

Creating Lasting Relationships

An Interview with Shyda Gilmer,
Chief Executive Officer and Co-Owner, Sherry-Lehmann Wine & Spirits



Sherry-Lehmann Wine & Spirits at 505 Park Avenue in New York City

EDITORS' NOTE Shyda Gilmer is the CEO and Co-Owner of Sherry-Lehmann Wine & Spirits, the leading New York fine wine and spirits retailer. He brings more than 20 years of experience in business, wine and philanthropy, with a commitment to quality that continues to lead Sherry-Lehmann and the Sherry-Lehmann Foundation to a bright future.



Shyda Gilmer

COMPANY BRIEF Sherry-Lehmann Wine & Spirits (sherry-lehmann.com) is currently in its 87th year of business. The Sherry-Lehmann store combines old-world charm with modern sophistication and caters to wine pundits and amateurs alike. Sherry-Lehmann 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 City.

Will you highlight Sherry-Lehmann’s history and heritage and what have been the keys to its consistent strength and leadership in the industry?

During Prohibition, Jack Aaron was a well-known supplier of spirits and was regarded as a great connoisseur of whiskey. Naturally, after repeal, he decided to take his ready-made client base and go into the liquor business. So, on March 6, 1934, he founded Sherry Wine and Spirits. Our first store was in the Louis Sherry building on Madison Avenue and 62nd Street, which is now home to Hermès. Our growth continued at a rapid pace under the leadership of the Aaron family, and in 1965, we took over our closest competitor, M. Lehmann, and thus our name was changed to Sherry-Lehmann. We were early to develop our Bordeaux futures business with the great successes of the 1959, 1961, 1966, 1970 and 1982 vintages. Throughout the decades of growth, we have always been laser focused on offering our clients exceptional service, competitive pricing, and the best selection possible.

Will you provide an overview of Sherry-Lehmann’s business and how you define the Sherry-Lehmann difference?

Our business is predominantly still wine and Champagne, representing over 90 percent. A vast majority of this is European wine, particularly from France and Italy. While we are best known as being the dominant player in

fine wine and spirits, we also pride ourselves on trusted brands, at all price points. All of our products are purchased from primary sources, so that we can ensure perfect provenance and authenticity. We place an enormous amount of time and resources educating our staff and making sure that they have the proper tools to best serve our customers. Finally, we were pioneers in offering proper temperature-controlled storage for our customers, with over 80,000 square feet across America and abroad, and take meticulous care of every single bottle, be it \$10 or \$10,000.

Sherry-Lehmann has developed deep relationships with the leading brands in the industry. How critical are these relationships to the success of the business?

The deep, long-lasting relationships that we have built over the last 87 years are critical to our continued success. Our suppliers have come to trust our ability to not only build brands, but to support them in the market year in and year out. We have been proud to exclusively launch new products throughout the years in America such as Dom Perignon, Chivas Regal, and Georges Duboeuf’s Beaujolais to name a few.

How did Sherry-Lehmann adapt its business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and how proud are you to see the way your team showed resilience during this unprecedented time?

Over the last five years, we had been investing heavily in our warehouse logistics, temperature control, and IT systems to be able to ship across America and the globe. So, while the pandemic no doubt dramatically accelerated the trend of online shopping we had already been anticipating, we were quite well prepared. We are incredibly proud of our entire warehouse and delivery team, and how they managed the incredible surge in demand we experienced. We are also proud of the early action we took to protect the health of our employees and their families during the pandemic, while also providing safe contactless delivery to all our customers.

Do you feel that a brick-and-mortar store will remain relevant in the future as consumers accelerate their online shopping?

Absolutely. Our well-known presence as an anchor tenant on the Upper East Side on Park

Avenue is essential to our heritage, to our partners and suppliers, and to our thousands of customers. Having the flagship store provides an opportunity for customers to experience the Sherry-Lehmann brand in an innovative and memorable way. There is no question, however, that we have seen a significant drop in foot traffic since the pandemic, but there is still a great deal of customers who enjoy coming into the store and receiving the personalized service that we always provide.

What are the keys to New York’s recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic?

The number of vacancies in Midtown Manhattan is indeed troubling. We need to see employees returning to the office and a rebound in tourism, both of which are critical for all retailers and restaurants in New York. This could take some time, but we believe we are almost there. After 87 years in business, Sherry-Lehmann has seen many economic cycles in New York, successfully navigated them, and in 2021, we are investing into it. We strongly believe that New York will be back stronger than ever and we are well positioned once offices start to return to their normalized occupancy, hotels reopen, and tourism ramps up once again.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I think the key is to be able to prioritize our goals as a company and being responsible for accomplishing those objectives. Our team always has a short, medium, and long-term plan, and we measure ourselves on a constant basis. Being an effective communicator is also critical – you need for the entire team to understand their roles, objectives, and ensure that everyone is pushing in the same direction. Finally, creating lasting relationships with employees, partners, suppliers, and customers is paramount – trust must be earned, it is not given.

What advice do you offer young people interested in a career in the industry?

I would say that finding a person who has the life or job you want is a great start. I am a huge believer in having a mentor, someone who can help you navigate the complexities of the work environment while also being your advocate and supporter. I would also say that being communicative is key. We are always looking for innovation from the next generation. Be confident, yet humble, and above all, always be a team player. ●