

# Bottoms Up

**When a bar's parent company earns \$3 billion a year,** mixologists might conclude that their cocktails are off the corporate radar. But that's not the case for Patricia Richards, the creative force behind the cocktails at Parasol Down, the eye-catching bar inside the luxurious Wynn Las Vegas.

## Matching the Magnificence

Richards's libations must not only meet the corporate standards for excellence, but also stand up to the bar's visual splendor. Below its sister bar, Parasol Up, and surrounded by two winding escalators, the shimmering Parasol Down wood bar faces two large, three-tier parasols that point toward an ornate white ceiling from which more colorful parasols hang upside down. On some nights, Steve Wynn, Wynn Hotels' billionaire owner, can be spotted among the guests on the bar's outdoor deck enjoying the "Lake of Dreams" multimedia and color-changing light shows. According to general manager Jennifer Greenman, the amazing decor draws crowds. "It's a beautiful environment. People are constantly taking pictures," she remarks, adding that Parasol Down has earned the "adult Disneyland" nickname, attracting everyday tourists, high rollers, and Tokyo businessmen.

**Owner** Wynn Hotels

**General Manager** Jennifer Greenman

**Bar Managers** Siobhan Mace, Melody Sheppard, Jennifer Hanson, and Brad Smith

**Number of Employees** 28

**Bar Focus** Seasonal drinks that boast unique flavor combinations

**Average Drink Price** \$12–\$14

**Signature Drink and Price** Mango Yuzu Highball, \$14

**Cocktails Sold in 2008** 353,296

**In the Well** Absolut and Grey Goose; Cruzan; Sauza and Patrón; Bombay, Hendrick's, and Plymouth; Jameson; Jim Beam, Jack Daniel's, Maker's Mark, and Wild Turkey; Johnnie Walker Black, Glenfiddich, and Glenlivet; Hennessy VSOP and XO, Rémy Martin

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# at Parasol Down





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we do a little twist to make it a little different. People love it and come back for more.”

—Patricia Richards, mixologist, Wynn Hotels

### Patricia Richards recommends

- 1 Use unconventional glassware to offer a fresh visual effect.
- 2 Offer limited-time specials to deplete overstocked ingredients.
- 3 Lower cocktail prices during slow hours to attract new patrons.
- 4 Develop signature drinks that can’t be duplicated by the competition.

In business since the \$12.7 billion Wynn opened its doors in 2005, Parasol Down has become one of the glamorous resort’s entertainment staples. Bartenders mix up 25,000 cocktails during a slow month, 40,000 in a busy one. Certainly the room’s dramatic decor draws customers, but they come for the first-rate cocktails too. With no advertising budget, the bar relies on heavy foot traffic and rave consumer reviews on travel sites such as TripAdvisor.com and Yelp.com.

### Consistency, Originality, Quality

Richards, who has been in the hospitality business since she was a teenager in Vancouver, British Columbia, recently was appointed as the mixologist for both Las Vegas Wynn hotels—the first woman to hold such a position in the legendary town. In her new role, she’s working to get all of the Wynn bars on the same cocktail page, ensuring that every drink tastes the same within the Wynn hotels. To emphasize drink consistency, Richards laminates all of her recipes and places them next to the point-of-sale machines. “When I launch a new menu, I make a sample of each cocktail and show the staff what it’s supposed to look and taste like,” she explains.

Besides uniformity, Richards strives for exclusivity. “We have a white cosmopolitan that outsells our regular cosmopolitan, and I heard from the bartenders that the guests were so in love with it that when they went all the way down the street . . . and couldn’t find [one], so . . . they came all the way back to us,” she relates. “We’re not doing the same-old, same-old; we do a little twist to make it a little different. People love it and come back for more.”

Parasol Down offers guests unique flavor combinations. During the summer season, Richards created a watermelon mojito with mint leaves, fresh lime juice, rock candy syrup, Cruzan light rum, Marie Brizard watermelon liqueur, fresh watermelon juice, and just a splash of club soda. “Patricia really focuses on the presentation of the cocktails, the smell, and the way they taste,” remarks Greenman. “Everything is taken into consideration when we engineer these menus.”

Richards also likes to mix things up when choosing glassware. In the winter, she served an Irish crème café in a tempered glass without a handle. A cucumber and ginger highball, one of her main drinks on the 2009 spring/summer menu, will be served in a pilsner glass, in her words, “just to have fun.”

Using premium products is another way that Richards strives to distinguish her drinks from the rest offered on the Strip. “Down the street, bars use less expensive, lesser quality

ingredients,” she contends. “I always try to work with the best.” Her competition uses triple sec; she pours Cointreau. They make margaritas with sweet and sour mix; she makes them with fresh sour mixes. Richards might sweeten a drink with agave nectar; others use commercial sweeteners.

### Balancing Profits and Opportunities

While Richards cannot divulge revenue or pouring costs, she makes each cocktail with profits in mind. If there’s an inactive product in storage, she will create a limited-time offer to use it up and “turn a profit out of something that’s just sitting in the warehouse.”

**Twin serpentine escalators, parasols as ceiling ornaments, large three-tiered floor-mounted parasols, and oversized backbar mirrors frame the well-stocked Parasol Down bar.**





## Mango Yuzu Highball

by Patricia Richards

1½ oz Absolut Mango Vodka  
¾ oz Cointreau  
½ oz Clos du Val Eval Mango Coulis  
½ oz agave syrup  
½ oz unsalted yuzu juice  
2 oz fresh sweet and sour  
Speared maraschino cherry, lime wheel,  
and kaffir lime leaf garnish

Combine vodka, Cointreau, mango coulis, agave syrup, unsalted yuzu juice, and sweet and sour in mixing glass. Add ice, shake well, and pour into highball glass. Add additional ice as needed. Garnish with speared maraschino cherry, lime wheel, and kaffir lime leaf.

She also has initiated lower-priced cocktail service to continue driving sales at a time when customers are reducing their discretionary spending. The normally \$12 to \$14 Parasol Down cocktails are offered at \$8 on the afternoon menu (11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). “We’re trying to appeal to a broader audience,” Richards asserts, adding, “The cocktails are not downsized. We use only quality ingredients; therefore, our profit margin is slightly reduced.”

### The Right Staff

When a bar position opens at the Wynn, thousands apply. The applicants who make the first cut meet in a conference room for a second-round interview. Waitstaff typically come in for a third interview; bartenders take tests and make drinks. “The process is really intense, but we want to find the right people,” Greenman insists.

Even the “right people” need ongoing training, and Richards admits that it’s impossible to run such a dynamic cocktail operation alone. “I enjoy teaching, and I do as much as my time allows me, but our guest speakers are an effective way to

learn from our friends in the industry. Last week Tony About-Ganim taught a class about Cointreau versus orange liqueurs.” She can’t always be there to taste every drink or to make sure the sours have the right balance, so Richards relies on her well-trained team leaders and lead bartenders. “They make my job easier,” she says.

“My [goal is to] instill freshness, quality, and integrity into my cocktail program, coupled with a passion to keep learning, improving—to making it better,” Richards concludes. At the end of the day, she knows that she is not creating anything as monumental as world peace. “But if I can make people smile and enhance their experience, isn’t that something?”

**Fred Minnick** (FredWrite.com) is a journalist and photographer who writes about the hospitality industry, among other subjects.