



IN 2005 BENOÎT GOUEZ, NOW 36, WAS NAMED CHEF DE CAVE OF MOËT & CHANDON and oversees the assemblage of Moët & Chandon champagnes and vintage champagnes. Prior to ascending to this position, Gouez worked with Richard Geoffroy on the production of Dom Pérignon vintage champagnes. He joined Moët & Chandon in 1998 as winemaker and during this tenure he assisted in the production of all Moët & Chandon champagnes.

Gouez was born in Saint Lô (France). He attended the École Nationale Supérieure d'Argonomie (Montpellier) where he received a degree as an Engineer of Agronomy. Simultaneously he received his Oenology Degree from the École d'Oenologie, also in Montpellier.

Gouez will host this year's Bobby Flay and Friends Moët & Chandon BubbleQ Friday evening, February 24, at the Delano Hotel. The BubbleQ continues to be the focus of the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, and this year 1,200 champagne lovers are expected to attend. We thank Benoît for taking the time to talk with Dindy Yokel on behalf of Southern Beverage Journal.

DY: With this being your inaugural year at the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, what are your expectations and how will your presence differ from past winemakers?

BG: I'm excited to be back here in my new role. As in years past, we look to increase our visibility with high-end consumers. I am also looking forward to working more closely with our partners in Florida.

DY: What will be taking place at the Moët & Chandon BubbleQ this year?

BG: The BubbleQ is a great opportunity for us to showcase how well Moët & Chandon pairs with the best of American barbecue prepared by all-star chefs. Attendees will be able to taste Moët & Chandon White Star, Nectar Imperial on Ice, and Brut Imperial Rose.

Our partners in Florida have prepared an elegant, contemporary beach celebration, complete with a well-known DJ and entertainment. Throughout the evening, there will be a silent auction for wines, dinners and weekend getaways.

We'll also be at the Grand Tasting throughout the weekend offering samplings of Moët & Chandon.

DY: In your new position will you blend past winemaking traditions with new technology, and if so how?

BG: Moët & Chandon is a heritage to be handed down, a firm with strong roots and the ability to look to the future. It is the instinct and sensibility coupled with style and integrity that bring out the truest expression of the grapes to closely reveal the characteristics of the varieties grown in the Champagne region. It is with careful attention that I can ensure the rightness and precision of the results while highlighting the distinctive Moët & Chandon spirit while evolving naturally.

“CHAMPAGNE IS THE ESSENCE OF SHARING A RICH PASSIONATE UNIVERSE. TO ME, WINEMAKING REPRESENTS A SUBTLE MIX OF TECHNIQUE, SENSITIVITY, KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVITY.”

—Benoît Gouez, Chef de Cave, Moët & Chandon

DY: How would you like to see Champagne evolve more into the every day life of the American public?

BG: I'd like to see Americans enjoy Champagne throughout the year, as we do in Europe. Making Champagne more approachable to the public is really important to us at Moët. It can be served in a more casual way, such as with our Nectar Imperial on Ice (3 ice cubes, Nectar Imperial and a slice of lime). And Champagne can be paired with a variety of appetizers and cuisines.

DY: Are there changes to the marketing and promotion tactics for the Moët & Chandon portfolio this year? What are the new promotions?

BG: As you will see at the Moët & Chandon BubbleQ, we transform any occasion into a fabulous fete! We want to make sure that we are continuously and consistently communicating all that Moët & Chandon has to offer – at events like the Golden Globes to special gift offers for Valentine's Day. We have several new programs lined up for this year such as our “Be Fabulous” advertising campaign.

DY: What can the retailers expect from Moët & Chandon this year that will assist them in increasing sales?

BG: In addition to our “Be Fabulous” 2006 campaign, we will roll out several promotional windows lined up to create excitement around the Moët & Chandon brand. Local markets will continue to focus on trade education and tastings to showcase our Moët offerings. Our focus will be to provide retailers with the materials they need to communicate Champagne's versatility and appropriateness for all seasons.

DY: Are there any changes with the brand in the growth and development vein?

BG: We have received a lot of great feedback on our Nectar on Ice proposition, which is new and different ways to serve Champagne. And we are the leader in Rose, driving the segment's growth, so we are always looking to continue this trend and to foresee its evolution.

DY: Any last words of advice for the retailers to help them increase Champagne sales during the months that are not tied to traditional Champagne-buying events?

BG: As easily demonstrated with our presence at BubbleQ, Moët & Chandon Champagne should be enjoyed with the foods Americans love to eat. We'd really like our retailers to build upon this with their consumers.

DINDY YOKEL IS PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF DINDYCO PR & MARKETING OF MIAMI BEACH, A FULL-SERVICE FIRM KNOWN FOR ITS INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS.