

# At the top of their game

To help give independent merchants the valuable advice and support they need in these challenging times, **Harpers Wine & Spirit**, in association with headline sponsor and leading Italian producer **GIV**, is introducing the Top Merchants initiative. Here's how you could get involved

**W**hen a leading winemaker steps off the plane at London Heathrow, the chances are it is the views of the country's independent merchants that they will be looking to seek out during their stay.

The multiple grocers may dominate sales, but it is the independents which are the real heart and soul of the retail sector. Or, as one producer put it recently: "The showcase for the world's best wines."

The fact they are often so hard to reach – popping up in nooks and crannies all around the country – makes them even more sought after. Four or five meetings with the UK's top grocers will provide an insight into the mass

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Independents are a showcase for the world's best wines

drinks market, but to understand what the discerning wine and spirits drinker is looking for takes a lot more hard work.

Similarly, the country's leading independents face the endless challenges of keeping on top of the market – who is doing what, finding the best deals and tracking the latest business, employment, health and safety, and drinks guidelines.

To help drive the significance of the independent sector to the rest of the trade and raise its profile with consumers, Harpers Wine & Spirit and headline sponsor GIV are unveiling the Top Merchants initiative.

## How will it work?

For the rest of the year, we are looking to build up a database of independents across the UK which are at the very top of their game. The inspiring retail businesses with whom the leading wine and spirit companies want to work.

Then, throughout 2010, we will host a series of regional events with key trade partners on set topics where merchant members will be able to come together, share ideas and discuss key topics affecting their businesses.

But the Top Merchants programme is not open to just any drinks retail business. You must be able to demonstrate that you meet a series of set criteria and be prepared to be a full and active member in the programme.

## How do you become a Top Merchant?

Either through self nomination or by nomination through our Top Merchants panel. Over the next few weeks, Harpers Wine & Spirit will be asking the views of key players, suppliers and agents working in the independent sector which merchants they regard to be at the very top of their game. Their nominees will then be asked: a) if they would like to be considered, and b) to provide further details to be included.

products, but addresses responsible drinking issues

- A social responsibility programme and activity with local communities
- Demonstrate you have a wide range of premium products, with an emphasis on diversity, innovation and quality.

Please send either by email or post brief outlines of activity in these areas. Note we are not expecting you to send in a great deal of background information.

Please send to either **richard.siddle@william-reed.co.uk** or by post to Top Merchants, Harpers Wine & Spirit, William Reed Business Media, Broadfield Park, West Sussex RH11 9RT.

## CRITERIA AND ENTRY DETAILS

To be considered for the Top Merchants programme you must be able to demonstrate that you meet the following criteria:

- Be an independent merchant with 10 or fewer retail outlets
- Be a business that is primarily actively selling and promoting premium wines, beers and spirits
- Have a shop, or high street, retail presence (exclusively online businesses do not qualify)
- Have in place an educational programme for staff covering both wine and spirits education and the promotion of responsible retailing and responsible drinking measures
- Have an educational drinks programme for customers that promotes both the value in quality



In association with Gruppo Italiano Vini

Either way we invite any merchant who would like to be involved in the project to send in top line information, based on the criteria set out.

But, please note that membership to the scheme will be kept open throughout the programme to allow merchants to participate at any time.

## What do you get in return?

If you become a Harpers Wine & Spirit/GIV Top Merchant, you will:

- Be invited to attend a series of regional events, based on key issues for independents, where you will get the chance to meet other merchants and industry figures
- Have your details listed on a dedicated, free Top Merchants website and have access to bespoke business and education advice for merchants
- Be sent bespoke point-of-sale and PR material, such as window stickers to help you promote your involvement in the programme
- Be included in all future Top Merchants promotional, business and marketing activities that are introduced during 2010
- We would also like to hear your views and feedback on what you want from the Top Merchants initiative.

## Top Merchants events

This will not be a London-focused initiative, but an opportunity to host independent-specific events around the country.

We are planning to run a series of quarterly events at different venues that will bring merchants together to discuss a specific theme with a key trade partner. Each event will include opportunities to taste new wines, share and have your views on a key theme, and meet other Top Merchants.

We are looking to hold the inaugural Top Merchants event on 8th February in Birmingham. So put it in your diary. ■

## OUR OBJECTIVES

- To raise the bar within the independent merchants' sector
- To help set the standards for independent merchants to follow
- Promote excellence of service, particularly in areas of wine and spirits education and the appreciation and promotion of quality wine among customers
- To encourage good business management skills
- To help promote best practice in areas such as responsible retailing and responsible drinking training
- To encourage innovation and promote quality above all else within the sector
- To create a networking environment to help leading independent merchants share ideas and experiences.

## OUR PARTNERS

Helping us all along the way is the Top Merchants' headline sponsor, Italian producer GIV (Gruppo Italiano Vini). It may not be a household name in the UK, but with 14 wineries in all the main winegrowing areas of Italy, it is the country's biggest overall wine producer.

Its UK operation is now headed up by UK chief executive Chris Carson, who brings 40 years of drinks experience to the table. A former chief executive of Constellation Europe, he was chairman of the Wine & Spirit Trades Association. (Full interview and background on GIV, pages 30-31.)

We are also pleased to be working closely with our key trade associations, the Wine & Spirit Trade Association and the Wine & Spirit Education Trust. We will be tapping into their expertise to help provide support and advice for independent merchants.

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Chris Carson brings 40 years of drinks experience to the table