

Expanding Sherry-Lehmann

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

COMPANY BRIEF Sherry-Lehmann is currently in its 82nd year of business. The Sherry-Lehmann store combines old-world charm with modern sophistication, and caters to wine pundits and amateurs alike. Sherry-Lehmann (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. The store is located at 505 Park Avenue in New York.

Would you highlight the current state of the wine and spirits industry and your outlook for growth for Sherry-Lehmann?

Our industry continues to move at a strong growth rate. Nationwide consumption trends are steadily increasing and wine and spirits are both seeing that a real focus on quality, distinction, and variety are leading the way. At Sherry-Lehmann, we've had another strong year, highlighted by strong sales in Italy, California, and Bordeaux. The "weakness" this summer was in rosé sales – which had been growing at a mighty clip but softened – notable due to the glut of new brands in the market. Historically, though, it was still a fine year for this category, just one without the growth we've seen over the past few years. Bordeaux had a terrific year with the futures release of the truly excellent 2015 vintage. This historic category for Sherry-Lehmann is back in business.

Sherry-Lehmann recently announced its expansion into California. Would you discuss your plans for that state and the opportunity for the brand in this market?

We are excited to announce this expansion. A number of factors drove it, and they all relate to our ability to offer our customers the best wines and spirits – impeccably sourced, stored, and shipped. We're closer to the source

for California wines, obviously, so we can expand existing allocations. We also look forward to discovering new wines and spirits in this market. The opportunity is really for Sherry-Lehmann to expand its reputation as the leader in the fine wine category. The best producers, I firmly believe, see the true value of being represented on our shelves, in our catalog, and on our website. California enables us to service this important market in the fashion that our brand embodies.

Do you envision additional markets for expansion for Sherry-Lehmann in the coming years?

I do. For now, we're focused on having our California operation running to perfection. We will continue to examine the national market and its trends, and make expansion decisions based upon where we feel we can bring the most value to market.



Sherry-Lehmann's flagship store at 505 Fifth Avenue in New York (top); and a view of some of their extensive selection of fine wines (above)

How has the Internet impacted Sherry-Lehmann's business and has this been a key driver for new business?

I think of the Internet – and I increasingly want to emphasize the power of mobile applications with this – as a critical platform for our business. If we watch the way younger people use mobile devices, we quickly realize that these will play a growing role in our business going forward. I think of Sherry-Lehmann.com, our mobile website and, for that matter, our presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well – all as additional business platforms that need to be managed, invested in, and nurtured. We believe strongly in our store and its prominent location, and we still emphasize that our real strength and expertise lies with our people, but we want that message to get out over many channels.

With the growth of online sales, is brick and mortar still important for Sherry-Lehmann's business?

There's no question that brick and mortar is still a critical component of our business. The image of Sherry-Lehmann is all about the store and its great bottles, big bottles, wide selection, and classic look. It's a destination. I love that customers from around the world come in and snap photos of themselves at the store, or take pictures of the imperials, etc. We enjoy inviting customers in for tastings, and education. This is an area of our business that continues to excite me, and one that I look forward to continuing in California.

What are your key priorities for Sherry-Lehmann in order to ensure that you remain the market leader?

In 2016, we are celebrating our 82nd anniversary. Stepping into a new market is a critical part of our growth model going forward. We are focused on increasing our positions on allocations of the best wines and spirits, and as always, I emphasize that these allocations are primary source only. Our customers have always known that the wine we sell is selected with care. I believe that expanding into new markets – starting in California – and bringing this message, coupled with perfect storage, competitive prices, and real passion for our products, will help us continue to lead the national fine wine retail industry. ●