

# NEW YORK

## The Best that New York Has to Offer

An Interview with Chris Adams,  
Co-Owner and Chief Executive Officer, Sherry-Lehmann



**EDITORS' NOTE** In 1997, Chris Adams began his career at Sherry-Lehmann as a part-time sales associate during the holiday season, which prompted him to seek out full-time employment with the company. He soon became a general manager, Managing Director, and Executive Vice President, before assuming his current post.



Chris Adams and the Sherry-Lehmann store

**COMPANY BRIEF** Sherry-Lehmann is currently in its 78th year of business. The Sherry-Lehmann store combines old-world charm with modern sophistication and caters to wine pundits and amateurs alike. Sherry-Lehmann ([www.sherry-lehmann.com](http://www.sherry-lehmann.com)) is consistently rated the number one wine shop in New York by the Zagat Survey and was referred to as the most 'justly celebrated wine store in the nation' by Vanity Fair. Their store is located at 505 Park Avenue in New York.

**This year will mark 78 years in business for Sherry-Lehmann. Would you provide an overview of the history and heritage of the brand?**

We opened in March of 1934 and we focused then primarily on spirits. It wasn't until Sam Aaron and James Beard (who worked and consulted for Sherry-Lehmann for decades) got the wine bug and started traveling regularly to Europe that we started to focus more on wine. Even then, in those early days, it was heavy lifting. Customers would come in for their cases of gin, scotch or vodka, and our associates would try to convince them to add a bottle of wine to their order. But as customers became more educated about wine's pleasures, our focus grew. By the 1960s, we were selling Bordeaux futures and quite a bit of Champagne. Now we are known mostly as a fine wine retailer, but we still love to sell our spirits.

**You have said that the business is built on three simple principles: service, service, and service. How do you define your service standards and how have you been so successful at providing a consistent customer experience?**

New York is a competitive town. Customers here are accustomed to high levels of service and a wide range of offerings. I like to think that our environment has shaped our business – that we reflect the best that New York has to offer. As the decades passed, we paid a lot of attention to aspects of service that customers regularly requested and incorporated them into the fabric of our business. And it's not just

we price competitively, and we deliver. When the market swooned, we had inventory and processes to lean on; as it has come back, we have used improved cash flows to grab more inventory from some really great vintages.

**While you're based in New York City, you have a global clientele. Would you highlight the profile of your customer base and how broad your market is?**

Our markets have expanded in recent years. Like a lot of New York retailers, we've experienced growth abroad in the Far East and in Brazil. We are excited about these markets because these customers fit well with what we offer and they love to learn about and consume the best.

**What are the most important traits you look for when deciding to carry a specific brand?**

I like when a wine or spirit over-delivers and has a real sense of identity, that it's distinguished by its origins – the producer, the vineyard, etc. I find when these aspects are in place, the product has a real chance of being successful. In the long haul – and the long haul is what interests Sherry-Lehmann the most – these are the qualities that will carry it.

**In terms of the number of brands in the market, how do you recommend consumers educate themselves to gain a better understanding of the vast offerings?**

I believe the Internet is a remarkable source; *Wine Spectator* has a tremendous Web site, for instance. They understand that tasting notes are valuable, but they also do a terrific job of filling in back stories to help consumers understand all that goes into the creation of this remarkable beverage.

**What are your key priorities for Sherry-Lehmann as you look to the future?**

I want us to open more stores. We have been working on an expansion model so stay tuned for more. ●



free shipping in New York State and Connecticut, but how we package their orders and how we make gifts special. It's all part of the level that we feel is appropriate for our clients.

**The economic environment remains challenging and volatile. How has Sherry-Lehmann's business fared during this time and how is the brand positioned for growth?**

We've done well by embracing our core business values. We hold well-sourced inventory in perfect conditions, we market effectively,