefs signature dishes. These dishes usually remain on the menu and give the restaurant an identity. If the wine matches these dishes, then the wine should be on the list for quite a while.

New guests will order a signature dish before trying another dish because it always will be presented as a recommendation from the server.

Obtain a copy of the food menu of the establishment or enjoy a meal at the venue. Do your homework, get a better understanding of the ambience, the customers, staff and find the perfect pairing of your wine to the menu item before trying to obtain the listing.

Find out the person who is in charge of the wine list together with their contact details and most importantly when they are on duty. Most cases they are the night shift managers and wherever possible please contact them at an appropriate hour of the day and preferably on the restaurants landline.

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### ROLE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF WINERIES VERSUS REPRESENTATIVES OF DISTRIBUTORS

All too often the representatives overlap, sometimes on the same day when visiting a restaurant. In the case of distribution houses, there can be as many as five persons representing their portfolios within their company arriving during the course of day, which is very frustrating for the managers. Planning and timing is everything, as previously discussed.

#### NEW LISTINGS

This should be the role of the representative of the distribution house. They have access to broader information e.g. new wines available through the house, shared information with fellow colleagues on new restaurant openings etc. These people are sales driven to achieve their targets and have the most drive to get the wine listed.

#### REPEAT LISTINGS

This should be the role of the winery representative. In my opinion, winery representatives build better relationships with restaurants.

*“Personal experience: way back when I was still in Johannesburg, the sales manager Mr. B from DW Wine Estate, came to chat about the current wine on the then small but concise wine list. At the end of a 20 min conversation not only did I understand the product better, the farm, the people and the region I felt no obligation to list the wine. It has been almost 15 years since that conversation and their wine remains a firm favourite for listing on a wine list that I have designed. There are 16 of these wineries that have been a constant factor in all of my lists.”*

Why is that you may ask?

Simple **SERVICE, COMMUNICATION** and **PASSION**.

Restaurant staff are fickle, they want to be waitrons in summer and managers in winter, which constitutes a large turnover of staff at restaurants throughout the year. However, this should not discourage you, if your relationship is good with that staff member, then your wine will follow. Build lasting relationships.

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### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WINERY OWNER AND THE RESTAURANT OWNER

From my experience, restaurant owners generally have the least amount of wine knowledge within the establishment, but are the decision makers.

Results in a recent online survey concluded that communications between owners of wineries and restaurant owners amounted to a very disappointing 7%, regardless whether the sales of a particular wine were good or bad.

Even if the marketing and sales departments of the wineries/distribution houses are doing the legwork, it is important for the owners of wineries to be more hands on when it comes to restaurants.

I am not saying that winery owners should visit all the restaurants where their wines are listed, but an occasional visit during the day or dinner at the establishment will suffice.

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### INCENTIVES FOR RESTAURANT STAFF

From my experience, restaurant owners generally have tried numerous incentive schemes with staff over many years in conjunction with wineries, for e.g. receive a case of wine for the most sales of a particular wine etc. with little effect on sales.

Winery visits by restaurant staff is a great incentive, which takes a lot of organization and planning between the restaurant and winery.

This kind of incentive could be for new staff as part of their induction and training or for sales driven staff members as part of an overall restaurant incentive.

What I do know for sure, is that restaurant service staff are mostly interested in money, bottle openers and an extra off day as incentives.

The most successful wine incentive I implemented at my previous restaurant that achieved optimum results were sales based per shift. For every eight bottles of wine sold (regardless of the price) on a shift, the server could choose any bottle of wine (regardless of the farm) to the value of the sales divided by eight from the wine list. This not only increased sales for the restaurant, but the staff members got to experience their chosen wine in their own environment, in their own way. The stock for the incentive came from de-listed wines, samples from the farm and complimentary stock.

A win-win situation!

See if you can implement a similar system at one of your clients. have the least amount of wine knowledge within the establishment, but are the decision makers.

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### TASTING VERSUS TRAINING

Knowledge is Power:- an old cliché but effective in the workplace.

Over the years as a restaurant manager and together with staff this old cliché has evolved and a new saying created which is:-

*"KNOWLEDGE ALONE IS NOT POWER. POWER IS THE CORRECT APPLICATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE"*

Most restaurants should have a comprehensive Training Manual for all staff, which includes basic wine knowledge, covering different varietals and general characteristics of wine.

Excellent establishments not only cover these basics, but also have extensive notes on the wine regions, vintages, tasting sheets of the wines listed, recommended wine and food pairings as well as correct wine service.

Next time you pay a courtesy call to a restaurant, check to see how they train their staff and what kind of training material is available for the staff.

Most restaurants require training from the winery/distribution house and a tasting of the wine does not constitute a proper training of the wine.

Sales representatives are skilled at product knowledge and selling but how many have training skills to provide the correct application of the knowledge.

All too often the representatives arrive at restaurants to 'train' the staff with their entire portfolio of wines which usually ends up in a tasting of wines that are not listed and not enough emphasis is placed on the wine that is listed.

It may be time to evaluate how wine training is implemented at your various listings – either spend time and effort on a skills training program within your organization or outsource a company who has the skills to effectively achieve wine sales results through training.