

WGS – More than Food & Wine

When **Floyd Cowan** interviewed Peter Knipp, joint organiser of the World Gourmet Summit with the Singapore Tourism Board, he was surprised to learn that there is more to this event than a showcase for chefs and the fantastic food they make.

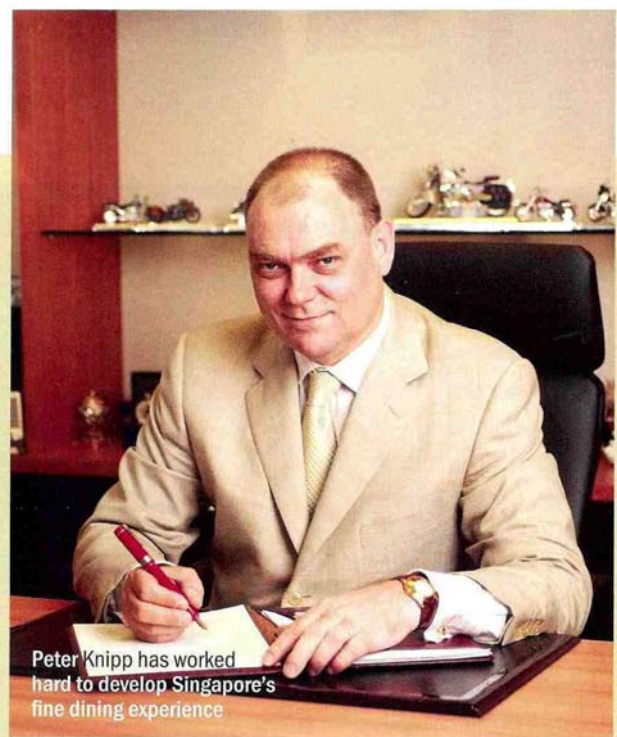
The World Gourmet Summit is not just about fine dining and fine wines and having a great time,” Peter Knipp explains. “Sure, it is all about those things, but when it was conceived 10 years ago it was all about bringing up the level of fine dining in Singapore. We could not take all these young chefs to Europe to give them experience there so we thought of bringing the chefs from around the world to Singapore.”

For the past 10 years the World Gourmet Summit has brought Masterchefs and special guest chefs to Singapore along with wine-masters to have a first class epicurean celebration. It has become acknowledged as one of the great events in Singapore’s social calendar. “Of all the events held in Singapore,” says Andrew Thomas, Managing Director of Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, “The World Gourmet Summit is one that truly is a worldclass event.”

Although having a great time is what it is all about, it is not all about having a great time. “I wanted to position and establish Singapore as the Gastronomic Hub of the Region,” Knipp explains why he initiated it. “My goals have always been to attract high-spending gourmets from around the world, branding Singapore as the preferred gourmet destination.”

In addition to providing a platform for renowned chefs and restaurant owners to showcase their culinary talent in Singapore the goal is also to encourage the growth of F&B in Singapore. “By inviting top chefs and winemakers to Singapore,” says Knipp “we create the opportunity for an exchange of information, ideas and skills. It is all about upgrading the skills and the product that is offered to diners in Singapore.”

The WGS is not only good for the F&B segment but for all businesses located here as it attracts many high-spending visitors. The event has grown since its inception. In 2001, 8,056 people attended the events. This went up to 10,742 in 2005 and this year the organizers are anticipating 13,000 to attend the various events. The Summit is a key attraction to foreigners with about 34 percent of the attendees coming from overseas.



Peter Knipp has worked hard to develop Singapore's fine dining experience

Photograph courtesy of Peter Knipp Holdings Pte. Ltd

In 2005 the Summit garnered S\$2.55 million in unsolicited media value in print and broadcast mediums locally and internationally (i.e. \$1.3 million local, \$1.25 million overseas) and the WGS2005 website received 1.5 million hits for the month of April. “For WGS 2006,” says Knipp, “we are targeting \$3 million in unsolicited media value.”

In addition to the business and publicity benefits Knipp believes the Summit, “Builds a more sophisticated pool of gourmets in Singapore, upping the ante for fine-dining and thus, assisting in the development of the F&B scene. With WGS and similar events going round in Singapore like the Raffles Hotel, Wine, Food and Art Experience, they all serve to make Singapore THE Gourmet capital and hub of the region.”

It is an expensive proposition to host the Summit but Knipp believes the benefits outweigh the costs. “It is a chicken and egg situation. Though the cost of running WGS is very high (about \$2 million) and the ticket sales hardly cover much of this expense, we still need to persevere and push forth. We believe that through WGS, the local F&B professionals, as well as foodies, get the opportunity to sample the cuisine of international stars and learn the different flavours, texture, smells and techniques (for the professionals). This all serves to up the culinary bar in Singapore and help nurture and build that sophisticated consumer base that is so important for a thriving F&B scene. Without this exchange, we believe that the F&B scene would stagnate, and we need to pre-empt that.

“Besides,” he smiles, “WGS is also a good excuse for a lot of good food and wines and a chance to fraternize with the who’s who, not just in the F&B industry but the well-heeled.”

However, Knipp doesn’t leave it there. “Another aspect of WGS is about social responsibility,” he states. “We try every year to give back to society what we have in one way or another taken or benefited from. Every year, WGS raises funds for the Community Chest of Singapore where over 200 voluntary organizations stand to gain from the amount raised from a silent auction held during the Charity Dinner. It will be held at the Oriental Singapore this year on April 21, and with the assistance of WGS partners who have donated some really valuable items, we hope to once again do our utmost for charity. For 2005, WGS raised about \$240,000.00 for Community Chest.” **XL**