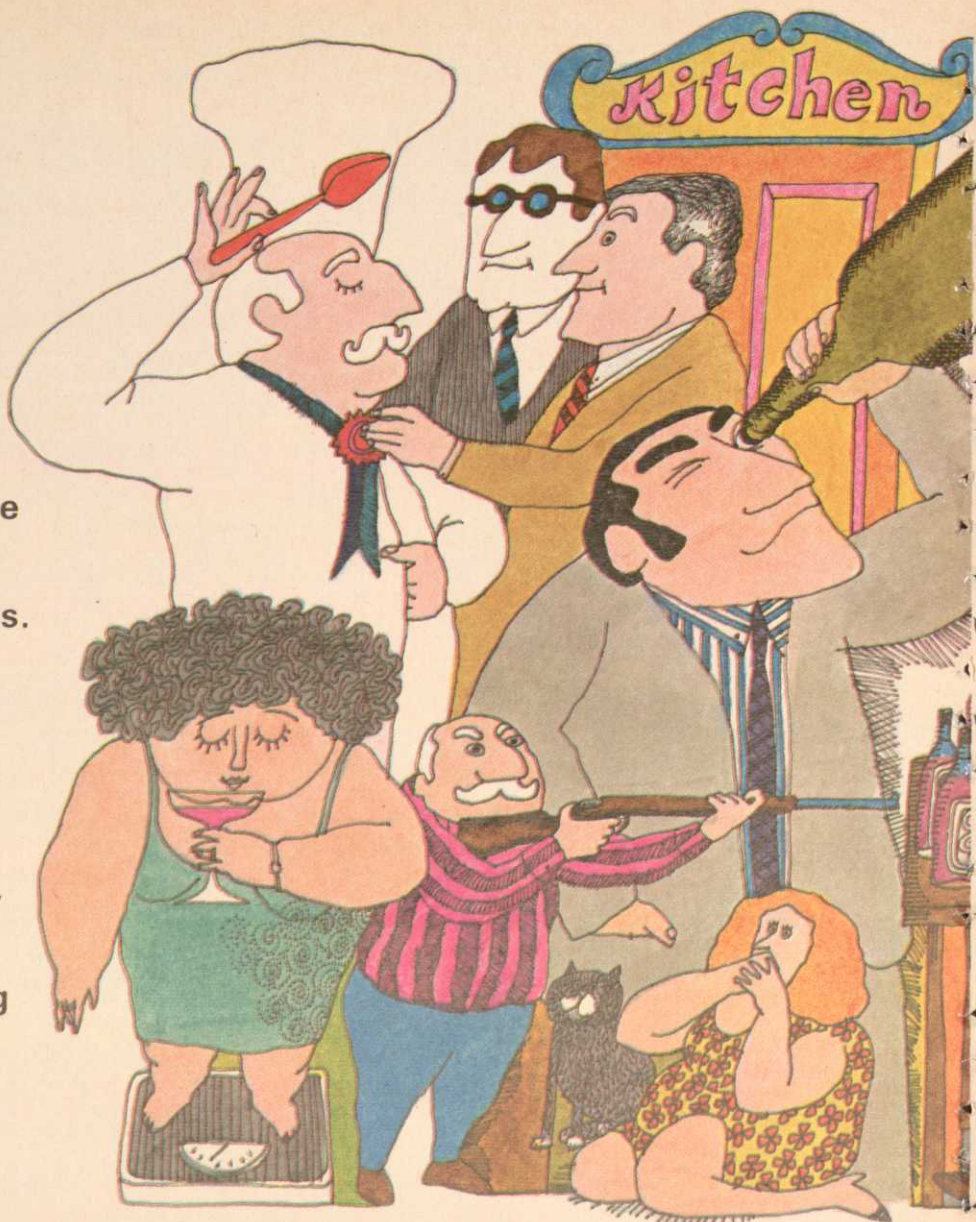


Food and drink
mean to the club
manager's revenues
what rain and sunshine
mean to the
superintendent's greens.

And, if they don't,
they should.

The following article
gives useful
hints on the stocking,
merchandising,
promoting and pricing
of some foods
and wines.



by William E. Massee

Supply lines to club profit

Editor's note: Mr. Massee is a public relations consultant and wine expert who has written several books, including "Wines and Spirits," and "Massee's Guide to Eating and Drinking in Europe."



PRIDE SELLS

Members like to show off their clubs, boasting about the chef or barman as well as sports facilities, when possible.

The best such ploys are the silent boosters—a chef's diploma discreetly in view, a color shot of a holiday buffet or the punch bowl at a gala affair—but there are more active ways to express pride of place. A 12-bottle rack of wines on display near the dining room entrance says a lot about the quality of food and drink to be expected, and so does a small glass-door refrigerator holding chilled Champagnes and white wines. One New York club keeps a small wire basket on a display table—for the corks from emptied wine bottles. The cheery heap provides a strong buying suggestion. A spotlighted wire grill with a big padlock guards one shelf of a backbar, where precious bottles of old Cognac, Highland Malt Whiskies, old Madeira and unusual liqueurs are kept, in another club. A Vermont barman displays a glinting row of pewter mugs for his specialty, Tom and Jerry, and down in Maryland a master of the nineteenth hole keeps a bowl of fresh mint out on the long mahogany. These are those "something specials" that show just how good you are, without saying a word.

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WINE ON THE TABLE

Americans are turning into a nation of wine drinkers. But because the fashionable custom is still so new, members need reminding. Table tents and wine lists are available from the Wine Institute, 717 Market Street, San Francisco, 94103. Importers continually provide their distributors with various items. All well and good. But still more appealing is the inclusion of a glass of wine as part of the dinner special or the offer of a glass of white, red or rose at a special price on the daily menu. Excellent, simple wines are now available from California wineries by the gallon, as well as from Portugal, Spain, Italy and France. Small carafes that hold six or eight ounces of wine and can serve two, have proved successful at holiday times or when wine sales reach a measurable daily volume. However, it is apt to fall flat if your members are not yet tuned in to the glories of the grape. An alternative, to develop interest, is to put unopened half-bottles on the tables as part of the set-up—red wines on some tables, white or rose on others—and provide at least one waiter with a corkscrew. The bottles are an invitation, and a hint from the waiter will begin to get corks pulled.

NOBODY'S PERFECT

There's nothing as discouraging as a stock of wine that doesn't sell. Especially if there was nothing wrong with the wine and the price was right, but the people just didn't try it. The worst thing to do in such a case is to leave the bottles in the cellar, noticing them only when they appear on the inventory sheets—a constant reminder of error. The best thing to do is to give it away, for a price, if possible. Include a glass as part of a daily special, offer it by the glass at cost, use it in the bar for wine drinks, or in a party punch bowl, or for a mulled wine party. Serve it at a committee meeting. Hold a wine tasting on Ladies Day. Feature it at a special wine dinner. If you're running a club that sells no wine, it will take about three mistakes like that to turn the whole crowd into friends of Bacchus. Everybody loves good wine. You can help them find out just how much.

HANDLING CHEFS

Members are apt to take chefs for granted—until something goes wrong. Menus then seem to have a tendency to degenerate to steaks and French fries, with a salad for Ladies Days. One club manager with a fine new chef took to summoning him daily to the office, at the height of the lunch hour, so that members would get a look at him in his white jacket, shiny shoes and tall white hat. Another manager makes sure that the chef comes forth from the kitchen whenever a member wants to praise a dish or plan a dinner. Chefs are supposed to hate this, but they hate lack of praise more. The best way to break in a chef is not by introducing him to staff and equipment, but by nudging senior members to praise his first few efforts. A well-praised chef may become temperamental, even conceited, but he'll cook well.

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FORMING A WINE COMMITTEE

Every club has its wine enthusiast—a doctor or lawyer, retailer or broker. Invite him and a couple of friends to a tasting of two or three wines you may be considering, and ask for opinions. Then follow their advice. Repeat this in thirty days. You will have an amenable committee in a few weeks, each member flattered that you asked his advice. You might even consider a distaff member.

WEIGHT-WATCHERS' DRINKS

Calories count. A thoughtful manager will feature various low-calorie drinks on his menus; clip-on cards that make the drink sound festive, with the low count printed on the bottom of the card. A glass of white wine, for instance, contains about 35 calories, certainly less than 50, while a highball or cocktail is sure to be over 100. Excellent drinks can be made with low calorie mixers. Vermouth-and-soda highballs and coolers, using a couple of ounces of red or white wine, made zesty with a lemon peel or cucumber strips, are quenching and appreciated when the calorie count is brought to the customer's attention.

GLASSES

Conservatively, 90 per cent of all wine glasses are too small. A wine glass is half chimney, and absolutely minimum size is eight ounces. Ten-ounce glasses are better, twelve-ounce glasses are better still. Such glasses can be used for water service and should be part of the table set-up, but not filled with water until after the wine order. Safe-edge or tempered glasses reduce breakage, and large glasses reduce crowding in the dishwasher. Get a gross to start.

WINE PRICING

A club venturing into regular wine service often charges too much for wines, charging three or four times the cost, across the board, like many restaurants. In the beginning, you might adopt a policy of making the wine pay for itself, not making money on it, but not losing any, either. Start out at twice cost, or take a flat three dollars a bottle on expensive wines. Keep prices on the low side until you build up a weekly volume, then study what your policy should be. Reasonable profit on a lot of bottles is better than no profit on none. □