

## A Storied Past and a Bright Future

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



Sherry-Lehmann at 505 Park Avenue in New York City

**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 80th 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](http://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.

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

Our industry continues to move at a good pace. 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 very good year highlighted by strong sales in Burgundy, Champagne, California, and Italy. We also had another remarkable summer for rose sales, which increased a healthy 25 percent over last year, a terrific increase off of an already strong base. There continues to be some weakness in the big wines from Bordeaux, but we're optimistic that a bigger vintage of very good quality will right that ship.

### How much has the Internet impacted your sales and is brick-and-mortar still critical?

If you watch the way younger people use mobile devices you realize quickly that going forward, these devices will more often than not play a role in our business. So I think of Sherry-Lehmann.com, our mobile website, and our presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as additional business platforms that need to be managed, invested in, and generally 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 our message to get out over many channels.

### What are the key characteristics that you look for when deciding whether to carry a specific brand as part of your offering?

In wine, we talk about the importance of "terroir" or a sense of the distinct place where a wine originates. With all of our selections, we are looking for something like this: that the wine or spirit is distinct, for instance. What this means is that the product has a certain character or fills a niche in our portfolio. Customers are better informed than ever, and the

more sophisticated the customer becomes, the better off we all are. So I want products and brands that carry with them a form of differentiation, certainly in quality but also in their story, origins, price, and package – any or all of these are important, but the quality comes first at Sherry-Lehmann.

### There are many new markets around the world that have been focused on building a wine industry. Has it been important for you to reach out to these markets and provide these wines to your customers?

Both new markets and new demographics are very important to our growth strategy. This year, we celebrate our 80th anniversary at Sherry-Lehmann, and it's never been more important to us to build our brand in markets across the country. We've partnered with [Bottlenotes.com](http://Bottlenotes.com), an online wine community, to be the retail sponsor for them at events nationwide. This partnership provides Sherry-Lehmann the opportunity to visit with wine lovers across the country and taste with, talk to about, and introduce them to Sherry-Lehmann. It's been a remarkable partnership that has integrated very well with our web, mobile, and social media platforms, too.

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

Over the years, our customer base has evolved, and we're proud to number it in the tens of thousands. It's primarily split evenly between male and female, and we view our work as carrying the message to them and potential customers that Sherry-Lehmann is unique. We focus on variety in inventory and competitive pricing, but also want to communicate the strength of our relationships with the world's top wineries

and distilleries, and emphasize our focus on our primary sourcing, our terrific storage facilities, and our expert fulfillment and delivery.

### Are you considering the opening of additional Sherry-Lehmann stores in other markets?

In the past year, we've had some transitions at Sherry-Lehmann, and Shyda Gilmer (our COO) and I have welcomed a new partner, Kris Green. We're immensely pleased with the transition, and as a team we are focused harder than ever on evaluating our next steps for Sherry-Lehmann. It's a terrific milestone – 80 years and a new partner – and I'm more enthusiastic than ever about possible expansion into new markets for this incredible institution.

### How do you recommend that consumers educate themselves to develop a deeper understanding of the vast number of offerings in the market?

I've generally considered the strength of the web, of Sherry-Lehmann.com, and of our catalogs, and great staff as terrific vehicles for information, and they are. But I'm also intrigued by the online community of wine lovers and the strength of tasting groups. When I first started at Sherry-Lehmann, I joined a few tasting groups, and we generally would get together a few times a month or so to taste and discuss and, basically, educate each other. [Bottlenotes.com](http://Bottlenotes.com) has created a national virtual tasting group where members can exchange thoughts on wines, wine regions, varietals, and everything else. That the community has the opportunity to meet at tastings held nationally closes the circle on the true strength of this terrific beverage. It is meant to be shared, appreciated, and enjoyed in person.

### What are your key priorities to ensure Sherry-Lehmann remains a market leader?

Knowing we've been around 80 years is a terrific feeling, but the challenge always is to create the groundwork for many more. I feel more and more that our focus will be on understanding how all of our business platforms relate to and reinforce each other. The goal is to lead in each of these aspects, and part of doing so is investing wisely in each, but also having a clear understating of how each part of our business reinforces the others. We are defined by our history and the promise of our brand, and this we can never forget. Moving forward means embracing innovation and integrating it wisely. ●