



# Creating a genuine wine experience

Licensed Trade talks to Clare Young, Senior Tied Trade Wine Advisor at Young's Brewery

Sixteen years ago, Clare Young, then a self confessed 'pub hater', amazed those close to her when she started work for a Brewery. As a wine enthusiast the thought of drinking the poor quality, unappetising wine served in pubs was something that Clare and a growing number of like-minded individuals did not relish, preferring instead to opt for the wine bar where at least they could get a decent bottle, even if the wine by the glass offer was less than ideal.

Young's Brewery, recognising wines importance to the future of their business, were delighted to welcome her to the team. It also took on board Clare's knowledge of wine and that prior to joining the company she had worked for Harrods Wine Department and *Wine & Spirit* magazine.

With the Board's support, Clare became the driving force behind today's successful 'by the glass service' - introducing commercial wine preservation equipment, establishing innovative training programmes and increasing the offer to a range of 18 to 20 quality wines across a significant percentage of the Managed House Estate (110 properties at the end of last year). Before being appointed to her current position of Senior Tied Trade Wine Advisor, Clare was Director of Cockburn & Campbell, Young's wine division and wholly owned subsidiary.

## **Q - When did you become interested in wine?**

A - After leaving school I went on to do an HND in Hotel Management at Westminster, the wine lectures were held on Wednesday mornings at 9.00 and despite the ridiculously early hour (well I was a student!) they quickly proved to be my favourite subject.

## **Q - How would you describe the wine by the glass service in Young's houses when you first started with them in 1985?**

A - Everyone had the dreaded optic cabinet containing four litres of Liebfraumilch or draft wine with two very basic vin de table wines. The glasses were those appalling 'Paris' goblets and wine knowledge amongst the managers, tenants and staff was virtually non-existent. Wine lists were gathering dust behind tills and wine coolers had plants growing out of them. I knew then that it was going to be a challenge.

## **Q - What did you do to improve wine sales?**

Quite a few of the pubs had wine lists for bottle sales so I made these more prominent, introduced blackboards and support point of sale. The majority didn't have fridges for wine so I gave them half-barrel tubs to chill the wine, which aren't ideal but it was a start. I increased the range so that we were able to offer three or four whites and two or three reds - but without some way of keeping the wine fresh I was concerned that if we significantly improved the choice and quality we would suffer expensive wastage or, worse still, serve wine past its best.

## **Q - Which wine preservation equipment did you look at?**

A - Sourcing effective wine preservation equipment quickly flew to the top of the priority list. I analysed every product purporting to preserve wine available at that time from vac-u-vin to cruvinet. I assessed them to be not effective, not reliable or too expensive - or all three! About 10 years ago we evaluated a new British product Le Verre de Vin, which had just been developed. It proved to be the best system we had tested. Effective and easily accommodated behind the smallest bar, Le Verre de Vin enabled us to offer an unlimited number of still, sparkling and champagne wines by the glass and its simple and easy to use. It was the solution we were looking for and we could not entertain offering our wine by the glass service without it.

## **Q - What have been your most successful marketing initiatives?**

A - Twice a year we run promotions on two to four specific wines, those houses that show the biggest percentage increase on existing sales win some fantastic trips to wine regions, sponsored by the wine suppliers. It creates a lot of excitement and significantly increases sales as well as providing us with an opportunity to reward our staff.

## **Q - How have you maintained momentum within the houses?**

A - Training, training and more training. All management and trainee management take the Wine & Spirit Education Trust qualifications (200 have passed to date), we also run one day Wine Champion courses that are available to all front of house staff, these are held every four to six weeks and have an average of 15 delegates. It's brilliant to see the transformation from quiet, terrified individuals to confident, knowledgeable and motivated team members. It's important to note that we place the emphasis on making staff more relaxed about wine rather than trying to turn them into connoisseurs.



Clare Young uses Le Verre de Vin at Ye Olde Spotted Horse, Putney



**Q - What new equipment or ideas would you like to see added to the Young's 'wine by the glass' programme?**

A - We are always looking for new ideas but I am proud of our achievements to date and I think we have been successful because we've addressed all the key issues. I love the idea of temperature-controlled red wine, demonstrated by the new Le Verre de Vin 'barclay bar' and I would also like to see bigger glasses, so that

although the same measures are served the wine sits in them much better.

**Q - What advice would you give to someone setting up a professional wine by the glass service?**

A - Dedicate a prime area of back-bar to wine, create a wine station around Le Verre de Vin, with everything easily to hand so you don't have to walk a marathon to get the white wine out of the fridges. Display your wines (people buy what they see), place blackboards and wine lists everywhere and make sure that every member of staff understands the products and is capable of making a recommendation.

**Q - What are you looking to achieve in the future?**

A - We will continue to look to improve our offer and really give customers a genuine wine experience that isn't restricted to major brands. I'm particularly pleased that each and every glass we serve tastes as the winemakers intended - an important point when you consider just how easy it is to get this part of the service wrong. Mentioning no names, there are a number of operators offering a decent choice 'by the glass' without regard for the condition of the wine when it's sold. Frankly this is downright unprofessional and for as long as this is allowed to happen the reputation of 'pub wine' will continue to suffer.



The 'barclay bar' all-in-one wine station (incorporating Le Verre de Vin model BCo2, located in the Riverside Restaurant, Woodbridge, Suffolk

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