



By Rick VanSickle

Beef up Your Profit Stream - Food and Wine go Hand in Hand

Two things happen when Todd McDonald comes in to help a golf club shore up a listless wine list.

First, wine sales skyrocket. Second, golfers are eating a lot more meals in the golf club's dining room.

Food and wine go hand in hand. Good wine, good food. It's all about beefing up the profit stream, maximizing sales and keeping your clients happy while using the facilities beyond 18 holes of golf.

McDonald is somewhat of a superstar in the world of fine wines and spirits. As national director of fine wines and spirits for Peter Mielzynski Agencies, Canada's largest importer of wines with a huge portfolio from entry level to super premium, McDonald is an expert on what sells and what doesn't. He's a hands-on salesman, a lover of wine, an engaging speaker and takes great joy in teaching staff the mysteries of all things vino. He can walk into your club's dining room or bar and in short order tell you what you need to do to bring your wine list up to snuff.

But McDonald warns that not all golf courses can profit from a great wine list. A public course that sees an endless stream of pay-as-you-play golfers and has a menu of burgers and sausages on a bun won't likely be selling any fine bottles of wine.

But private clubs and upscale tracks with a decent menu can benefit from a strong wine program.

McDonald knows what he's talking about. He's been instrumental in many golf club wine programs including Sleepy Hollow Country Club in Stouffville, Ontario, and the tony Toronto Hunt Club in Scarborough, Ontario. The Hunt is an exclusive, nine-hole golf club that overlooks the shores of Lake Ontario and prides itself on its strong culinary and wine program. McDonald has worked closely with the Hunt's clubhouse manager, Marcel Bregstein, on the wine program and the members have embraced the innovative and "exclusive" wines available on a rotating basis. Members of the Hunt are knowledgeable wine



Mario Andretti

and food lovers who are looking for interesting wines beyond what you can find at the LCBO or Vintages.

One of McDonald's great coups was bringing race car legend Mario Andretti to the club to introduce his Napa Valley wines exclusively to Hunt Club members who were able to meet him and share an amazing meal paired with his wines.

As sailboats twinkled on Lake Ontario in the late-day sun, crowds gathered around the legendary race car driver on

the well-manicured lawn of the Hunt Club. Andretti held court and instead of fielding questions about the record number of races he'd won, members seemed more interested in the fruity Chardonnay with his name on it that he was holding.

Wine was the reason McDonald brought Andretti to Toronto and Hunt Club members had the exclusive pleasure of hosting him.

McDonald has also brought some of the world's most respected winemakers to the

club and matched their wines to a specially prepared meal by the chef. Club members are always offered a special buy on the wines following the dinner.

McDonald says there are several steps that have to take place when implementing a workable and profitable wine program into your golf club (which he says takes about a year before everything runs smoothly).

1) First look at what food is generally sold to members and stock wines accordingly. An extravagant menu requires high-

end wines. If it's casual food on the menu, stock wines that are good but in the mid-range in terms of price. A menu of burgers, tacos and fries and you really don't need McDonald's help (although he can stock you up with rum, vodka and gin).

2) Staff knowledge. If you are going to sell great wines, there's nothing worse than handing it off to a waiter who knows nothing about what he's serving or how to serve it. McDonald has spent hours of time educating wait staff on how to open and serve wine. And having the necessary information on the wines that they are serving, in case the diner has a question, is imperative for a successful wine program. The server also has to know how to handle complaints.

3) Know the age of your members or clients. If it's an older crowd you want to stock up on traditional wines. A younger crowd craves newer wines that they've read or heard about. McDonald says that you should stock up on 80 per cent New World wine styles — wines that are fruit forward from North America, Australia, Chile and New Zealand. The rest can be from the traditional wine regions of France, Italy, Portugal and Spain with producer names that are familiar. McDonald also has access to a portfolio of wines that can be offered up to the club exclusively that isn't available at the LCBO.

And above all, says McDonald, "it's a must to have a wine list that makes sense." And that means having someone with wine knowledge work with the club to not only provide a workable wine program but to maintain it and change it constantly throughout the year.

We can all drink to that! •

Rick VanSickle is a wine writer with weekly columns in several Canadian newspapers. He lives in Niagara with his family and when he's not drinking wine he enjoys hitting the links. And anytime he can combine the two, it's a glorious thing.

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to help. Contact me at: rickwine@hotmail.com