



In Search of Interior Excellence

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Top-class interior service, from cocktail making to dinner service, is an art form. Training school Triple S Consultancy is helping interior crew to polish their skills and stand out from the competition.

There's nothing worse than bad service at the bar: a damp and dirty bar surface, a bar tender texting on his mobile and not paying attention, slow service, not having the ingredients to make a drink ... the list goes on. Having handed over their \$500,000 for the week this is not the sort of service a guest onboard a superyacht would expect. Of course, these are examples of extremely bad service, the kind that you would never encounter

on a multimillion-euro superyacht. Nevertheless, although the standard of service yacht interior crew provide is extremely high, there are elements of running a bar that are frequently overlooked.

Dispatched on a mission to find out more about super-polished bartending, I made my way to the Cap d'Antibes Beach Hotel on the French Riviera to sample Triple S Consultancy's five-day bartending and barista course.

The hotel was not your average

schoolroom: the Bauhaus-style foyer and architecture oozing European chic with its brazen concrete structure, sheets of glass and stylish furniture. Triple S had gone to extensive lengths – the management exploiting its knowledge of the hospitality industry – to secure the best venues for training. The company has recently started holding courses in a swanky hotel across the Pond in Fort Lauderdale.

I was greeted by Ton (full name Antonius Martinus de Wit), a smartly dressed man complete with bow tie

and horn-rimmed spectacles who has spent the majority of his life in the service of others as a professional butler. With an upright and dignified manner Ton formally introduced himself before crunching my palm into an extremely firm handshake.

We were then led into the hotel's restaurant, which would be the classroom for the butlering course running alongside the bartending course for the week. The course instructors introduced themselves; alongside Ton there was Lesley, a former stew from the US who reminded me of Monica from *Friends* and has over ten years' experience of the industry. Misja Vorstermans from the Bartender Network and The Fabulous Shaker Boys was to take the bartending course.

Misja's experience is extensive, having poured his first drink at the age of 14. He received his initial cocktail training in 1995, followed by five years in bartending and bar management. He joined the Fabulous Shaker Boys, an Amsterdam-based professional mixology/bartending agency in 2002. Misja has been training bartenders for several years now as well as writing columns and making guest television appearances as one of the most well-known and respected names on the international cocktail scene.

Peter Vogel, the company's Managing Director gave us a brief introduction to the Triple S Consultancy's philosophy, namely that "great service is a universal language". According to Peter, the training programme was "created after recognising the need to raise the bar of service provided to exclusive clientele within the hospitality industry". The backbone of the Excellence in Service philosophy is the company's "crown qualities". These consist of responsibility, excellence in service, sincerity, being a team player, flexibility, friendliness, communication, decisiveness and humour.

After the introductions Lesley announced "It's quiz time" and studiously we filled in a multiple-choice test. The idea being that our test results would be compared

to a test that we would take at the end of the week to assess our progress. The test touched upon the course's content that was to come. There were questions such as: What questions do you ask if a guest orders a Dry Martini? How long did prohibition last? What is a jigger? After marking boxes at complete random I was fairly confident that any improvement would be significant.

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The bartending and butler groups were then split up and we made our way to our work area, the hotel's bar, which had been obligingly handed over to Triple S for each day of the course. Misja spent a few hours introducing us to the bartending profession and the history of cocktails as we began to realise how much there was to learn.

We discussed the bad habits of bartending and what it takes to make a brilliant and confident bartender.

There is more to this profession than you would imagine. A bartender should have intimate knowledge of the pillar spirits and around 60 different cocktail recipes. They should also be an entertainer, a host and even a salesman able to up-sale where necessary (obviously this is not applicable to bartenders on yachts).

The theory of mixology is based on the ability to adjust the taste of the cocktail for the guest's preference, be it sour, well balanced or slightly sweeter. Mixology is also about combining the right flavours. Thinking about food combinations will give you a good hint.

Other lessons to be learnt are the correct glassware in which to serve the cocktail and what to garnish your drink with. Glasses can be chilled using ice cubes first. The cocktail itself should be made with large ice cubes as these melt slower and from the point of the ice cubes being added the drink should be made quickly to stop the drink being diluted with melting ice.

After a thorough introduction to bartending we broke for lunch. Back in the restaurant we were treated to an outstanding three-course meal. The students on the butlering course attended to us as Ton held forth on matters such as the correct way to behave at the dinner table and the details a butler should be watchful of. The tone was extremely civilised, the linen was crisp, the glassware sparkling – and the whole occasion came as a complete surprise to me; I had imagined we would be tucking into a rustic crusty baguette.

We spent the rest of the day putting into practice what Misja had taught us, learning how to make the perfect Cosmopolitan (it has a lot less cranberry juice in it than you would expect), complete with pyrotechnics – this involves setting light to a puff of oil from some orange peel. Misja explained about how precise the measuring ought to be, using the jigger – a steel measuring tool. However, extremely confident bartenders can dispense with the jigger and pour >

out using counting to keep track of the measurements.

On day two Misja gave us a comprehensive introduction to the skills needed by a barista and the intricate procedure behind making the perfect cappuccino. As with cocktail making there is a lot more to it than meets the eye. Misja was not training his students to make a hastily-slammed-together, mediocre tasting Starbucks coffee; this was a true art.

The perfect cappuccino starts with the coffee beans. The quality of the coffee is perfect straight after grinding but within hours it will have begun to oxidise and be past its peak. The coarseness of the grind is also of importance – if the coffee is too coarse the water will filter through too fast. It should be possible to adjust the grinder for the perfect-textured grind. The temperature and pressure of water in the coffee machine are also of importance, as is the extraction time.

The coffee machine should be cleaned regularly as well as the milk-

heating spout after every use. Getting the milk to the right temperature is a fine art in itself. Milk that gets too hot can give coffee a burnt taste. The perfect milk for a cappuccino should have many fine bubbles of a uniform size; for the highly skilled barista elaborate foam art also becomes obligatory.

That afternoon, after another stunning lunch (by which time the students had graduated onto serving us in sync whilst wearing white gloves – very high-end service) Mijsa explained distillation methods to us so that we would be able to understand why different spirits taste the way they do and describe this to the guests. We also did some vodka tasting. I had never considered that vodka tasted of anything, however the flavour of Grey Goose, Smimoff and Absolute varies with some lingering on the tongue for longer and others having more of a peppery taste.

After two days of the five-day course I learned an extensive amount, although had I stayed

for the full five days I am sure my learning would have been further consolidated. I was presented with my very own Triple S Passport. These are given to the students who complete any Triple S training course and illustrate a measure of their performance. Triple S Consultancy hopes that with these passports levels of hospitality training will be internationally recognised, not only in the hotel industry but also aboard yachts where in previous years courses and training for interior staff have been less comprehensive. Having completed my two days I knew that I would never look at bartending the same way and I now fully believe that every yacht should have interior staff who are trained in the mastery of the great bartending. ■

Triple S Consultancy runs its Excellence in Service courses in Antibes and Fort Lauderdale. A course schedule for 2010 is available online. tripleSconsultancy.com