

By William E. Massee

Club managers should no longer ignore or take lightly the dollars wine can pour into overall dining room profits. The outlook for increased wine business is especially attractive now since wine is the fastest growing beverage sold in the club restaurant today.

In fact, wine had the largest percentage increase of case purchases at golf and country clubs among major liquor types—a 51 per cent rise—over the year 1966.

Additional evidence as to why club managers should enter or increase their wine business is the fact that there has been a 20 per cent increase in cases sold over the past 10 years (1957 to 1967). This is buoyed by a projected 20 per cent rise in the next five years and a 30 per cent increase for the next decade.

How can the club manager who is doing little or no business at all in wines cash in on this lucrative market?

To begin with he should start with his staff, perhaps asking them for suggestions. The barman may have some good ideas that could be featured on cocktail lists or on tip-on cards with menus.

The chef may know just the dishes to be cooked with wine and featured on Ladies Day, dinner menus, banquets and buffets. The service staff should be able to come up with good suggestions since they are usually well aware that wine sales build up the check and the tip.

THE FIRST STEP

Since there is often a desire to serve wines if bottles and glasses are conveniently at hand, the first step in extending wine service may well be

Uncork
that wine bottle
and pour
out those profits

Uncork profits

to get some samples of wine glasses from your supplier and consult with the dining room staff about which one would serve best. A big stemmed glass that can be used for all wines, and even mixed drinks, is generally best. A wine glass is half chim-

ney, the average three-ounce serving calling for at least an eight-ounce glass. These lend an air to long drinks so the manager might start by keeping a couple of dozen glasses at the bar with a display of wines.

Begin filling these glasses with featured wine drinks from the bar, wines you already stock, if any.

There are dozens of drinks ranging from vermouth-on-the-rocks to champagne cocktails.

STIMULATING SALES

Appealing to members' egos is an excellent way of launching the first wines to be promoted. Certain members can be changed from grumblers to boosters by the tried and true device of asking them for their opinions. It is also a good idea to get three or four members to act as an informal wine committee. Get them to make suggestions. If they feel they have had something to say about the selections, they will talk up the selections and buy them.

To promote more sales, feature one drink and present the first few, compliments of the house, to a birthday or anniversary party or whenever you want to make a gesture. Holidays and celebrations are good for introducing special wine drinks.

It is always good to feature a wine each month, perhaps offering it at a special price or including it as part of the cost of a special dinner. Every time somebody sits down at one of your tables, there should be a reminder that you have wines available—on the menu, from a table tent, by the person waiting on the table, and preferably all three.

For further impact, wines should be displayed wherever possible—in the dining room, in the bar, in hall display or cases. All sorts of attractive racks are now available. Wines should be part of every buffet. Unopened half-bottles can become part of the table set-up.

There are also several punches that can be served to groups by the pitcher: sangria, May wine, the mimosa (a Riviera drink of champagne and orange juice) and various cobbles. A brimming pitcher will serve a party of four, lends itself to decoration and eases service when the dining room is crowded.

WHAT SHOULD YOU CHARGE?

Pricing policy is always a problem. The basic idea should be that selling wine is interesting only when there is enough volume to return a satisfactory profit. At



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There's an evolution in the kitchen



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dinner wine at one table out of six is an indication that you are doing very well. You have a very fashionable, tuned-in membership if a quarter of the club drinks wine. The night you see wine on half the tables is the time to have a celebration, and the way to reach that point is to establish a reasonable markup. Offering wine is a service to members, and twice cost is about as high as you can go to build volume with a minimum of a dollar in profit on every bottle you sell. As a rule of thumb, figure an additional dollar for cost of handling.

For example, a wine costing \$12 for a case of 12 should be sold for about \$3 a bottle, breaking the basic rule, but wines costing \$2 a bottle can be sold for \$4, leaving a proper margin. Your price should generally be a dollar higher than the wine would cost in a retail store, providing the retailer is taking normal markups. Champagne, which is so expensive, is a special pricing problem, but a markup of \$4 a bottle can be considered high.

It is a mistake to price wines too low in the beginning. A good rosé might well be your lowest priced wine, selling at \$3.50 or \$4, with a white and red at \$4 or a little more. There are several dozen such wines available to you at less than \$20 a case.

A bottle of wine can be sold for not much more than a round of drinks, considering a table of four, but the wine profit in this case should be figured as twice the liquor profit. One reason for this is because wine is often regarded as an extra sale, and a party planning to order wine for dinner may restrict themselves to a single cocktail. They are much more likely, however, to order a liqueur after dinner. Such considerations have to be taken into account so that wines fit into your normal pricing patterns.

SELLING BY THE GLASS

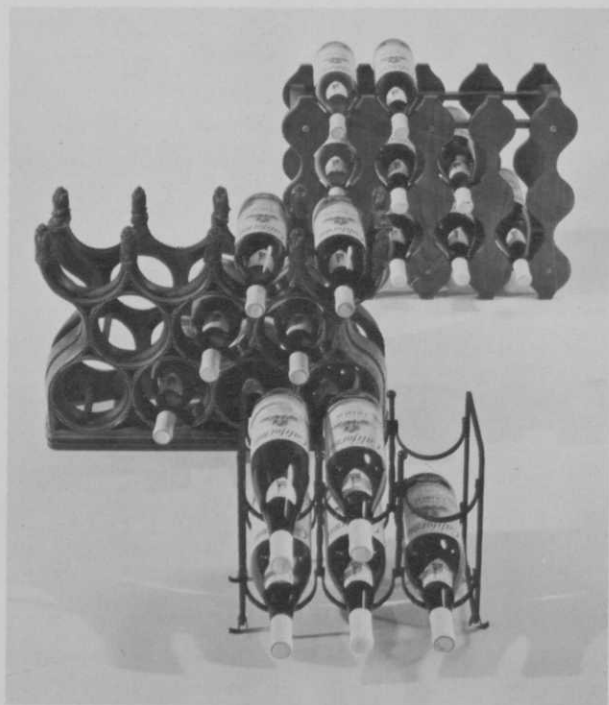
Three good wines are needed for selling by the glass—a white, a red and a rosé. Which types these should be depends somewhat on your members, but good choices are a rosé made from the Grenache grape, a light red like a Beaujolais or a Mountain Red from California and a dry white wine of the Burgundy type, made from the Chardonnay grape. Offer a glass of wine for the price of a cocktail, with featured menu items, and see that the staff pours four or five ounces in an eight-ounce glass, leaving at least an inch at the top. Wines cost half or a third as much as spirits, so a large serving does not hurt your profit margin and does please your members. When you are averaging about a case a week of the three basic wines, you are on your way.

If sales go well, you will need a regular stock of the well-known wines—a Beaujolais and Pouilly-Fuissé from Burgundy, a St. Emilion and Médoc from Bordeaux, a Chateaufort-du-Pape, a Chablis, a Rhine wine and a Chianti. To start out, you might buy four of these wines from one supplier, the other four from another, then sit back and see how they help you sell the wines. Don't sit back too

far, wine salesmen need help, despite their skill at encouraging wine sales. You can get additional wines and help from other suppliers and their salesmen. There are wine lists, brochures, recipe books and all sorts of display pieces and point-of-sale materials like coasters, napkins and ash trays to also aid your wine business.

THE SHORTER THE BETTER

The hardest trick is to keep the wine list short. Long wine lists can confuse members. Your basic list should not contain more than a dozen wines, if that. Additional wines can go on a supplementary list. This is probably the cardinal rule of wine



merchandising, certainly the one that offers best chances for success.

The dozen wines should change to suit the seasons. Perhaps six wines will be popular year around, but white wines like Muscadet and Soave attract people in warm weather; reds from Burgundy's Côte d'Or, from the better Bordeaux châteaux, and from the Rhone, spark interest in cool weather.

All these merchandising techniques are simple things to do. Not even much stocking is necessary because mixed cases of wines can be bought. But even managers with extensive stocks and substantial volume have a tendency to let the wine take care of itself because there are so many other details demanding attention. But Americans are only beginning to think of wines, and they need reminding. A little attention, regularly applied, builds wine sales. In fact, there's no better way of pleasing members than by extending some extra service. Offering wines is one of the easiest ways to do so. □