

Fall 2012

# check in

Boston University School of Hospitality Administration

## *Ferretting Out the Faux Bordeaux*

Maureen Downey ('94)  
spots the fakes in rare wine



BOSTON  
UNIVERSITY

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## From the Dean...



Let me describe something I like to call the "SHA Virtuous Circle," and offer my thanks to you for making it happen through your time, generous donations, and strong support.

The SHA Virtuous Circle starts here: It is a known fact that the reputation of a great school in a great university is built on the foundation of its best assets—our alumni and friends. Remarkably, we now have more than 2,000 SHA alumni and thousands more friends. You are the reason SHA is becoming more prominent every day. Our thanks to you.

The strength of your accomplishments after leaving BU, or the discussions about SHA you have with others, have meant that when it is time to recruit hospitality management

students, great companies come to visit SHA looking for people just like you. In fact, thanks to you, we had more than two dozen company recruiting visits during spring 2012, and our new graduate placement record was among the highest of any BU school or college.

The reputation that you, our alumni and friends, enhanced while working as undergraduate interns or as the people who mentored them, guarantees the success we have in offering more internship opportunities to our current undergraduates every year. Once again, this past year we had more requests for interns than students to fill them. This happened while our SHA student interns were gaining the skills they need to fast-track their careers when they enter the workforce. And for that, we have you to thank.

The more internships leading to better job offers our graduates have, the easier it becomes to recruit exceptional entering students from around the world. Once again, thanks to your professional successes, we have started the semester with a stronger core of international students, more transfers from other colleges, and another entering class with exceptional admissions statistics. This is all because of the success that you, our alumni and friends, have created. You have more than earned SHA's gratitude.

And, of course, the stronger our incoming freshmen and transfer students are, the stronger our future SHA alumni and friends circle will become. Great schools attract great students; great students become great alumni; and great alumni and great friends ensure that our SHA Virtuous Circle grows larger and more prominent every year. Again, it's all thanks to your efforts and your engagement.

I know you want to make sure this growing circle of success expands, and your continued support, through gifts to the Annual Fund and participation in local and national alumni events, makes it all possible. On behalf of SHA, our sincerest thanks to you.

  
Chris Muller

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Join the **SHA** online community! Post, tag, tweet, ask questions, and reconnect with alumni and faculty.



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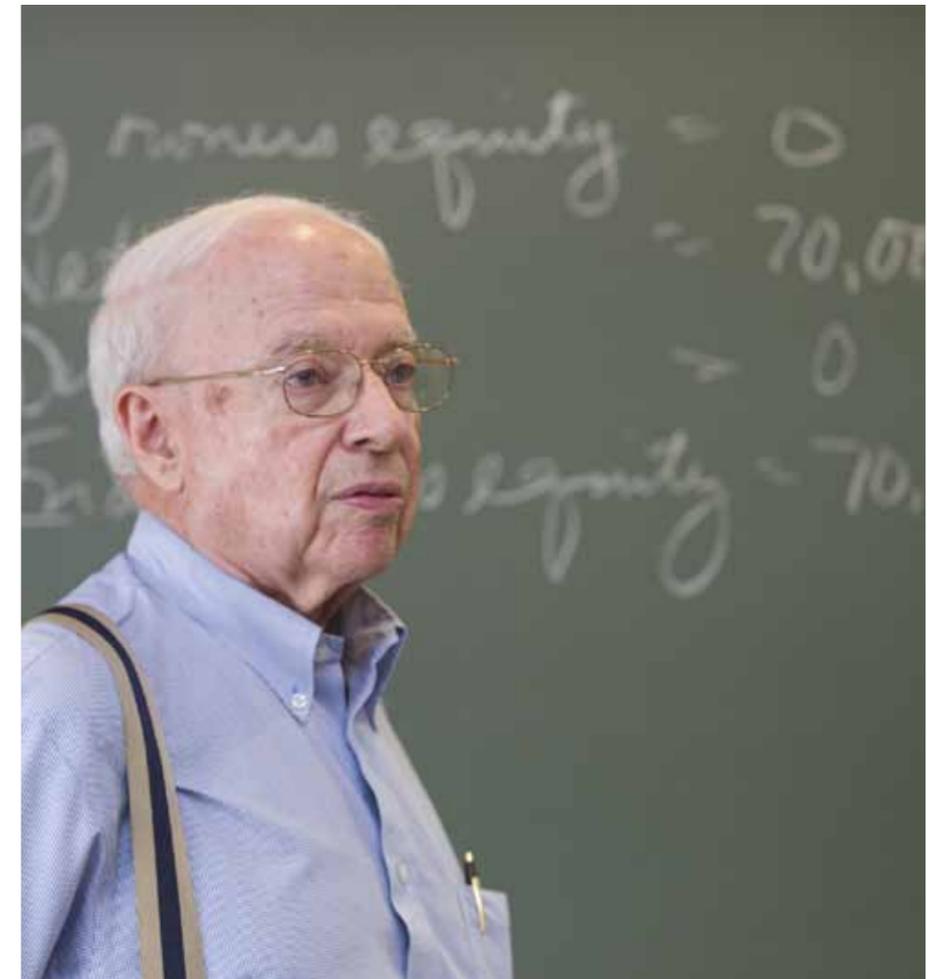
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## PHASED FAREWELL

After 15 years of teaching at SHA, 80-year-old **Stanley Buchin** has decided to enter a phased retirement. Buchin is continuing to teach this academic year, and he is still serving as chair of the faculty. He will take a sabbatical in 2013/2014 to research a new way to do regression analysis. (Buchin had a long career as a market consultant before coming to SHA in 1997.) On July 1, 2014, **Dean Christopher Muller** will appoint Buchin professor of the practice emeritus. Buchin intends to rejoin the faculty on a part-time basis that fall, possibly to teach a course on hospitality as it appears in literature and cinema.

"His years of service," Muller says of Buchin, "are a testimony to his lifetime commitment to higher education, especially in our field of hospitality management. His tireless efforts on behalf of our students, his collegiality with his faculty and staff colleagues, his partnership with our industry friends, and his contributions to the greater University should be models for all of us to follow. I personally am grateful for his leadership and commitment to SHA, his erudition and considerable wit, and of course, his boundless energy."

"I've loved it," Buchin says of his time at SHA. "I love the students; I've loved working with the faculty. It's really been a privilege." —PATRICK L. KENNEDY

## ▶ **AKILAH:** Swahili for Freedom

SHA community rallies in support of Rwandan students' quest for economic freedom

**"EVERYTHING WE'RE DOING HAS** some real element of community," says Erinn Tucker. She's reflecting on a project that connects the SHA community and a group of purposeful women studying hospitality management almost seven thousand miles away at a fledgling school in Kigali, Rwanda.

When Tucker, an assistant professor of hospitality administration, attended a fund-raiser in Boston for the Akilah Institute for Women, she was inspired by the school's mission: empowering young women by providing them with a transformational business education and career development opportunities. The school offers students a two-year business diploma with a focus in hospitality management or entrepreneurship and a chance to escape the life of subsistence farming and impoverishment that is the lot of many Rwandan women.

Rwanda has moved beyond its violent past to become one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. Tourism is now the country's leading source of foreign exchange; ecotourism has mushroomed; and the government is positioning Kigali

as a convention center for East Africa. Akilah's curriculum gives graduates the skills and confidence needed to start careers in this important industry and contribute to the country's development.



Above, Erinn Tucker of SHA. Below, students at the Akilah Institute for Women in Rwanda, with U.S. Ambassador Donald Koran.

"I felt that this was an organization we really should get involved with," says Tucker, and she decided to find a way to send the students much-needed textbooks. Stanley Buchin, SHA's chair of the faculty and professor of hospitality administration, connected the dots between Tucker's intention and SHA's chapter of Eta Sigma Delta (ESD), the international honor society for hospitality manage-

ment students.

"The students loved it," says Tucker. "They ran with it, and it was vastly successful. We ended up with eight boxes of books, and ESD geared up to be a strategic partner with Akilah when the institute's executive director and two graduates came to Boston this fall."

The Akilah Institute is also well known to SHA overseer **Ed Fuller (SMG'68)**, formerly of Marriott International Lodging. After they graduated in August with Akilah's first class, 14 women headed for Marriott International's 10-month training program, which leads to full-time employment. They might even find positions at Marriott's first-ever property in sub-Saharan Africa, a five-star hotel in Kigali projected to open in June 2013.

The SHA community will continue to support these women as they transform their futures. Tucker writes in a blog, "My experience has shown me that vision, hope, and hard work can make anything happen."

—TEMPE GOODHUE

**WEB EXTRA** Read Erinn Tucker's blog and learn more about the Akilah Institute for Women at [www.akilahinstitute.org](http://www.akilahinstitute.org).



### Welcome Aboard!

Advisory board bulletins

**Eric Danziger**, president and CEO of Wyndham Hotel Group, has joined SHA's advisory board. (Read more about Danziger on p. 11.)



Longtime advisory board member **Ed Fuller (SMG'68)**, retired president and managing director of Marriott International Lodging, has joined SHA's faculty as the School's first executive in residence. In his weekly course for seniors, **HF 402 Global Lodging Leadership**, Fuller will discuss hospitality leadership from a global and multicultural management perspective.

**Joe McInerney**, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, has joined the SHA advisory board. In a career spanning half a century, McInerney has helmed Sheraton, Hawthorn Suites, Forte Hotels, and the Pacific Asia Travel Association.

**Javier Rosenberg ('94)**, COO of Radisson and executive VP of Carlson hotels in the Americas, has joined the board. (Read more about Rosenberg on pp. 4–5.)



## ▶ No Lack of Concentration

EVENT MANAGEMENT AMONG NEW AREAS OF FOCUS

**WHETHER YOU NEED TO HIRE** an event planner or an accountant, look no further than SHA. The School is introducing new concentrations to meet those and other industry needs.

The changes occurred after a holistic examination by the faculty revealed or confirmed three realities. First, that students can benefit from focusing on a particular interest, be it a mainstay of the hospitality industry or an emerging area such as event management. Second, that sophomores, juniors, and seniors—with their disparate levels of understanding and experience—sometimes mingle in elective courses, and teaching them effectively can be a challenge. Finally, that students—especially transfers—often go to summer school to meet all SHA graduation requirements so they can walk with their class.

"We wanted to make the SHA education experience better for the student," says Chair of the Faculty Stanley Buchin. "Dean Muller set the process in motion; there were a lot of cooks, and I wiped the dishes," Buchin jokes. In fact, he says, input from colleagues, students, and the hospitality industry were invaluable in shaping the changes, which will take effect in 2013:

1. Concentrations will be available in five areas that will reflect student interest and industry needs, including event management.
2. Students will have to take all the required courses at a particular level (e.g., 200 level) before they can take an elective at the next level (i.e., 300 level).
3. The core curriculum will be streamlined so all students can elect a concentration, take a semester abroad, and meet graduation requirements without going to summer school.

The requirements for two 400-hour internships and a semester of study abroad will remain; selecting a 16-credit concentration will be optional for juniors and seniors.

"This has been a student-focused initiative," says Buchin. "We designed a package of courses in five areas that we think will help students. But they don't have to concentrate if they don't want to."

Assistant Professor of Hospitality Administration Erinn Tucker is helping to shape the event management curriculum, one of the concentrations most called for by both students and employers. "Reality shows feature event planning, and it's part of pop culture today," she says, "but companies have a broader perspective. We will emphasize what are called MICE events—meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions. They are more business- and tourism-focused and require strategic management. Companies and organizations want meetings to have a perspective that fits with their overall strategy.

"This is also an area of job growth," Tucker continues, "and employers are looking for new hires who understand the business side as well as the customer service side. This doesn't mean we're not interested in social events, but students can take the skills they learn from the business sector to any other sector." —TG

### SHA'S NEW CONCENTRATIONS

ACCOUNTING & FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT  
EVENT MANAGEMENT  
FOOD & BEVERAGE MANAGEMENT  
LODGING OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT  
SALES & MARKETING MANAGEMENT

## CRASH COURSE FOR WINE SNOBS

This fall, SHA Dean Christopher Muller hosted a group of alumni and friends at Boston's elegant Hampshire House for "How to Be a Wine Snob in 20 Minutes," a talk and tasting. Muller demystified the expert's swirling, swishing, and use of terms like "bouquet" and "retro-olfaction," while guests had the chance to try some delicious wines for themselves.

It was all to support the Frederick Rubtchinsky Memorial Scholarship, an effort started by the late Rubtchinsky's niece, Jodi Smith. "My uncle did not attend BU, nor did I," says Smith, "but two things my uncle loved were the city of Boston and his job in the hospitality industry. BU SHA was the obvious choice."

Rubtchinsky worked at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel until he died in 1991. "He was passionate about his career," says Smith, who is president of Mannersmith, an etiquette consulting firm. "I wanted to do something significant to honor his memory." The scholarship recipient will be announced next spring.

—PK

## HONORING SHA: ETA SIGMA DELTA

Eta Sigma Delta, the international honor society for hospitality management students, encourages and rewards outstanding academic achievement. Membership is limited to juniors and seniors in the top 20 percent of their class, with a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Last spring, BU's Student Activities Office recognized the SHA chapter for its community service activities, and 19 new members were inducted into the chapter. The new seniors ('13) are Aimee Caplen, Jillian Costa, Kris Parry, Carla Paul, Emily Powell, Ester Wan, Joanna Barth-Werb, Shirley Chen, Leah Flaxman, Danielle Hasinovsky, Melanie Isola, Jocette Lee, Roy Madhok, Dorothy Malcolm, Klo Maria Stine, and Alaina Wartman. Ziling Huang, Daniel Queiruga, and Huanjia Yu graduated in May 2012.



# TITAN of TURNAROUNDS

## How one man helped Puerto Rico get its groove back

BY PATRICK L. KENNEDY

You might say **Hugh Andrews** has the Midas touch when it comes to hotels. But unlike King Midas, Andrews has *worked* to transform properties of little value into gold; there's no magic behind his string of successes in Puerto Rico, according to those who know him—just sweat, smarts, and good leadership.

"Time and again, Andrews has been the driving force behind initiatives that have nurtured failed hotels back to prosperity," declared *Caribbean Business*. For his "towering contributions to Puerto Rico's tourism industry," the newspaper named Andrews its Private Sector Person of the Year for 2011. "The legendary hotelier has spent a lifetime turning shuttered or inactive properties into some of the Caribbean's best hotels, while rescuing others from bankruptcy."

A member of SHA's advisory board, Andrews is the founder and president of International Hospitality Enterprises in Puerto Rico. Born in New York, he studied in

Michigan, France, and Mexico, and served in the Army in Vietnam, where he set up the R&R facility later depicted in the television show *China Beach*. He moved to Puerto Rico in 1976 and stayed. A travel writer called the cigar-smoking Andrews "the kind of perennial expatriate who could have stepped out of the pages of a Graham Greene novel."

Andrews's first job on the island was overseeing a San Juan hotel that had gone bankrupt for the fifth time, as the territory's tourism industry floundered. Within a few years, he had transformed the property into the four-star Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino. In 1985, he reopened the heretofore-shuttered

## "THE PRICE OF SUCCESS IS PERSEVERANCE, PERIOD."

El San Juan Hotel & Casino, which also continues to thrive.

Andrews has found success by tailoring different hotels to different clientele—business travelers, gamblers, sun-worshippers—and working with civic and business leaders to boost the profile of a vacation destination that had fallen out of fashion before he arrived. Thanks in part to his efforts, travelers began to rediscover the island's white sandy beaches, colorful architecture, and cultural attractions.

Nowadays, 3.7 million people visit Puerto Rico every year (double the amount in the 1970s)—and many of them stay at El Conquistador, perhaps the commonwealth's

marina, and 100,000 square feet of meeting facilities. El Conquistador was the first hotel in Puerto Rico's history to receive AAA's Five Diamond Award.

The list of Andrews's triumphs goes on. San Juan's El Convento hotel had been a Carmelite nunnery, a bordello, and even a garage for garbage trucks before it became a debt-ridden, publicly owned hotel. Andrews bought it, and in 1996, after a \$12.5 million renovation, he reopened El Convento with 58 luxury rooms, three restaurants, and a shopping mall. The elegantly restored historic landmark is a centerpiece of Old San Juan's revitalization. Meanwhile, on a peninsular beach about two miles away, the refurbished Condado Vander-

lage. While still fresh out of BU, Rosenberg began his career at the then-newly reopened El Conquistador. "It was an incredible experience," he says. "I learned so much from him in so many ways." Andrews is a highly knowledgeable, hands-on owner who never walks into a meeting unprepared, as Rosenberg recalls. "It's truly leadership I haven't come across too often: brilliant, compassionate, but at the same time, pushing everyone around him to excel."

At first, Rosenberg didn't quite grasp the rationales behind his boss's directives, he adds with a laugh. "I'd spent several years in different roles in food and beverage, and at one point [Andrews] started insisting that I move into the rooms division. At that time, there was a clear line of separation in our industry; you were either F&B or rooms, and here was my mentor pushing me to go into rooms. The GM even said to me, 'I can't have you going into rooms—you're an F&B guy!' So we kept making up excuses for me to stay in F&B. 'Oh, it's too busy now,' 'Now he needs to open a new restaurant,' and so on."

Finally, Andrews put his foot down: "Enough, you're going into rooms." Rosenberg feared the impression this switch would create on his résumé. "I was panicking that I was going to become a jack of all trades, master of none. But it actually ended up being the best thing that could have ever happened to me," he says. "What he'd really given me was an opportunity to improve my leadership skills, which is really what our industry is all about. And I am eternally thankful to him for that. The only other person I think of in that way is my father," who pushed young Rosenberg at an early age to learn multiple languages, which has also proven rather handy in today's global industry.

Andrews's lessons paid off. By 2001, Rosenberg was the general manager of then Swissôtel in Atlanta, and *HOTELS* magazine and the International Hotel & Restaurant Association named him the Young Hotelier of the World for that year. Today he is the chief operating officer of Radisson and the executive vice president of Carlson hotels in the Americas.

"The price of success is perseverance, period," Andrews told *Caribbean Business* when he was reopening El Conquistador. "If you plug away and push hard enough, you can do anything in this world, and if you don't, it's because you choose not to." ■



Javier Rosenberg (left) worked under Hugh Andrews at El Conquistador (above and opposite).

hottest hotel. Andrews opened this sprawling cliff-top resort in 1993. With fantastic views of both the Atlantic and the Caribbean, the 500-acre complex includes more than 900 rooms, a water park, a golf course, a casino, a

built boasts luxury condominiums as well as rentals—yet another innovative Andrews restoration project.

### CULTIVATING LEADERS

"In addition to those heroic achievements," notes *Caribbean Business*, "Andrews has made it his core mission to educate and develop local tourism-industry talent into top-notch hoteliers." He chairs a foundation that has awarded 200 Puerto Ricans scholarships to study hospitality around the world.

Andrews also makes it a point to develop SHA grads into industry pros. **Javier Rosenberg ('94)** is just one accomplished hotelier who benefited from Andrews's tute-



Maureen Downey ('94) brings a detective's forensic skills to the authentication of labels, caps, corks, and bottles—just one part of her work managing clients' collections of rare and fine wines.

MICHAEL SHORT

# ferreting out the faux bordeaux

AN ALUM WITH A RARE SKILL IN THE RARE WINE FIELD

When James Grandison forked over about \$5,000 for some coveted Bordeaux wine, including a bottle of 1949 Chateau Lafleur, he was excited about the auction-house find and felt it worth the splurge. The theology teacher in Berkeley, California, had started buying \$40 bottles of wine in the mid 1990s. "Two years later the value was at \$130," he says. "In the 2000s, I ordered wines at \$350 a bottle, and three years later, when I actually received them in my hands, they were worth \$2,000 a bottle."

So Grandison (STH'91, '94) could justify plunking down the \$5,000, and, as he was meeting **Maureen Downey ('94)** for lunch after the auction anyway (and he didn't want to leave the wine in his car, where the heat could sour it), he brought the bottles into the restaurant with him.

Downey, an expert in rare and fine wine, examined the Lafleur—or rather, the alleged Lafleur.

"I hate to tell you this," Downey told Grandison, "but this bottle doesn't appear to be consistent."

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"The glass is correct, but I don't like the paper, I don't like the printing; the capsule looks funny... The cork could be a new cork in an old bottle. Based on all these factors, I think you should get up from this lunch right now, drive back to the auction house, and return it and say you expect a refund."

Grandison took her suggestion. When he told the auctioneers that Maureen Downey had

inspected his purchase and found it suspect, they returned his money, "no problem," he recalls.

## *Culling Your Collection of Cabernets*

Authenticating wine is just one part of Downey's work, although it is the part that's turned her into a sought-after commentator, with the recent indictment of suspected wine counterfeiter Rudy Kurniawan, a.k.a. "Dr. Conti." Downey is one of just a handful of authentication experts in the rare and fine wine industry, and she began airing doubts about Kurniawan's "magic cellar" almost a decade ago. Now seemingly vindicated, she's been doing interviews with *Vanity Fair*, *Inside Edition*, Fox Business, and CNBC's *Crime, Inc.*

Based in San Francisco, Downey runs Chai Consulting. (*Chai*, pronounced "shay," is French for cellar. "I don't make tea," Downey says.) With employees' help, she manages clients' massive collections of high-end wines—usually bottles numbering in the thousands, often worth millions of dollars. She transforms cellars chockablock with haphazard piles of boxes into neatly arranged repositories organized by spreadsheet and labeling system. She helps clients cull their collections to adapt to their changing tastes or lifestyles, figuring out which bottles to sell and finding the best price for them, and by the same token getting them deals when they want to restock. She acts as an appraiser, sometimes in sticky situations arising from a divorce or inheritance. She teaches about wine and testifies about it in court as an expert witness. And it all started at SHA.

"I took a bar management class freshman

BY PATRICK L. KENNEDY



Downey compares an authentic bottle with a fake.

year,” she recalls. “Sophomore year, I went abroad, took a four-unit course on the wines of France, and traveled through the French wine regions.” And, as a junior, she and three other young women represented BU in the student division of Kevin Zraly’s International Wine and Spirits Competition, a male-dominated environment. “We walked in and were laughed at,” she recalls, “and we smoked everybody. We won. That was really when the door opened for me.”

Downey got certified as a sommelier shortly after graduation, and was soon hired as manager of Tavern on the Green, the restaurant then in New York City’s Central Park. By 2000, she decided she didn’t want to work another Christmas. She became a wine specialist for a series of auction houses and earned more wine certificates before striking out on her own in 2005.

Since then, Downey has made a name for herself as a smart buyer, seller, organizer, and overall manager of the collections of a range of clients with one thing in common: “Once you’re in the habit of buying and aging wine,” Grandison says, “it’s difficult to stop. It presents organizational and storage problems. That’s where someone like Maureen comes in—and actually, there are not a lot of people like her.”

Downey has to be as much psychologist as wine expert at times. “There is a compulsion to collecting,” she says. “They all have fierce separation anxiety when it comes time to sell.” In Grandison’s case, she says, “Every bottle has a story,” a sentimental attachment. “He was like, ‘Ohh, Mo, you’re killing me.’”

“We’ve had standoffs,” Grandison confirms with a laugh.

But Downey realized her client simply

wasn’t drinking the higher-alcohol-content California wine he had gone for in his late 20s and early 30s, and she pointed out that if he got rid of some, he’d have money to buy the European vintages he was developing a preference for. And, after all, Grandison says, “I consider myself a wine drinker” more than a collector.

### **The Madoff of Merlot**

Downey has had more serious standoffs, in the realm of wine-buying public opinion, over the existence of fraud in the market. “I’ve been a totally anti-fraud freak since 2000, and I was laughed at by a lot of the boys in New York,” she told SHA students when she visited the School last spring. As for Kurniawan, whom Downey calls “the Madoff of Merlot,” in 2002, he tried to sell her (at auction house Zachys) 1940s and ‘50s bottles of Pomerol wines. When he couldn’t produce adequate documentation of their provenance, she refused to buy it. “Everybody thought I was crazy,” she says. “Everybody held him as this great guy, and I always felt there was something wrong.”

Indeed, Kurniawan apparently succeeded in fooling some of the country’s biggest wine connoisseurs, dealers, and bloggers with his tales of rare wines found walled up in cellars in Europe. Eventually, the number of rare bottles he somehow produced strained credulity; the number of used high-end bottles he collected raised questions; and the threads of his (alleged) deception unraveled. In March, the FBI raided his home and found thousands of top wine labels, hundreds of corks and a corking device, sealing wax and rubber stamps, glue, stencils, instructions for fabricating labels, empty bottles soaking in the sink, and cheap bottles of Napa Valley wine marked with the

names of classic bordeaux to be impersonated, *New York* magazine reported. Kurniawan now faces trial on multiple counts of fraud.

Those labeling and corking materials were key: fraud detection has nothing to do with the taste of a wine, Downey says. “If you’ve got something that’s been in a bottle for 40 or 50 or 100 years, there’s gonna be bottle variation.” Not to mention some wines were transported in different types of barrels before even being bottled. “Some threads should carry through, but nobody on the planet has so much experience with these incredibly rare wines that they can say with any degree of accuracy, ‘Oh yeah, this is correct Petrus from 1920.’ Bulls—t.” If taste told the tale, she points out, Kurniawan never would have pulled off the giant con he’s now charged with.

Downey’s approach, when studying bottles and preparing authentication reports for clients, is more about forensics than flavor. She takes into account paper stock, printing quality, and the oxidation rate of label paper. She contacts the relevant producers (Downey knows them all and is fluent in French) and brings to bear historical knowledge about tin capsules and what colors of glass were used to bottle what brands when. “If you see a bottle where the label looks like hell but the capsule looks pristine, that’s like a 20-year-old’s body with a 90-year-old’s face. They should have aged together. These are all errors that counterfeiters make.”

### **Bottoms up**

But wine buyers shouldn’t jump to conclusions, Downey cautions. The fakes “represent such a small fraction of the market.”

And a healthy, growing market it is. Total wine sales in the U.S. jumped 5.3 percent to 347 million cases in 2011. The Wine Institute estimates that retail value at \$32.5 billion. The wine industry in Napa alone—and that California county is a mere eighth the size of just one French growing region, Bordeaux—generates 40,000 jobs.

That’s why Downey hopes to see hospitality schools bring back the sort of wine education she got at SHA but that has fallen out of favor because “we live in a prohibitionist society,” she says.

“This is a real business; this is a lucrative business; and it’s a viable career,” the alum told SHA students during her visit. “There’s nothing but opportunity for people who are smart, who are capable, and who work hard.” Her advice? Get educated, and “start in wine early.”

MICHAEL SHORT

VERNON DOUCETTE

## **Kristine Suh:**

### **This striving senior boosts minorities in hospitality**

BY RACHEL JOHNSON

**WHILE MILLENNIALS MAY HAVE A** reputation of waiting for prosperity to find them, no one told that to **KRISTINE SUH (’13, SMG’13)**. From the moment she landed at BU, she’s been busy writing her own success story.

The California native struck out for Boston looking for a taste of independence. She quickly realized that by creating her own opportunities, she was training for her future career. “Something new is going to pop up every day,” she says. “I love doing new things.”

Joining the National Society of Minorities in Hospitality (NSMH) was the key step, Suh says. Through the society, she learned how to network with her hospitality school peers and take on more responsibility, running and organizing professional events and national conferences. “The vision,” she says, “is to get minority students more recognition and more opportunities in hospitality companies. We’re hoping to help them along, give them a step up.” In June, she became the organization’s national chair and charter director, the first BU student to hold such a high position in NSMH.

Suh is no slouch on campus either. She works as a VIP caterer at President Robert A. Brown’s house with Catering on the Charles, BU’s on-campus catering service. She is also a resident assistant for BU’s Hospitality House and helps run SHA’s student government and BU’s Diner’s Club. And if that isn’t enough, she spent the summer working at Torrance Marriott South Bay outside of Los Angeles, learning the ins and outs of running a major hotel. It’s a lot, she says, but this is her chance to try a bit of everything, to get a full picture of the hospitality industry. “If you’re going to work in this industry,” she says, “you’re never going to get the same customers or have the same experiences. That keeps me interested.”



“The vision is to get minority students more recognition and more opportunities in hospitality companies.”

#### **WEB EXTRA**

Read Suh’s post about her internship at Torrance Marriott South Bay on the SHA Student Blog at <http://buhospitalitystudentblog.wordpress.com>.

Suh says her own relentless drive to take full advantage of all possibilities, combined with a SHA curriculum that insists on diverse classes, has given her the chance to be more flexible as she begins the job search in earnest. “Even in the classes we take, we learn to do everything. It piques your interest about different aspects of the industry, and that eventually leads to finding what you really like to do. It’s very important to get a general education about the entire industry. And it’s fun!”

Patrick L. Kennedy contributed to this article.

Every year, SHA's distinguished lecture series—a spring semester course that draws roughly 100 students from all class years—brings hospitality heavyweights to campus to share their stories and insights. “We try to bring in the top people from a wide range of companies, so that students can see the breadth of the industry from a leader’s perspective,” says Dean Christopher Muller, who oversees the course.

Each lecture is followed by a roundtable discussion that allows about 20 SHA seniors to interact on a more informal level with the week’s presenter. “The seniors get to talk to these leaders and get to know them on a personal level,” says Muller. “We’ve actually had students hired right out of the class.”

We spoke to four recent lecturers and asked them to share their words of industry wisdom with *Check In* readers. BY CHRIS BERDIK

▼  
**Denise Coll**

President, North American Division  
Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide



**“I HAVE A FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF** that part of managing one’s career and growing as a professional is dependent on trying things that take you out of your comfort zone,” says Denise Coll, who currently oversees operations, sales, and marketing for more than 500 Starwood hotels. “You shouldn’t be reckless, but you need to be willing to take some calculated risks.”

In the late 1980s, she accepted the challenge of leading a rebuilding of Sheraton’s central reservation system, even though her

*“Try things that take you out of your comfort zone.”*

background in operations wasn’t the best preparation for this tech-heavy project. “It was a risk, but one I knew I could manage,” she says. The project introduced her to a wide array of new opportunities and senior leadership contacts.

“Often, in making career decisions, I have asked whether I’ll have more options at the end of this experience than I have today.”

Indeed, Coll says her one regret is not taking the risk to seek out an international work experience during her career, especially while working for many years at a global company.

In that same spirit, Coll’s advice is to “think broadly.” Wherever your career takes you, Coll says, “find something you’re really passionate about, and make changes until you find what that is.”

▼  
**Eric Danziger**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Wyndham Hotel Group



**EVER SINCE HE LANDED HIS** first hotel job in 1971, as the doorman at San Francisco’s famous Fairmont Hotel, Eric Danziger has known the value of learning a business from the bottom up. He’s also learned the value of taking a risk and leading a team to grow a business from scratch. Today, he is responsible for the operation and strategic direction of more than 7,000 hotels

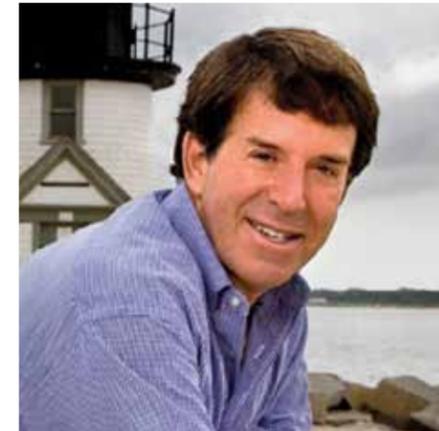
*“You need to learn how to inspire and motivate.”*

in 66 countries around the world. Danziger says the most important lessons of his career weren’t always the easiest to learn. His foremost piece of advice is to appreciate the value of your team. “When you start out, you think, ‘If I’m good, that’s all I need to be a success.’ But you learn that’s not what it’s about,” he says. “Your ability to perform is completely dependent on getting your peers and subordinates to perform. So, you need to learn how to inspire and motivate.”

In addition, Danziger says, take the tough job. Early on in Danziger’s career, he agreed to turn around a struggling DoubleTree hotel in Tucson, Arizona, rather than take a much easier post for the company in Monterey, California. “It might not seem ideal, but it’s a way to get your hands dirty and make your bones,” he says. “Because it’s not easy and you’ll earn respect for doing something that not just anybody can do.”

▼  
**Bruce Percelay (SMG’77)**

Chairman and Founder  
The Mount Vernon Company



**BRUCE PERCELEY WORKED FOR NEARLY** a decade in advertising after graduating from BU. On his lunch breaks, he helped his dad renovate and flip a Beacon Hill condominium. More property renovations and sales followed, and, in 1986, Percelay left his day job to start a real estate company that now owns and manages approximately 1,400 apartments, as well as commercial and vacation properties.

*“Never start thinking the status quo is OK.”*

“Learning real estate by trial and error is a great way to learn the business, but the cost of tuition is very high,” he says. One of the key lessons he took from his years in marketing is to always be creative.

“Being innovative, clever, and forward thinking helps differentiate you from the rest of the pack,” says Percelay, who pioneered the practice of staging homes that are for sale or rent. “Never start thinking the status quo is OK, because it isn’t.”

Percelay’s other keys to success include building customer loyalty by striving to give them “more than they expect” and conducting business with “uncompromising honesty.” Of the latter, he says, “it’s not only the right thing to do, but people will seek you out and even pay a premium to do business with you when they know that your handshake is as good as your signature.”

▼  
**Punit Shah (’02)**

President and Chief Operating Officer  
Liberty Group of Companies



**THE SON OF FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS** from India, Punit Shah says entrepreneurship is in his blood. In the last 10 years, he has rebuilt and expanded the Liberty Group, his family’s real estate development company, building and managing hotels, luxury waterfront condominiums, and assisted-living facilities in Ohio, Georgia, and Florida. To date, Shah has overseen \$250 million in commercial real estate developments. Shah encourages others to follow the entrepreneurial path, and he offers two main pieces of advice for those who do.

*“If you’re going to dream big, then you can’t be afraid to fail.”*

First, dream big. Shah’s parents retired and sold all their hotels right after he graduated, so he faced a blank slate when he joined the family business as the director of new development. “I took it upon myself to grow the company again and diversify it,” he says.

Second, if you’re going to dream big, then you can’t be afraid to fail. Shah’s first years as a developer coincided with a real estate boom. When the bust came in 2008, he had to pull the plug on multiple developments. “I lost tens of millions of dollars,” he says, but like any true entrepreneur, he took stock, and looked for a new opportunity.

“It was a hard lesson, but it set me up for future success because I learned to face those challenges head on.”

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SHA welcomes news of our alums' professional and personal achievements and milestones. Please write to us at [busha@bu.edu](mailto:busha@bu.edu). You can also connect with SHA online at [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com). (Under *Groups*, search "BU School of Hospitality Administration.")

**JESSICA ARONG O'BRIEN ('89)** of Chicago, Ill., was elected to the Illinois State Bar Association's board of governors. Jessica is a special assistant attorney general at the Illinois Department of Revenue and acting chief counsel of the Illinois Lottery.

**EMILY WILLIAMS KNIGHT ('95)** was recently named president of Kendall College, a member of the Laureate International Universities network. Located in Chicago, Kendall offers undergraduate degrees in business, culinary arts, hospitality management, and early childhood education. Knight has served as CEO of New England University LLC and as vice president of marketing and sales strategies for Pearson Teacher Education and Development. Early in her career, Knight managed executive meetings at Marriott's Key West resorts in Florida and taught business at Montgomery County Community

College in Pennsylvania. "Emily's experience and leadership skills make her a natural choice for the role of president," says David Graves, CEO of Laureate Hospitality, Art & Design. "Her passion and relentless energy will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the future of Kendall College."

**MAX SCHLAN ('03)** recently graduated *cum laude* with a JD from the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University. Max received the Benjamin Weintraub and Alan Resnick Bankruptcy Law Award, as well as the William Eric Goldberg Scholarship. He has accepted a federal clerkship for the Hon. Christopher Sontchi, U.S. Bankruptcy Court, District of Delaware. Max lives in Syosset, N.Y., with his wife, **AMANDA (TURNER) SCHLAN (COM'03)** and their two-year-old daughter, Emily Lila. Email him at [MaxSchlan@yahoo.com](mailto:MaxSchlan@yahoo.com). ■



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