

Wine and brandy can enhance your



New idea for a wine list: fifth bottles of premium wine decorated with a wine list label and placed on each table.

Ever-increasing costs have become a fact of life in club operations, and managers have had to perform some feats of magic to keep their clubs and resorts in the black. Increased dues and special assessments are temporary ways out of the spiraling cost dilemma, but new business growth is what's needed to put a club operation on the road to long term profitability.

A well-managed wine and brandy merchandising program offers a proven method for bringing new and impressive profits into your operation. An effective program here can return as much as 50 percent on sales. Compared to other products regularly marketed through golf facilities, a good inventory of wine and brandy requires a modest investment both in dollars and space. Secondly, offering a wide selection of premium wines and brandies brings the extra dividend of added prestige.

In 1976, Americans consumed 378 million gallons of wine, an increase of almost 24 percent in the past 5 years. Most important, though, is the fact that restaurant wine sales make up the largest and fastest segment of growth within this wine boom. Are you getting your share of this high-profit business? The approaches and sales techniques I'm going to describe here should get you well on the way.

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Service personnel training programs, such as those run by Mel Flyer (facing page), prepare club employees for selling and serving wine and brandy. One important facet (below) calls for learning to evaluate the color and brilliance of the wine.



profits as they enhance diners' meals

by Mel Flyer



“An effective wine and brandy merchandising program can return as much as 50 percent profit on sales.”

Each of these types of program has advantages and disadvantages, and let's take a quick look at both sides of the coin in each category. First off, selling wines through a wine list makes great sense economically: you can achieve a better markup here than with almost any other type of program. Also, a handsome, well-constructed wine list brings an added degree of sophistication to your dining room.

There are a few disadvantages in basing your wine sales efforts strictly around a wine list. This approach calls for a high degree of salesmanship on the part of waiters/waitresses — selling from a wine list presupposes a wine-knowledgeable staff and clientele. A wine list by itself on the table (with no additional merchandising aids) is an ineffective way of selling. Finally, wine lists require extensive inventories.

Selling wine by half and full carafes has its good and not-so-good points, too. Carafe sales tend to cut into bottle purchases, but wine by the carafe is a very profitable route to consider: 50 percent is a standard minimum markup. This method requires a minimal inventory, and best of all, it provides your service personnel with an easy way to sell wine. When serving carafe wines, there are no corks to pull, service is fast, and your people need to know just three types of wine: red, white, and pink. Obviously, waiters and waitresses have fewer inhibitions about wine service when using the carafe approach.

Wine-by-the-glass is most profitable when tied in with a carafe program. The percentage of markup here is greater than on wine sold by the bottle. Experience has shown that the average restaurant patron is more receptive to purchasing a glass of wine than a bottle of wine. Promoting wine by the glass also eliminates confusion in pairing the appropriate wine with various entrées. It can also produce additional revenues from convention and/or party groups. A program chairman or party host might balk at the notion of placing a few bottles of wine on the tables, but he will generally agree to serving a glass of wine to everyone for an additional 50¢ per person. Wine by the glass keeps the consumption of alcoholic beverages within the bounds of moderation and adds a note of elegance to the event.

The keys to success

It's fairly obvious that since each of these three methods has some unique benefits, a balanced approach — a combina-

Within the big shift to wine is a second critical trend: the great popularity of white wine. You see it everywhere: the traditional cocktail at lunch and dinner being replaced with a glass of chablis or chenin blanc. Clearly, the time is ripe for club managers to tap the exciting profit potentials in the wine and brandy business.

Making the most of this opportunity for new profits requires a genuine and continuing commitment by management to a full-scale aggressive wine and brandy sales program featuring premium quality products. Once a manager is determined to make premium wine and brandy basic ingredients in the club's total “product mix,” everything else comes into line very quickly.

Launching a new profit center

Step one in putting together a sales effort on wine and brandy is the determination of which type of program to pursue. There are three basic programs:

1. Wine list.
2. Carafes.
3. By-the-glass.

A brief history of wine

by David C. Ludwig

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"A day without wine is a day without sunshine," Henry IV, king of France and Navarre, is said to have observed more than 400 years ago. Yet this great warrior was referring to an elixir that was already 6,000 years old, for the story of wine predates Western civilization.

The exact time, place, and person who discovered wine is lost in the dark mists of the past. We do know, however, that the earliest records of the Egyptians clearly show that wine was widely used by 4000 B.C. It was possibly the Phoenicians, that intrepid race of seafarers, who were responsible for spreading the fame of wine, along with a great many other accoutrements of civilization, to the semibarbaric peoples of the Mediterranean shores.

As these peoples gradually developed their own cultures, they assimilated the basics of winemaking, varying these basics with grapes and methods best suited to their particular area. The Greeks, for instance, originated the practice of filming the top of their wine with a layer of pine resins to preserve it. This practice led to the present-day Greek national beverage, retsina.

With the rise of the Roman Empire, winemaking for the first time left the shores of the Mediterranean and spread northward to what was later to become France and Germany. The vineyards of France, in fact, produced



wine of such high quality that the Roman emperors banned the growing of grapes in France to prevent competition with the wines of Italy.

In the fifth century, as the Teutonic hordes swept across the borders of the empire and the pall of the dark ages fell over Europe, the tending of the vineyards fell into the stewardship of the various orders of Catholic monks. Their simplistic lifestyle was responsible for establishing the tradition of excellence in the early vineyards of Europe.

In the eighth century, when Charlemagne temporarily restored some semblance of order to the West, one of his first loves and chief concerns was establishing the vineyards in Burgundy that to this day bear his name (Corton-Charlemagne).

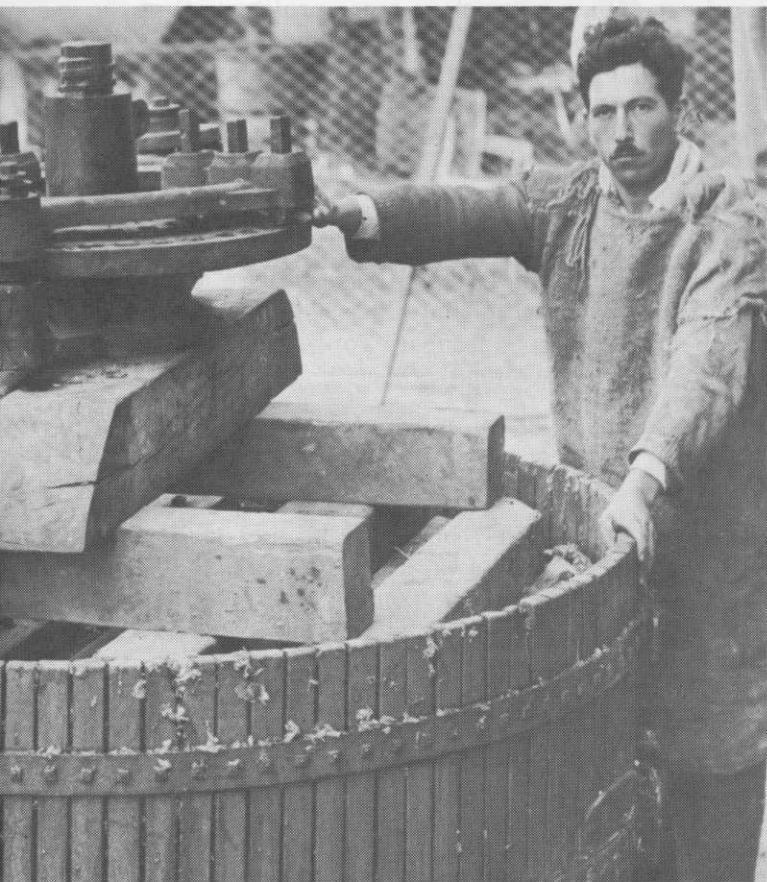
Throughout the remainder of the Middle Ages, after the heirs of Charlemagne divided his empire into small warring feudal states, the assorted overseers of the vines, both cleric and layman, experimented, tested, and slowly developed the various grape types and viniculture methods used to produce the fine wines that we know today.

But an essential ingredient for the final perfection of wine had to await the second half of the 17th century, when, according to tradition, a Benedictine monk named Dom Perignon, the father of Champagne, devised a cork to replace the ineffective pegs and rags that were used to stopper bottles, thus producing a method of sealing bottles from the air.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, quality viniculture



German woodcut from the 15th century shows man and woman harvesting grapes for winemaking.



The Bettmann Archive

centered in France, but quality control, as we now know it, was sometimes lacking. With the approach of the International Exposition in Paris in 1855, it was decided that something should be done about this. So in Bordeaux a system was devised to rate the various vineyards on the basis of consistent dedication to excellence.

Under this system the finest vineyards of the region were grouped in five categories or growths. As important as these classifications were and are, it was not until the 1930's that the full weight of law was placed behind quality control with the passage in France of what are known as the laws of *appellation d'origine*, under which qualifying wines may be labeled *appellation controlee*.

In this century Italy and Germany have joined France in establishing strict, nationwide controls over the production of wine.

In this country much progress has been made, in the last several years, toward establishing national regulations regarding wine production and labeling.

On the subject of U.S. wines, considering that prohibition was repealed only 40 years ago, their quality and variety is amazing.

Remember that the only way to learn about wine is to taste some and there is no substitute for pulling a cork. Only as you expose yourself to different wines will you begin to understand what makes one wine better than another, and you will recognize the complexity that characterizes the finest wines. □

tion of all three — yields optimum results. An attractive wine list coupled with carafe service and wine by the glass sets the stage for a first-rate wine sales effort.

We're now at a critical point in launching the effective wine sales effort: training your personnel. After all, nothing happens until someone takes the initiative in a selling situation. Successful managers devote a great deal of time on a *continuing basis* to helping their service personnel become very knowledgeable about wines and to stimulating a positive, pleasantly aggressive sales attitude among their staffs.

A logical starting point here is to assemble all the information you possibly can about those wines you have decided to offer through an appropriate combination of the three programs outlined earlier in this article. This will involve inviting winery representatives to present their quality stories at personnel training sessions. Emphasis should be placed on providing your people with as many quality facts — sales ammunition — as possible so they are well prepared to discuss all the wines in your inventory. Motion pictures, slide programs, winery literature, label information, and tastings all play an important part as vehicles of this basic information.

Once the basic "script" information is thoroughly reviewed and understood, your service personnel are now ready to rehearse the wine selling situation: that moment when they involve their customers in a dialogue about wine. A proven technique to use here is role playing. During these basic training sessions, arrange for your waiters/waitresses to switch roles (one plays the restaurant patron, the other a service person). This enables your people to try out various sales approaches in a nonthreatening situation. These rehearsals must be aimed at putting service personnel at ease with the physical handling of wine bottles and carafes (pulling corks, pouring, etc.). I suggest you use dummy bottles and carafes filled with water so that personnel will get used to managing at-the-table wine service without using actual products.

Of course, the main thrust in all sales training work should be to educate waiters/waitresses to take a pleasant and positive sales approach. They should always present the customer with a choice of something or something — not something or nothing!

Here's an example. It's far more effective to ask "Shall I bring you a large or small carafe of red wine with your steak?" than to timidly inquire "Would you like a carafe of red wine to go along with your steak?" The first approach offers the customer a choice between a large or small carafe of wine; the second approach offers no choice — it's either "a carafe of wine" or nothing!

Please remember that only one or two training sessions a year won't accomplish much. It is necessary to hold refresher wine/sales training programs a minimum of every other month; ideally you'd conduct them once a month. In addition, special short sessions are called for when you introduce a new wine into your inventory. Ongoing educational programs are the best way to convince your people that management regards wine as a terribly important part of the total sales effort.

It is essential that sales personnel develop a goal-oriented attitude toward their work, and management can

encourage this through a well-organized incentive program. Goals can be based on dollars and/or unit sales, and where legal, cash rewards may be offered for outstanding performance. A system which measures results is a basic element in any incentive program. Friendly competition among your employees, when combined with a method of measuring success (such as a weekly or monthly sales progress chart), will get your wine sales program off to a flying start. Permitting employees to participate in the profit goals of the club or resort also does wonders for overall morale.

Merchandising the way to profits

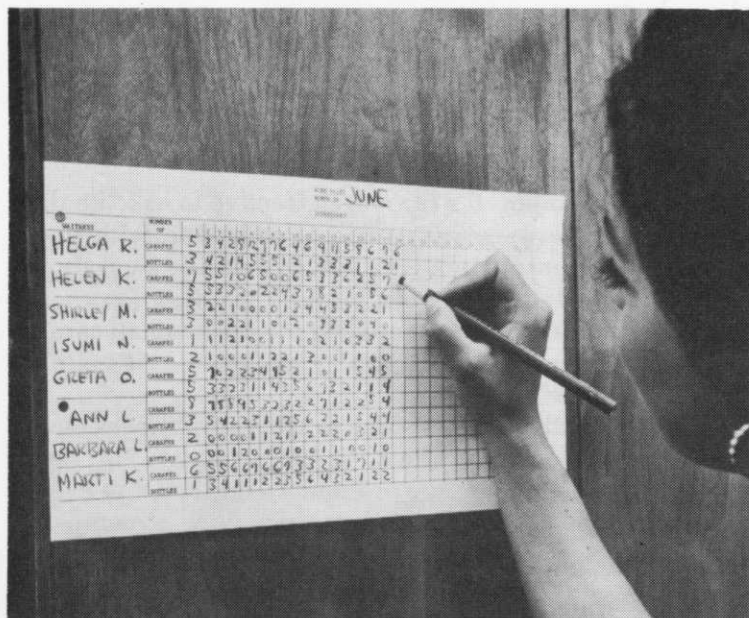
There are lots of things a club manager can do to raise the "wine consciousness" of his clientele. For example, when reprinting your menu, list a specific wine suggestion directly beneath each entrée (include bin number, a description of the wine and price — or, if you wish, carafes can be listed instead of bottled wine). Setting every table with 8½-ounce, all-purpose wine glasses puts the suggestion of wine at your patron's fingertips.

Here are more promotional techniques to stimulate interest: informative wine lists (complete with phonetic pronunciation of wine names/types, go-together suggestions, maps of viticultural regions throughout the world), wine-in-rack displays around the dining room, and single fifth bottles of wine on every table will serve as effective sales stimulators. Menu clip-ons highlighting various wine specials ("Wine of the Month") and placemats imprinted with wine selections are also effective reminders.

Incidentally, a growing number of club and resort operators are using the "Wine of the Month" promotion to market test a new wine before adding it to the wine list.

Turning after-dinner coffee into gold

Often neglected in looking for new areas of profitability in club/resort operations is the after-dinner experience. A



Sales progress charts, kept in the back of the house but where all waiters and waitresses can see and use them, encourage friendly competition among personnel and promote greater sales of wine.

round of after-dinner drinks (especially coffee/brandy combinations) can return as much or more profit as all of the dinner checks at a table. A calorie-conscious public has put the crimp into the profit-rich add-ons of fancy desserts. Creating something special with coffee is a way to give the customer what he wants and yet create additional profit. Right now, with coffee prices continually going up, it costs you from 10 to 15¢ and more to serve a cup of coffee. Here are three ways to make something special out of coffee:

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| Venetian Coffee | Add 1 ounce of brandy to a 6-ounce cup of hot black coffee. Add ¼ teaspoon sugar. Top with a mound of whipped cream. Serve. |
| Brandy Café | Pour 1 ounce of brandy in a 6-ounce cup of hot black coffee. Add twist of lemon peel. Serve. |
| Cappuccino | Add 1 ounce of brandy to 6-ounce mug of Caffè D'Vita mixed with boiling water. Top with whipped cream. Serve. |

In addition to these coffee drinks, brandy, that versatile spirit, goes beautifully in these two winners:

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| Mexicali | Pour 1½ ounce of brandy to ½ ounce Kahlua (or other coffee liqueur) in a 25-ounce snifter. Fill snifter half full of ice cubes and pour brandy and Kahlua over cubes. Serve well chilled. |
| The Asp | Combine 1 ounce of brandy and 1 ounce Amaretto in a 25-ounce snifter half filled with ice cubes. Serve. |

L'Orange La Salle is a refreshing change of pace for after dinner:

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| L'Orange La Salle | Place scoop orange sherbert into glass, pour in 4-5 ounces The Christian Brothers Chateau La Salle and add splash of soda. |
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For health food enthusiasts, how about offering an individual cheese and fruit board with a half carafe of sherry or port as a way to make the after-dinner experience truly memorable?

There are many ways to merchandise the after-dinner experience to club/resort patrons. You can list these "dessert drinks" under desserts on the menu; use special coffee boards imprinted with an offering of your unusual coffee drinks; include the price of a novel glass or mug in the price of the drink and encourage your guests to take the item home as a souvenir; use table tents and menu clip-ons as reminders or create drama by flaming a few of these brandy specialties.

Turning coffee into a high-profit item is easy. These ideas will help create larger tips for waiters/waitresses, increase your check averages, prevent customers from tying up tables by asking for coffee refills, and will add excitement and elegance to any club or resort. □