

A Commitment to Quality

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

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 over 20 years of experience in business, wine and philanthropy. This commitment to quality 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.*

What have been the keys to the ability for Sherry-Lehmann to stay relevant and stand the test of time?

Sherry-Lehmann has been in existence for eighty-seven years and is an exciting, iconic brand that has stood the test of time. Our strength has been the partnerships we have forged with the brands that make the wine, going back to launching Dom Perignon in New York in 1928, before it was launched in France. We partner with brands who share our passion and are committed to bringing the highest quality product to the most discerning individuals in the world who are looking for it.

Is it challenging to differentiate in such a crowded industry?

We believe that our focus and commitment to quality at any price point is our advantage. Every bottle of wine that we have ever carried has been properly stored at 55 degrees and we do not spare any expense to assure this level of quality. We believe that when the consumer buys from Sherry-Lehmann, they know they are experiencing something different and that from the point of acquisition to the time the bottle is in the consumer's hands, it has been perfectly taken care of and protected, and we can guarantee the quality.

It has become somewhat more challenging today to differentiate since all brands make similar claims and with the increase in online retailing, there is a proliferation of information and it is difficult to know what is correct. We pride

ourselves on maintaining an extensive inventory in our cellars, from the perfect daily drinking wines all the way to the rare treasures for celebratory occasions. Sherry-Lehmann has always stood behind our brand and we are proud that if you ask us directly or speak with one of our partner brands, our focus on quality and service will be the first thing that you hear about and come to experience.

You mentioned the increase in online business. Will the store remain relevant as you look to the future?

We are a New York institution and I believe in New York as much as ever. I am confident that New York will be back and will be back better than before. We know that the recovery will take time and that brick and mortar will not be what it was before the pandemic, but it is an important part of our business. We have seen multiple recessions in our history and have learned how to toggle our costs and our focus effectively and decisively. The store has always been a place where we can meet our customers and build relationships and tell the Sherry-Lehmann story, but most recently this has not been possible due to COVID. We have pivoted to heavy investment in our online business and are working to tell these stories online and continue to provide education and introduce new wines to our consumers. While it has been important to continue to do this online, it is of course not the same as being in person with the customer and having that human interaction. Our efforts are showing strong results thus far, and I look forward to when we can once again interact face to face since relationships are at the heart of Sherry-Lehmann's business.

Sherry-Lehmann is known for its vast wine offerings. Will you highlight the strength of your spirits offerings and business?

Spirits have always been as important as wine for Sherry-Lehmann and we have a long history of being a leader in this space. We have been collecting special cognacs, bourbons and scotches and many other spirits since day one of the business. The difference between wine and spirits is that when people purchase spirits it is something that is added to their bar or put into a cocktail, while with wine you are trying to find the right bottle to serve with your dinner or for that special occasion. Spirits generally have a longer life, and you can figure out its story over time while with wine you need to tell

the story of the bottle which is being consumed much faster.

How has Sherry-Lehmann adapted its business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?

With the substantial decrease in Midtown Manhattan foot traffic caused by the pandemic, we have aggressively invested in our infrastructure, logistics and technology platforms to address the surge in online purchasing and contactless delivery to the customer's doorstep. We have incredibly sophisticated logistics systems and large warehouses where we store our inventory, and we were always structured to ship large numbers of cases throughout the world. We are an essential business which has allowed our team to continue to work night and day, in a safe environment, to fulfill customer orders and I must commend our director of operations and our entire team for doing an amazing job during this unprecedented time.

What was the vision for opening a warehouse in California and have you been happy with its impact on the business?

California has been a big focus for us as we continue to grow. By having a warehouse and online operation in California, it allows us to fulfill more effectively both the East Coast and the West Coast and to be more efficient in the way we operate. We have never been comfortable using third parties since we want to maintain control over quality and making sure we are protecting the wines so that the consumer knows that every bottle that they get from Sherry-Lehmann has been handled with the highest level of care. Scaling our global logistics capabilities has always been a top priority, and the pandemic has only accelerated this trend.

Did you always know that you were interested in working in the wine industry?

I feel very fortunate that I get to do what I love to do. I am also incredibly proud of the team that I am surrounded with, who all share the passion and dedication to the Sherry-Lehmann brand and reputation. I have been able to visit some of the most beautiful places in the world and meet some of the most special families in winemaking and enjoy a bottle of wine together. I cannot think of anything more fulfilling and enjoyable than walking through the vineyards and seeing how it all comes together to create these amazing wines. As the famous saying goes: "Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life." ●