



# PRISM a diverse look at lodging

A MEMBER BENEFIT OF THE AMERICAN HOTEL + LODGING ASSOCIATION

December 2008

[renaissance man](#)

[diversity data](#)

[lodging industry taps NMCi](#)

[prism](#)

[WIL Connect](#)

[national HR in Hospitality™ conference](#)

[fast facts](#)

[contact](#)

## renaissance man at Ritz-Carlton Atlanta

**prism savors an end-of-year conversation with lifelong ambassador of fine food, wine, and hospitality, Silvio Garcia.**

A random meeting with Silvio Garcia would not betray his profession. A cultural connoisseur and cork-cuisine lexicon, Garcia is sole composer of the ever-changing array of wine offerings that consistently garner *Wine Spectator's* highest awards for the world renowned Ritz-Carlton Atlanta's signature



restaurant, Atlanta Grill. His palate for excellent new releases, unexpected finds, and exemplary classics commands notice from top competitors, critics and clientele around the world.

But the master sommelier has cultivated another quality during his extensive career in hospitality: that of relating to an extremely diverse guest base on an authentic, ease-inducing level. When talking wine, says Sandra Ryder, area director of public relations for the Ritz properties in Buckhead and Atlanta, Garcia "is so warm and gracious that you probably would not realize you are speaking with an expert of his caliber".

Garcia traces his career roots to the sounds and flavors of his father's restaurant and bar. Amid the

clatter of plates and laughter of diners, he began serving guests at just fourteen. Garcia was a quick study, turning to his older colleagues for guidance, and recalls meeting many professional bartenders and waiters who "taught me everything my father didn't about wine."

With such an early start in hospitality, it's no surprise that Garcia made wine the focus of his career. But of equal influence was his family's heritage. Born in Italy to a Milanese mother and a Spanish father, Garcia moved with his family to Argentina before his sixth birthday, and it was there that he developed his taste for the red wines of the area. Although he loves the luscious, full wines of the region, he insists that "connoisseurship is not about which wine is best; it's all about your own unique taste and finding a way to express that."

***prism:* Tell us a bit about the path that led to Argentina, where you eventually set career roots.**

Garcia: When my family left Europe for Argentina in the late fifties, Argentina was considered the land of opportunities; the new Europe in South America. My parents were tired of the after-war issues in Europe, and considered it a new beginning for us.

***prism:* What did you like best about the culture there?**

Garcia: It is the Paris of South America because of the huge influence of Italian, Spanish, French, German and eastern Europeans who immigrated there in the fifties. I felt right at home with the same culture and values from the old country blending with the new. It made my life and career decisions easy to mold and develop.

***prism:* Do you remember your first taste of wine?**

Garcia: Yes, I do. My father always had wine at the dinner table. When I was 11 or 12, he put some wine in my glass with a lot of soda water and told me "I think it's time for you to stop drinking Coca-Cola and develop a taste for wine". His intent was to prepare me for social events and gatherings with family. At first I did not like it. It took years of small sips to develop a taste for it.

***prism:* When did you first decide you'd become a sommelier?**

Garcia: When I came to the U.S., I was a server in a very famous hotel in Miami Beach, the Fontainebleau Hilton. I worked in room service for a while, then transferred to the dining room where I learned how powerful wine knowledge was in determining the tip at the end of a meal. From there I went to a famous restaurant in Miami Beach with a very big wine cellar: The Forge. I learned from the sommelier about tasting, ordering, selling, training and making every customer very happy. I said to myself, "this is the job I'll have when I've learned enough about the hospitality business".

***prism:* Who was your first or most influential mentor?**

Garcia: Well, certainly the sommelier at The Forge. And later the maitre 'd and sommelier at Giovanni's, an Italian fine dining restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio, who taught me everything about Italian wines.

***prism:* Would you share a typical page from your calendar?**

Garcia: Some days I have a business lunch to taste new wines or fight for an exclusive wine at our restaurant. I always read the wine publications -- *Wine Spectator*, *Wine News*, *Wine & Spirits*, *Decanter*, *Quarterly Wines*, *Wednesday's New York Times* food section and *Thursday's Atlanta Journal-Constitution* food section - basically, anything I can get my hands on. Part of my job is to be informed about the wine and liquor market. I like to have an exclusive wine on our wine list for banquets or offer a great wine by-the-glass at Atlanta Grill. Many competitors shop my wine list on a regular basis.

Other days, I arrive at the hotel around mid-day, do a quick inventory of my wine room, place orders and take appointments with distributors for new features, new vintages or new prices with special discounts. Also, I have my daily get-together with my boss and touch base with our catering manager, banquets department and restaurant manager to plan for any upcoming events. After I finish my lineup with the staff at 5 p.m., I work in Atlanta Grill, helping guests with wine suggestions. I close the restaurant after midnight and start all over again the next day.

***prism:* What profession would you have chosen if not this one?**

Garcia: I think I would have been a corporate trainer or speaker, teaching something that I believe in

and have passion for.

***prism:* What do you enjoy most about your work?**

Garcia: Every time I approach a table and introduce myself, I immediately see mixed feelings in the eyes of the guest. There's a mixture of anxiety, intimidation -- you name it, it's there! With my best effort, I smile and greet the guest warmly, to try to raise their level of comfort. I'm there to make their wine experience as easy as possible.

At the same time, they will come away with some additional knowledge and appreciation about their own particular tastes. I hope that my guests take away the understanding that not one grape is necessarily better than the other -- it is more about your own enjoyment and preference and finding a means to express that.

Of course, I love when guests leave with a little bit of knowledge that gives them the courage to experiment on their own, and they come back to visit with me because they've made new discoveries and want to share this new passion with me.

[Back to top](#)

## diversity data

### **a year-long study illustrates challenges in unlocking the strengths of diversity.**

Organizations believe workplace diversity is important, but only 30 percent have an official definition of it, according to the American Institute for Managing Diversity, Inc. A year-long study on the status of diversity in the workplace included a survey conducted with 993 HR professionals and 330 diversity practitioners representing publicly and privately owned companies, non-profits, and the education sector. Findings suggest there is little common language to guide companies in managing their diversity efforts.

## **awareness on the rise**

The good news from the report, say HR professionals and diversity practitioners, is evidence of greater awareness of diversity in a general sense. That makes this a good time for organizations to focus more on how diversity can have a positive impact on the bottom line.

A survey that was part of the study asked more than 1,400 HR professionals and diversity practitioners to gauge the extent to which diversity practices accomplish specific business objectives.

## **positive workforce feedback**

- 52 percent said that to a "large extent," diversity practices created a work environment or culture that allows everyone to contribute all that they can to the organization.
- To that same extent, 49 percent said the practices achieved appropriate representation of racial and ethnic groups.
- Similarly, 48 percent said that to a large extent, the practices enhanced the ability of people from different backgrounds to work together effectively.

Also within the "large extent" category, respondents said diversity practices leveraged differences and similarities in the workforce (39 percent) and among customers and markets (36 percent) for the strategic advantage of the organization, and that they eliminated or minimized prejudice (38 percent).

## **when it comes to implementation, management still "stuck"**

Diversity management remains a challenge. Respondents said that, among other hurdles to diversity management, the field is not well-defined or understood, focuses too much on compliance, and places too much emphasis on ethnicity and/or gender.

"The field is stuck, with little innovation in how we are tracking diversity," said Frank McCloskey, survey contributor and vice president of diversity at Georgia Power.

"There is lack of discipline and understanding of what diversity means beyond race and gender or how success is being defined, or not being defined, by most corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives."

[Back to top](#)

## Lodging industry taps NMCI to help hotels tackle challenges

To take on the need for better education and implementation of holistic strategies promoting diversity within lodging, AH&LA partnered with the National MultiCultural Institute (NMCI), a leading think tank developing new services, knowledge, and skills in multiculturalism and diversity. The partnership produced a diversity assessment tool that any lodging property can use. The tool puts leading techniques and research into context for hoteliers, helping management incorporate best practices into their own operational procedures.

Guidelines are broken into three stages, based on your existing diversity initiatives or practices, and include a checklist to download and self-audit as you move through the various steps. Hoteliers can access the tool via the Members Only section of [www.ahla.com](http://www.ahla.com).

[Back to top](#)

## *prism*, industry's highest award for diversity, casts open call

The *prism* award is the hotel sector's pinnacle honor for programs that elevate the industry's scorecard for innovation and inclusion. December marks a call for nominations as part of AH&LA's Stars of the Lodging Industry awards. Learn more at [www.ahla.com](http://www.ahla.com) or email [bpadden@ahla.com](mailto:bpadden@ahla.com) for details.

[Back to top](#)

## WIL Connect launches web forum, empowers women to Dress for Success

WIL Connect ("Women in Lodging Connect") continues to push boundaries as the first industry-wide

forum exclusively for female hospitality professionals.

To build access to resources and further a sense of community for women at all levels in the industry, the group unveiled an exclusive Website for members. Featuring articles, tips, and an enhanced member directory, the site is a crucial resource for members to stay connected and leverage their career. In conjunction with Under 30 Gateway, WIL Connect members also have the opportunity to serve as a mentor or mentee, the type of program to which many top executives credit their success.

In November, WIL Connect and Dress for Success announced a national partnership to build awareness of and solicit donations to support the organization's primary mission of promoting the economic independence of disadvantaged women. Joi Gordon, CEO of Dress for Success Worldwide, and Vicki Gordon, chair of AH&LA's Women In Lodging Executive Council, officially kicked off the new flagship initiative of AH&LA's WIL Connect membership category, which will include a series of fundraising events and suit drives at hotels in a half-dozen cities across the country in 2009.

Events included a mentoring luncheon, which allowed approximately 125 female lodging professionals one-on-one time with the C-level hospitality professionals of the WIL Executive Council. The luncheon followed an educational session featuring Susan Steinbrecher, Embassy Suites' youngest general manager in history, who discussed why women are uniquely qualified to lead in the lodging industry and offered insight on how to capitalize on gender-specific traits. To support the Dress for Success initiative, learn more, or join AH&LA's WIL Connect, contact Kim Weed at [kweed@ahla.com](mailto:kweed@ahla.com).

[Back to top](#)

## national HR in Hospitality™ conference draws top talent

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual National HR in Hospitality™ Conference is developed at Cornell University by the School of Hotel Administration and the ILR School in partnership with *Human Resource Executive*® magazine. More than 700 senior level HR professionals attended last year, making it the biggest event of its kind. Join colleagues **March 17-19** at Disney's Contemporary Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., for the premier event for HR professionals in the hospitality industry. Featuring Hilton CEO Christopher J.

Nassetta in "A CEO's Perspective on HR in the Hospitality Industry" and a discussion panel of leading hospitality executives. **\$450 discount for AH&LA members:** use promotional code AHLAHR when you register at [www.HRinHospitality.com/HR](http://www.HRinHospitality.com/HR) or call 1-800-727-1227.

[Back to top](#)

## fast facts

- Small companies—99 or fewer employees—are the least likely to have an official definition of diversity.
- Public/government organizations are more likely than private non-profit and for-profit organizations to define diversity.
- Some 75 percent of HR professionals say that, from a strategic perspective, leveraging the diverse talents of the workforce is extremely important to their organization; they would like to see greater emphasis made on the positive relationship between diversity and business results.

- American Institute for Managing Diversity, Inc. & Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

[Back to top](#)

*prism*

1201 New York Avenue, Suite 600

Washington, DC 2005

editor

Jessica Maccaro

*prism* is a quarterly newsletter celebrating the diversity of people, ideas, and cultures within the hotel industry. Produced in consultation with AH&LA's Multicultural & Diversity Advisory Council, *Prism* shows how individuals from every background are building dynamic careers, reshaping convention, and creating a new, more inclusive era for lodging. *Prism* also underscores the benefits of pursuing a diverse

employee, vendor, and customer base.

*prism* seeks conversation: please send quotable comments, story ideas and feedback to

[jmaccaro@ahla.com](mailto:jmaccaro@ahla.com).

[Back to top](#)

To unsubscribe, please [click here](#).