

**COMPETING FOR BUSINESS**

Mark Twain famously referred to golf as “a good walk spoiled.” While playing golf is definitely all about your game and not as much about the food or beverage, I can’t help but wonder if Twain’s walk would have been more enjoyable if he knew there was a nice bottle of Pinot Noir waiting for him at the clubhouse. The key issue that golf course owner and operators need to understand is that they compete with restaurants for their customers’ dining business. There must be incentive for golfers to stay and dine at the golf course instead of going home or out to another restaurant.

As a wine agent my day to day involves working with various restaurants in Eastern Ontario. I consult

with General Managers, Sommeliers, Chefs and servers, help them build wine lists and fine tune F&B programs where we see opportunity for better wine, service, or profits. Granted that F&B departments at golf courses often have a different operational structure than restaurants, but they still compete directly for dining business.

**WINE IN THE CLUBHOUSE**

It always surprises me how little attention golf courses devote to their wine lists. It is an aspect of the dining program that provides an opportunity to demonstrate your philosophy and desire to provide an excellent experience to your clients. An F&B program where food and wine is clearly an afterthought

implies that the overall experience is of secondary importance. In contrast, courses that source more interesting ingredients for their dishes, hosting special dining events and take the time to seek out more exclusive wines from which to create their list build a more loyal client and return business. And it doesn’t have to be a costly endeavour for you or your customers.

Much like food, art, music, cars, and other things with aesthetic value, wine is something that has various levels of production and appreciation. There are the numerous industrially produced wines that are widely available on retail

shelves, and there are the artisanal, handcrafted wines that are distributed more exclusively. The major difference between the two: it is almost impossible to find great quality in something that is mass-produced. Moreover, it is less exclusive when a bottle you serve is widely available to the public and your patrons know the base cost of the wine before markup on the list. This is a vital point in the business of wine, as wine lists operate within the auspices of known margins. If customers feel like they are getting great quality or exclusivity for a good price it produces higher

satisfaction than if they feel they are being over charged for a regular product from the store.

**PURCHASING GREAT WINES**

In my experience, many courses have not been investigating ways to expand their wine list and often purchase wine available at the liquor store. However, it has been the courses interested in offering their members a greater experience that compete with restaurants for the dining business. Success is two or three fold in these scenarios because course profits increase, member satisfaction increases,

# A LITTLE WINE WITH THAT?



Photo on left: Overlooking the course from Camelot Golf & Country Club’s patio.  
Photo on right: A selection from Camelot’s new wine list.



## Building Your Wine List



Food & Beverage Manager Jay Thomsen in the wine cellar at Camelot Golf & Country Club.

and F&B reputation of the club increases amongst competitors.

One of the solutions is to create a good list from privately ordered wines. This means ordering wines directly from the distributor or winery that don't make it to the retail shelves, usually reserved for restaurant sales only. In Canada we have no shortage of great wines. Between Niagara, Prince Edward County and Erie North Shore in Ontario and the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, we have some of North America's best wine regions at our doorstep. The courses that tailor their wine lists to their clientele and include unique wine options will get their patrons excited about dining and wine, and turn them into loyal customers at their clubhouse.

This can be accomplished on a grand level that competes with the best restaurants which many clubs may not have the budget for, but it is important to understand that this can also be done just as successfully in an inexpensive manner that delivers the same results without requiring large investment. Camelot Golf & Country Club has experienced great success in the last few years in providing greater satisfaction to its members this way.

**CAMELOT GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB**

Camelot is a private course located about 15 minutes east of Ottawa in Cumberland, ON. Prior to 2009 they had an average wine program comprised

mostly of wines available at the liquor store. Their membership was pretty interested in wine, but the mainstream selections everybody recognized from the liquor store were getting a little tired.

When Food & Beverage Manager Jay Thomsen took the reins in 2009 and they began to shift gears into a more premium and exclusive direction. Jay realized that this was "a revenue stream that needed to be tapped" and they could do it more successfully and build a passionate following by bringing in private wines for the list. Jay describes their change in wine list direction as "building a wine culture" at Camelot:

"The immediate difference was not with the individuals who already loved the more expensive wines, it was with the golfers who were previously buying the cheaper wine and when introduced to better product at the same price we started to build a following because they wanted to continue exploring, and eventually their interest eventually worked its way up to demanding more premium wines. Their palate became educated and they became interested in everything ... that's how we built this wine culture."

Jay elaborated on some of the specific changes to their wine list. "We increased the number of wines on the list from 30 to 75 wines. We aggressively promoted wines throughout the facility by displaying and advertising wine, training staff to have the basic understanding

of wine and educating the Food & Beverage Manager through a sommelier program. We experienced a 21% increase in wine sales from 2008-2011 and a 13% overall food & beverage sales increase over 3 years and our wine costs remained below 50%."

**BUILDING YOUR WINE LIST**

It is difficult to provide a general how-to on building an appropriately successful wine list because every course, venue, membership and clientele is different and a good list needs to cater to its demographic. But if there is one key to taking a step above, it is in taking the care to source interesting wines of any price point directly.

John Skinner, the owner and proprietor of Painted Rock Winery in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley noted that: "Private clubs are a different thing when it comes to selling wine because the pricing structure is different. They can be a really good place for selling high-end wines because there isn't as much of a profit motive when factoring in membership dues so it is often advantageous to offer your membership that added value."

The pricing structure that John Skinner refers to is most often used by private clubs because membership dues help offset the cost of F&B so that margins don't need to be as high as restaurants. Many clubs will take the approach of adding 30% more for a bottle of wine, compared to 100% markup at a restaurant, which generally leaves the customer feeling satisfied and offers significant value to the course. This is why top Canadian wineries like Painted Rock and Norman Hardie have done so well at golf courses, because the impetus to support local, coupled with the outstanding value in pricing makes them great venues for their consumption. It is a business plan that really works for the premium wineries and golf courses.

Conversely, public courses that do not have the offset of membership dues, offering added value can be done through sourcing high quality unique products inexpensively. In addition to sourcing private import wines reserved



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for the hospitality industry discussed earlier, there is an endless amount of direct from winery delivery options at all different price points.

Last year the NGCOA Canada saw the need for this in the market and specifically sought out a private label created specifically for clubhouses and their organization. Rockway Glen is a golf course and winery in Niagara who have created a "Clubhouse" series of estate grown wines for the NGCOA Canada's Golfmax Wine Program. Understanding that not all courses can have large wine lists, but wanting to be able to offer something unique, the Clubhouse series is priced between \$7 and \$10 per bottle. The wines are estate grown VQA Ontario and produced in much smaller lots than the large corporate wineries that are widely available at the liquor stores. A win-win inexpensive choice.

Another advantage to privately sourcing your wine from the distributors

or directly from the winery is the staff training and service component. The liquor stores won't bring in experts to taste and train your staff on their products to help them sell, but any decent agency should offer that level of service and most wineries are more than happy to.

**MAKE THEM WANT TO STAY**

A few years ago when the economy crashed and people's spending dollars tightened up, many courses were forced to tighten their belts in the clubhouse. But in the recent years of economic recovery, there hasn't been a proportional recovery with many F&B programs. It is clear that people are dining out again, so the question is how do you keep them at the club after a round of golf?

You have a captive audience that is already in the clubhouse, they then have to make a choice to leave and go somewhere else, but it is much easier to stay and have a good meal and a nice glass of wine right

there. The goal is to make them want to stay and a unique and tailored wine list can help you accomplish exactly that.

*Photography by Andrew Rastapkevicius*



**ANDREW RASTAPKEVICIUS**

Based in Ottawa, Andrew represents Lifford Wine Agency in Eastern Ontario. Lifford specializes in private order fine wines for the hospitality industry from around the world. Contact Andrew on Twitter @AndrewRasta, ottawawine@gmail.com, www.capitalwine.ca or 613.761.3091.



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## Don't come up short when hosting that special event.

### Get the music licence you need to make it a hole in one.

Golf and music. At first glance, perhaps not the most natural pairing; but the closer you look, the more sense it makes.

Music in the clubhouse, on the patio, and in the pro shop can provide you with a competitive advantage and help drive your success. Music helps to create an environment that supports your brand and extends your marketing reach. Music engages your clients, whether it creates their atmosphere in the clubhouse or encourages them to linger in the pro shop long enough to make that impulse buy. In addition to helping determine their spending patterns, music can forge links between you and your clientele. It's no wonder thousands of businesses nationwide consider music an integral part of their brand, like the décor.

As non-golf profit centres become increasingly crucial to your success, music becomes an even larger part of creating a memorable, entertaining experience for your clients. For example, music is an indispensable part of most wedding receptions, fashion shows, and other events frequently held at golf facilities that are equipped to handle them.

In order to provide music in your facility, you'll require a performing rights licence. This is because you're obligated by law to pay licence fees to the creators and publishers of the music used throughout your venue, based on tariff rates set by the Copyright Board of Canada. SOCAN takes care of this with you, and with tens of thousands of other music users across Canada, by granting performing rights licences to all businesses publicly playing live or recorded music. SOCAN allows you legal, ethical access to all the music you use. SOCAN fees represent a very modest cost, and assure that songwriters are properly compensated when their works are played.

### What music uses most often apply to golfing facilities?

- Rental Functions where live or recorded music is played – Tariff 8**  
This pertains to banquet facilities, meeting rooms, reception areas, etc. The fee is charged per event, and calculated based on the room capacity.
- Recorded Background Music – Tariff 15.A**  
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- Music on Hold over your telephone system – Tariff 15.B**  
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