

# P&M BEVERAGE

A passion for well-crafted wines and spirits is bringing brand new players to the American market. Here's an inside look at the veteran-owned P&M Beverage.



Thanks to P&M Beverage, Americans can now enjoy Sicilian wines like Gambino's Tifeo red.

When Troy Pepito was rising in the pre-dawn hours for long marches in late 1998, he knew his military basic training would come in handy one day. Indeed, the toughness, discipline, and physical readiness he was building as an 18-year-old recruit served as the bedrock of a successful 20-

year Navy career—one that saw him deploy four times and take part in actions like Operation Vigilant Mariner, which provided security to ships hauling supplies to post-9-11 warzones in the Middle East. But today, the recently-retired veteran is relying on his military discipline for an entirely

different purpose—one he could have never foreseen back then.

Pepito is the owner of P&M Beverage, a wine and spirits importer that has introduced Americans to a variety of foreign libations, most notably the award-winning Gambino wines from Sicily. Pepito says the importation and distribution

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of foreign wines into a saturated American market is “tough—not for the faint of heart” but worth it because he truly believes in the products he represents.

As fate would have it, Pepito’s military background and passion for wines collided in Sicily, where he was stationed for three years. While serving there, he developed an affinity for Italian wines, and Gambino in particular, which he says is able to craft unique taste profiles by utilizing grapes exclusive to the Italian isle.

“Sicily has the perfect climate to create fantastic wines,” Pepito says. “Every wine connoisseur knows the French Bordeaux, but not many know the Sicilian Carricante,” he adds, referring to the native Sicilian grape that grows on the volcanic slopes of Mt. Etna and used to make Gambino’s Tifeo Bianco, a crisp, refreshing white with an intense straw color and a fragrance of yellow flowers—which is strong but not overpowering—and retails for about \$25.

“And not too many folks outside of Sicily have ever heard of the Nerello Mascale,” Pepito says, “Whereas a Nero D’avola grape grows well in low-lying areas, the Nerello Mascalese—like the Carricante—grows well on the higher volcanic slopes.” Gambino brings these two worlds together in its Feud’o red, a bold, complex red wine blend of Nerello Mascale and Nero D’avola that hits the nose with notes of red fruit such as plums and settles in for a long finish.



Top, Troy Pepito when deployed in the South Pacific during his 20-year Navy career. Bottom, adjusting well to civilian life with the Raciti brothers, who run the family-owned Gambino winery.

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In Pepito's perfect world, Americans will get to know Sicilian wines like Gambino as well as they know those from Napa Valley. And though he might have the stubborn persistence typical of a career military man, he's not impatient and knows the road ahead is a long one. To wit, he has partnered with other like-minded veteran-run companies, such as Tuscany Distributors

Central Florida, in addition to Hotel Tango Distillery, the first combat-disabled veteran owned artisan distillery of its kind in Indianapolis, where Pepito supports the military exchange sales operations.

Pepito also says he's wary of growing too big too fast, and his team at present is still able to give the personal touch to both the clients they service and the buy-

ers they sell to. As P&M grows, he wants everyone to know the producers and their products as well as he does.

"Passion finds a way of trickling down to the consumer," he says. "The people who make this put their entire heart and soul into the process and the product. We owe it to them to find the root of that passion and make sure it's translating across the Atlantic. We need to know the grapes and soil and climate the same way they do. If we're as excited about it as they are, then the buyers will be excited, and so will their customers."

Of course, in the spirits world—and wine in particular—word of

Clockwise from top left: Pepito speaking at his retirement ceremony—he retired as a Master-at-Arms Chief Petty Officer; a bottle of Gambino's Feud'O, a full-bodied red in a Tuscany Distributors glass; the full line of spirits from Hotel Tango, a veteran-owned distillery based in Indianapolis, where Pepito supports military sales.



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SERVICE BEFORE SELF: Top: Pepito (back row, center) has spent the past 20 years in service to his country, developing a work ethic and focus uncommon in the civilian world. Today, his company, P&M Beverage, works closely with other veteran-owned businesses in the industry. Bottom right: Pepito at a recent trade show. Left: With his wife, Jenni, and son, Eli.

mouth is everything. *Wine Enthusiast's* recent decision to feature Gambino will no doubt further Pepito's vision. When pop superstar Rhiana paid a visit to the Gambino winery, that didn't hurt, either.

"You need to work until the name penetrates the consciousness," Pepito says. "We're all creatures of habit. People have their favorite things and it takes a lot to break through that. But the product is on our side. When people try it, they're blown away."

P&M Beverage currently imports five varieties of Gambino wine, the aforementioned Tifeo Bianco and Alicante, as well as Duvanera, a bright, ruby red wine with a hint of vanilla and plum; and red and white varieties of Feud'O: the red has notes of licorice and a persistent, pleasant finish, and the white—with notes of melon, peach, and pineapple.

For any distilleries and wineries operating outside the US, Pepito has a simple pitch.

"If you make a great product that you're proud of, tell us your story," he says. "Yes, the market is saturated. Yes, it's tough to break through, but where there's a will there's a way. And when you combine a great product with a company like mine—where we only hire people with passion and tenacity—we can make big things happen."

You can contact Pepito by clicking [HERE](#). Learn more about his company by clicking [HERE](#).