

WINE WISDOM

To sell more wine, give these basics to your catering salesforce. BY BOB BROWN

Let's face it, wine is perplexing. What's a Meursault? If a Chardonnay is described as having apple flavors, is it grown near an orchard? Why are whites a pale yellow, not white? What does body mean? Knowing the answers to these and other questions instills confidence and ensures you don't leave money on the table.

How is wine named? Old World wines produced in Italy, France, Spain, Germany, and Portugal are most often named after a place. Let's take the Pouilly-Fuissé. It's an appellation (a place) located in the Burgundy region of France. It's just Chardonnay! Consider Chianti, which is a region in Italy near Florence. Other Italian wines are named by a grape, such as Pinot Grigio. Est! Est!! Est!!! was named in the 1100s when a lackey was sent to Rome before a coronation to scout inns serving the best wines and wrote the word "Est" on their doors in chalk. When the runner reached the town of Montefiascone, he was so blown away he wrote "Est! Est!! Est!!!"

Wines from the New World—Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Argentina and the United States—are easier, since they are named after the grape and the producer. An example would be Robert Mondavi Chardonnay. If you know the characteristics of the grape, you're in the driver's seat. Also know what's up in the New World: New Zealand makes the excellent Sauvignon Blancs, and Argentina is famous for its Malbecs.

What are varietals? Whether you're talking Chardonnay, Cabernet, or Merlot, all wines are made from the same species: *vitis vinifera*. So think apples. There are many varieties with differ-

ent flavors, textures, and colors. A Granny Smith has tough green skin, fresh flavor, and is crunchy. Galas are red, crisp, and sweet.

A little knowledge will banish your fear, help you trade up, and make for happy guests.

Where does flavor come from?

- ◆ The grape itself. If a wine tastes of lemon, it has the same natural flavor compound also found in lemon.
- ◆ The soil. Consider Bordeaux where the soil is gravelly. The vine has to reach deep down for water and nutrients; thus, the mineral flavors.
- ◆ Oak casks. Wines are sometimes fermented or stored in oak. They pick up the flavor as well as a naturally occurring substance called vanillin; ergo, the description "oak and vanilla."
- ◆ Lactic acid. The same acid found in milk, which is described as "buttery."

Use guest-friendly flavors to describe wine: cherry, strawberry, basil, black pepper, lime, peach, passion fruit, pear, butterscotch, and lavender. Avoid words such as bacon fat, leather and tar—save those for the wine connoisseurs.

What does body mean? This is the weight in your mouth. Use the milk metaphor: light would

be skim milk, medium would be two percent, and full would be whole.

Where does color come from? The juice in both red and white grapes is clear! White wines' pale yellow or golden color comes from oak or aging. When the colorless juice of a red grape is fermented with the skins, it creates various shades of reds: ruby, purple, or garnet. With White Zinfandel or rosé, the red skins are left in for just a few hours.

What about sweetness and dryness? A common misconception is that when a wine is fruity, it's sweet. Most wines on most lists are dry, with the exception of some Rieslings and White Zinfandel that are considered off or semi-dry. Sweet wines are late-harvest wines and in small bottles on the dessert list.

Beware! Many Food Network and Fine Living-watching guests with their iPhones on ready alert may know more about wine than you do. So a little knowledge will banish your fear, help you to trade up, and make for happy guests. 🍷

Bob Brown, president of Bob Brown Service Solutions, www.bobbrownss.com, pioneered Marriott's Service Excellence Program and has worked with clients such as Disney, Hilton, Morton's of Chicago, Olive Garden, and Red Lobster. He has appeared on the Food Network, is author of *The Little Brown Book of Restaurant Success* and *The Big Brown Book of Managers' Success*, and has recently released *The Seven Keys of Beverage Sales Success* DVD Learning System, www.bobbrown-media.com. Copyright Bob Brown 2011.



Hotel Banquet Seating

LASTING LUXURY

With the high volume of upscale meetings, weddings, and other events New York City's famed Waldorf=Astoria hosts each year, the hotel needs its 3,600 banquet chairs to hold up—and that's exactly what chairs from Youngstown, Ohio-based Gasser Chair Company do. "[Gasser chairs] are all we have in our hotel," says Donna Kelly Williams, director of meetings and banquet operations. "They're very strong, and we like the look," she adds. "I love the color; I've been to various hotels, and nothing looks like what we have."

The Park Avenue landmark luxury hotel has been using the same set of chairs for



six years, with only occasional reupholstering, though Williams is quick to point out, "When we refurbish, it's because of wine or other spills, not because the chairs wear out."

Procurement and Sourcing Manager Flynn Harris agrees. "There's a bumper on the side [of each chair]. They are the only company that does that. The durability is key." Harris also finds the Gasser team a pleasure to work with. "Being the purchasing manager, the thing I like most about Gasser is they are beyond responsive. Roger Gasser is directly involved. I wish I could say that about more vendors." —JM
CONTACT: 800-323-2234, www.gasserchair.com