

Beverage Journal

JANUARY 2024

2024 TRENDS TO WATCH



WHAT'S NEW IN THE
WINE WORLD

COCKTAILS AND SPIRITS
LEADING THE CHARGE

A BEER INDUSTRY
IN FLUX



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YOUR LIVELIHOOD DEPENDS ON IT

As the Maryland General Assembly prepares to convene on January 10th, the imminent introduction of legislation allowing chain stores and supermarkets to obtain retail liquor licenses, along with another potential extension of direct shipment privileges by Maryland manufacturers (originally introduced during COVID-19) are sure to be in the legislative hopper. On page 8, Beverage Journal staff writer, Teddy Durgin, interviews industry insiders to provide insights on what to expect and how to counteract these potential challenges.

To navigate this legislative landscape effectively, consider the following 'How-To' guide on political involvement and influence:

Stay Informed:

Be proactive in understanding upcoming legislation that could impact your business. Join your county association and the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA.org), which actively monitors proposed legislation affecting its members.

Build Relationships:

Attend local liquor board meetings, and familiarize yourself with your local and state representatives. Use resources like the list of local liquor boards for Maryland available at mdalcoholhalls.org/local-liquor-boards. Identify your State Senator and State Delegate(s) by visiting mdelect.net and entering your or your business' address.

Establish connections with your representatives by introducing yourself, highlighting your business within their district, and ensuring they receive your communications.

Communicate Effectively:

Keep your representatives informed about your business and its positive impact on the community. Ensure that you are included in their communications and distribution lists. Sending a personalized, handwritten letter of introduction with a meeting request can be a powerful way to establish a relationship.

Quantify Your Contributions:

Utilize the resources provided by the American Beverage Licensees (ABL) to quantify your business's contributions to the community. Through the 'members only' area of the ABL website (www.ablusa.org), members can generate reports detailing job numbers, tax contributions, and economic impact at the state legislative district level. This valuable data serves as a persuasive tool when communicating the positive influence your business has in the community.

In the face of potential legislative changes, active engagement with state legislators and thorough preparation are essential to safeguarding your livelihood. By following these steps, you empower yourself to effectively navigate the political landscape and advocate for your business interests. ■

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1. AIX ROSÉ

Now sporting a convenient Stelvin Lux screw cap instead of a cork closure, Aix Rosé, part of the Kobrand Wine & Spirits portfolio, is even easier to serve at convivial gatherings. Made at the Maison Saint Aix estate just north of Aix-en-Provence, the salmon-hued blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Cinsault transports imbibers straight to the South of France.

\$ SRP: \$23.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 aixrose.com

2. FLAT CREEK ESTATE WINERY & VINEYARD

Hearty beef and pork dishes are choice companions to the Estate Montepulciano 2019 from Flat Creek Estate Winery & Vineyard close to Austin in Texas Hill Country. Its ripe tannins and deep flavors of black currant, blackberry, and cherry are bolstered by a whisper of toasted almond.

\$ SRP: \$50 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 flatcreekestate.com

3. HOLISTIC SPIRITS COMPANY

Actor and vegan activist Woody Harrelson and wellness entrepreneur Amy Holmwood have founded the Holistic Spirits Company. Fueled by plant science, its inaugural products—the organic white wheat Origen vodka and Harmony gin made with organic corn—are infused with a proprietary, natural blend of artichoke leaves, elderberries, green tea leaves, and muscadine grapes from the American South, rounded out with juniper berries, coriander seed, hyssop, lemon peel, lime peel, angelica root, and orris root.

\$ SRP: \$39.99-\$46.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 drinkholistic.com

4. GOSLINGS

Goslings launched its Family Reserve Old Rum in 2003 exclusively for the Goslings family to savor. Twenty years later the line expands for the first time with a medley of rums aged in former bourbon barrels, then finished in one-time rye whiskey casks for three years. They imbue the liquid with spicy, herbaceous notes redolent of whiskey that shine in riffs on the Old Fashioned.

\$ SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 goslingsrum.com

5. WOODY CREEK DISTILLERS

Woody Creek Distillers ramps up its collection of Colorado-made spirits with the limited-edition William H. Macy Reserve Straight Rye Whiskey. The 100-proof, 10-year-old bottled-in-bond expression, the inaugural entry in Woody Creek's premium Barrel Select program, features a mash bill of 80 percent rye and 20 percent malted barley that was developed in close collaboration with the actor, who also serves as the distillery's "spokesdude." Nutty notes, punctuated by spiced fruit and smoke, make it ideal for sipping neat or over ice.

\$ SRP: \$199 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 woodycreekdistillers.com

6. SYMINGTON FAMILY ESTATES

Acquired in 2017, Quinta da Fonte Souto, in the Portalegre subregion of the Alentejo in southern Portugal, is the first location from Symington Family Estates outside of the Douro region. Hailing from this cool mesoclimate is the Taifa 2020, a limited-edition, super-premium white wine that nods to the area's Moorish heritage. It marries early-harvested grapes from several plots of mature vineyards with low-yielding vines and tastes of creamy apricot and quince.

\$ SRP: \$105 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 symington.com



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7. CÓDIGO 1530

Código 1530, the additive-free tequila and mezcal brand, launched its first Cristalino tequila. The unique offering consists of a blend of their award-winning reposado, aged in French oak Cabernet Sauvignon wine barrels, and their six-year-old extra añejo, finished in Cognac casks. Aromas of rich vanilla and roasted hazelnuts yield depth and warmth, while notes of cooked agave offer a delicate and balanced sweetness.

\$ SRP: \$89.99 per 750-ml bottle

codigo1530.com

8. OLD OVERHOLT

The first cask-strength whiskey from Old Overholt since the mid-20th century, the 10-year-old Old Overholt Extra Aged Cask Strength Rye was aged in one of the James B. Beam Distilling Co.'s last remaining "escalator warehouses" in Clermont, Kentucky. The 121-proof limited-release morphs from vanilla to brown sugar to leather on the palate.

\$ SRP: \$99.99 per 750-ml bottle

beamdistilling.com

9. CK MONDAVI AND FAMILY

Baking spice, toasted oak, and touches of mocha and blackberry define the 2022 vintage of CK Mondavi and Family's Dark Cabernet Sauvignon. The Petite Sirah blend is harvested from grapes sustainably grown on the winery's 1,850 acres of estate vineyards in Dunnigan Hills, California, outside of Sacramento.

\$ SRP: \$7.99 per 750-ml bottle

ckmondavi.com

10. DASSAI BLUE

Dassai Blue, the U.S. extension of Japanese sake brand Dassai, has unveiled its flagship Dassai Blue Type 23. The Junmai Daiginjo is produced in small batches at Dassai Blue's newly opened brewery in New York's Hudson Valley from precisely polished Yamada Nishiki rice sourced in Japan and balances delicate floral and pear flavors with a robust backbone.

\$ SRP: \$79.99 per 720-ml bottle

dassai.com

11. TRES GENERACIONES

In 1973, Don Francisco Javier Sauza created the recipe for what is purportedly the world's first añejo tequila. To commemorate that milestone, Tres Generaciones has released the limited-edition 50th Anniversary Añejo—its first prestige tequila and the third offering in the Legacy Edition series—aged for 14 months in American oak barrels treated with an in-house charring process that culminates in a gentle smokiness. It's housed in a green ceramic bottle that aptly calls to mind Don's original decanter.

\$ SRP: \$199 per 750-ml bottle

tresgeneraciones.com

12. PICCADILY DISTILLERIES

The Indri Diwali Collector's Edition 2023 recently arrived stateside, and now Piccadilly Distilleries has debuted its Indri Dru single malt Indian whisky in the U.S. An ode to the ancient ritual of offering gods sips of the divine drink, or *soma*, from vessels of wood, the 114.4-proof spirit was mellowed in former bourbon casks hand-picked by master blender Surrinder Kumar, garnering layers of vanilla, chocolate, and honey.

\$ SRP: \$80 per 750-ml bottle

piccadilly.com

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Ron S., Frederick County

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Maben K., Anne Arundel County

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- I.M. Wine
- Dual Hwy. Liquors
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- Hideaway Lounge
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- Shop Rite Liquors
- Harpers Choice Liquors
- John's General Store
- Star Liquors
- Cranberry Liquors
- Woodensburg Market
- Ye Old Packaged Goods
- Old Orchard Liquors
- The Liquor Store
- Camelot Liquors
- Centreville Liquors
- Federal Hill Wine & Spirits

- Staples Corner Liquors
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A BEVERAGE BIZ LOOK AHEAD AT THE MARYLAND 2024

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

As the next General Assembly session nears, those who fight the good fight for the beverage industry in Annapolis will be focused squarely on two threats. The first is any legislation that seeks to allow beer and wine sales in supermarkets and chain stores. The Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) has opposed such bills for decades and will continue to do so in 2024.

MSLBA Legislative co-Chair David Marberger of Bay Ridge Wine & Spirits in Annapolis remarks, “The fact that grocery stores are still not selling alcohol is always going to be a big victory . . . as long as that’s a true statement! Sometimes there are different angles from our opposition on that. For us, at the end of the day, there is really no good way for that to be presented. Period! Every year that it goes by that it doesn’t get passed, we consider it a win. We also know that, with that win, comes another attempt the following year. It is a short-lived ‘Hurrah!’ for us, because it’s a perpetual thing. You can never rest on your laurels. We, as retailers, always have to stay focused and paying attention. And we always have to

"You can never rest on your laurels. We, as retailers, always have to stay focused and paying attention. And we always have to keep communicating with our legislators. You have to let them know who we are and what we do."

David Marberger, MSLBA Legislative Chairman



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The second threat is one the Legislature is currently grappling with: whether to extend the direct shipment privileges it gave to Maryland manufacturers during the COVID-19 crisis, which have been extended every year since. Attorney and MSLBA lobbyist J. Steven "Steve" Wise states, "MSLBA has opposed these extensions in part because of constitutional concerns which were borne out this summer when the State was sued by out-of-state manu-

facturers who contend that the temporary law treats in-state and out-of-state manufacturers differently. The State now faces a choice of ceasing this effort, which is what MSLBA believes should be done, or allowing every manufacturer in the country to ship into Maryland."

Marberger and others saw such a legal challenge happening way before one was filed. He remarked, "No one ever wants to say, 'I told you so!' But we laid out what we thought was going to happen. And, sure enough, it happened!"

MSLBA's other Legislative co-Chair Jack

Milani assured, "Direct shipping will be an important issue in 2024 if only because of the fact that now there is indeed a lawsuit against the State. The Legislature is going to have to decide if they want to open up the market to direct shipping to consumers for every distillery and brewery in the country. That is a question that will have to be answered. Are we going to treat the out of state like we treat the in state?"

Milani, proprietor of Monaghan's Pub in Baltimore, believes another issue state legislators are going to take up in the new year is "Internet gaming and lottery. Our



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"MSLBA has opposed these [direct shipping] extensions in part because of constitutional concerns which were borne out this summer when the State was sued by out-of-state manufacturers who contend that the temporary law treats in-state and out-of-state manufacturers differently. The State now faces a choice of ceasing this effort, which is what MSLBA believes should be done, or allowing every manufacturer in the country to ship into Maryland."

J. Steven 'Steve' Wise, MSLBA lobbyist

concern is what will that do to the brick-and-mortar lottery agents? How will it affect those folks who sell the lottery in their stores and restaurants? Being able to play online, will that take away foot traffic?"

All three men interviewed for this piece stressed the need for beverage business professionals to band together, reach out to their local lawmakers, and stand up for themselves and their industry. According to Marberger, "every four years, it's a different group of legislators. Some years, it's a massive change of elected officials. Most, though, want to come back for another four-year term. But you never know what a new elected official's mindset is. What is his or her background? Where do they come from? How are they going to perceive the different topics?"

Wise concurred, adding, "Speak up! Too many industry members assume someone else is doing the work needed to keep the industry healthy. Trade associations are very effective bodies, but only if members participate. . . . Good defense wins games, so it isn't always what we get passed dur-

ing the legislation session. It is sometimes what we prevent from passing. Holding off the supermarket legislation in the 2023 Session was a big win."

To this end, Milani stated, "If I could have our members concentrate on one thing, it would be the relationships with their legislators. Don't wait until the session starts. Know who your legislators are, be in contact with them, get to know them, and explain our business to them. Tell them how many employees you have. Show them how you fit into the neighborhood and what you do for the community."

Such strength in numbers will go a long way to relieving anxieties and keeping state government on the side of the small business operator. Marberger fears the day the supermarket operators might put on their most aggressive, full-court press yet for grocery stores to sell beer and wine as they do in other states. He wonders, "Will all of the large chains band together and form some mega-group and throw all of the money in the world at new legislation? Will one or two rise above the rest and lead

the charge? We don't know. Vigilance!"

Looking ahead, all three interviewees definitely see some formidable challenges on the horizon. Wise notes that the federal largesse that "rained funding down" upon the states during and after the pandemic has run out. "Maryland's Governor has already signaled that either belt-tightening or higher taxes and fees, or some combination thereof, are going to be required. An alcohol tax increase will no doubt be on the menu of options if higher taxes are considered."

But all three agreed that if beverage pros band together, they have an excellent chance of surviving anything that comes their way. Milani urged in conclusion, "When issues come up, you want to have the chance to present your side of things. And when those elected officials sit down and debate these issues, we want them to have in mind the small businesses in their district. It helps when people know your story, know what you do, and how many local people you employ." ■

"If I could have our members concentrate on one thing, it would be the relationships with their legislators. Don't wait until the session starts. Know who your legislators are, be in contact with them, get to know them, and explain our business to them. Tell them how many employees you have. Show them how you fit into the neighborhood and what you do for the community."

Jack Milani, MSLBA Legislative Chairman



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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW

EASTERN IMPRESSION

India's eco-friendly **Piccadilly Distilleries**—known for Indri 'Trini,' the country's first triple cask single malt—has brought its extremely limited Indri Diwali Collector's Edition 2023 (there are just 450 bottles) stateside. The 121-proof peated single malt, born from six-row barley and matured in PX sherry casks, tastes of candied dry fruits, toasted nuts, and dark chocolate, an expression of North India's subtropical climate.



SRP: \$135 per 750-ml bottle

NEW TERRITORY

Since 2013, **Barrell Craft Spirits** has been blending numerous cask-strength whiskeys with liquids sourced from distillery partners around the world. But fresh from its recently opened 31,000-square-foot facility in Jeffersontown, Kentucky, is Barrell 'Foundation' Bourbon, its first-ever, equally bold non-cask strength expression, uniting five- to nine-year-old Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and Maryland whiskeys all bottled at 100 proof. It features a mash bill of 73 percent corn, 23 percent rye, and four percent malted barley.



SRP: \$59.99 per 750-ml bottle

QUARTER-CENTURY REWARD

The **Glenrothes Scotch Whisky**, part of the Edrington portfolio, has offered a 25-year-old in the past, but The 25 showcases a new 86-proof liquid reflecting a high proportion of first fill sherry-seasoned casks. Overseen by master whisky maker Laura Rampling, The 25 elicits aromatic fruit with rich, nutty layers revealing vanilla, chocolate, and marzipan, and its updated bottle is housed in a contemporary fully recyclable cylinder.



SRP: \$750 per 700-ml bottle



SECOND REFLECTION

Last year, **Kentucky's Blue Run Spirits** made a splash with Reflection I bourbon. For its follow-up, the just as approachable Reflection II, whiskey director Shaylyn Gammon added a touch of the original to the base, toned down the rye, upped the proof from 95 to 100, and instead of emphasizing dark notes of oak and caramel, highlighted the brighter mid-palate ones, like orange peel and honey that lead to a finish of spicy citrus oil and powdered sugar.

SRP: \$99.99 per 750-ml bottle

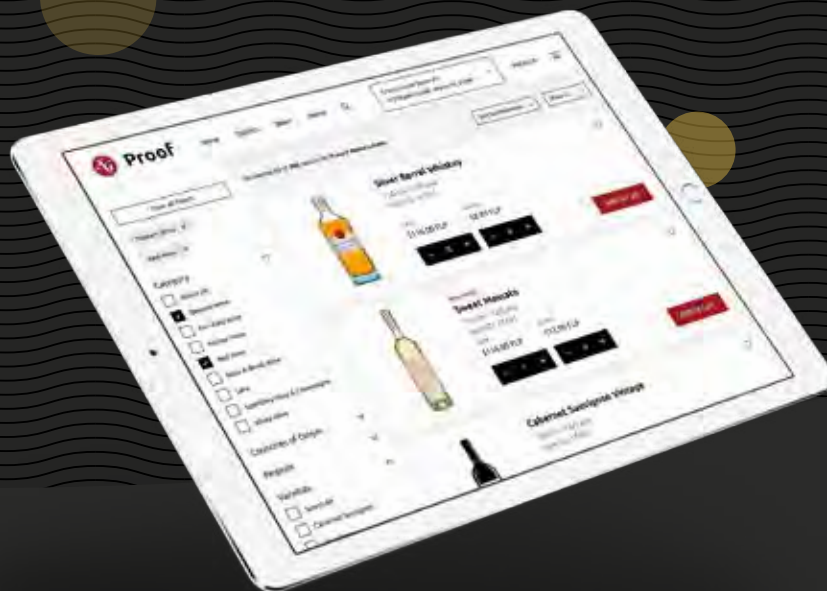
ON THE JOURNEY

Pinhook Bourbon's The Vertical Series charts the evolution of 1,350 MGP casks as they mature from four to 12 years old. The latest of these limited-edition releases aged and blended at Castle & Key Distillery in Frankfort, Kentucky, is the 114.6-proof eight-year-old. Marrying 120 different barrels, it exhibits flavors of cherry, plum, cinnamon, and burnt sugar.

SRP: \$89.99 per 750-ml bottle



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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



YEAR-LONG SUMMER

Melinda Maddox, the production manager and rising master blender at Colorado's **Old Elk Distillery**, has crafted the limited-release 111.7-proof Cigar Cut Island Blend from a combination of whiskeys in the brand's cask finish series. The base of high-malt straight bourbon whiskey, straight rye whiskey, and straight wheat whiskey was aged for a minimum of six years and finished in Port, Sauternes, sherry, and rum casks for an additional two months to two years, yielding tropical notes of honey, pear, and vanilla.

SRP: \$129.99 per 750-ml bottle

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

A duo of new Kentucky straight bourbon expressions aged in Bardstown from **Hirsch Selected Whiskeys**, the third edition of The Single Barrel and the second edition of The Single Barrel Double Oak, have arrived in limited quantities of 50 and 30 barrels, respectively. The Single Barrel, melding two mash bills in new American oak casks with a char # 4, exhibits layers of stone fruit and cashew butter, while the Single Barrel Double Oak tastes of caramel and vanilla underpinned by fruity aromas.

SRP: \$89.99 (The Single Barrel) and \$149.99 (The Single Barrel Double Oak) per 750-ml bottle



EUROPEAN TOUCH

Eager to introduce a bold whiskey influenced by Port, Murphy Quint, master blender at Iowa's **Cedar Ridge Distillery**, has turned out the 117.2-proof QuintEssential Special Release Portside. Distilled from 100 percent two-row pale malted barley, the limited-edition six-year-old American single malt was first matured in former Cedar Ridge bourbon barrels, then finished in first-fill ruby Port, first-fill amontillado sherry, and virgin French oak casks before the liquids were blended.

SRP: \$99.99 per 750-ml bottle



IRISH LAND



Waterford Whisky deepens its exploration of Irish terroir with Organic Gaia: Edition 2.1. Made from organic barley grown on six different farms, the 100-proof Irish single malt, a newcomer to the Arcadian Farm Origin range, showcases sustainable distillation practices and a tasting profile that is equal parts malty, earthy, and subtly sweet.

SRP: \$79.99 per 700-ml bottle



BLUEGRASS STATE'S FINEST

Gem of Kentucky, the newest offering from whiskey blender **Dixon Dedman's 2X0** label, is a double barreled, single barrel Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey, the first of its kind on the market. From the stocks of his high-rye bourbon mash bill, Dedman selected single casks that spent up to a year in new charred oak prior to bottling. To call attention to the annual release's full-bodied, nuanced flavors, courtesy of Dedman's innovative double barreling process, the 108-proof whiskey is packaged in a sleek black bottle.

SRP: \$199.99 per 750-ml bottle

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WINTER COCKTAILS



ZACAPA HARMONY COBBLER

1 oz. Zacapa No. 23 Rum
 ½ oz. red vermouth
 ¾ oz. lemon juice
 ½ oz. hibiscus or plain simple syrup

Method: Add all ingredients to a shaker with ice. Shake well and strain into a wine glass filled with crushed ice. Garnish with fresh mint, citrus and berries.

GRAPEFRUIT SIDECAR

2 oz. Cognac Park VS 'Carte Blanche'
 ¾ oz. Giffard Crème de Pamplemousse
 ¾ oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice

Method: Combine all ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake vigorously and double strain into a coupe glass with a sugar rim.



NOLET'S SILVER SPARKLING MOONLIGHT

2 oz. Nolet's Silver Gin
 2 oz. crème de violette
 1 ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
 2 oz. fresh tangerine or orange juice
 Champagne or sparkling wine

Method: Rim a coupe glass using a lemon slice and a shallow dish of sugar or edible glitter. Chill the glasses until ready to use. Combine Nolet's Silver, crème de violette, and the lemon and tangerine juices in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake well, and then strain into the prepared coupe glass, top with Champagne and garnish with a lemon twist.



ROSITA

1 oz. Campari
 ½ oz. 1757 Vermouth di Torino Rosso
 ½ oz. 1757 Vermouth di Torino Extra Dry
 1 ½ oz. Espolón Reposado Tequila
 dash aromatic bitters

Method: Stir the ingredients in a mixing glass with ice and strain over fresh ice in a rocks glass. Garnish with a lemon peel.



5 WINE TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2024

THE YEAR AHEAD WILL FOCUS ON SOIL HEALTH, LABOR, AND INNOVATIONS FROM THE EAST COAST, WHILE COOPERATION AND CONSOLIDATION RESHAPE THE INDUSTRY

BY BETSY ANDREWS

Inflation, declining sales, labor shortages, climate crises—the wine world had plenty of stress in 2023. But there are also reasons for hope. As eco-minded winemakers push more earth-friendly practices and a new generation puts its stamp on ways of making and enjoying wine, creativity and expansion are on the horizon—if we’re willing to think outside of established boxes. Here’s what to look forward to in 2024.

01 REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE IS THE NEW GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY STANDARD

Four years ago, when Maison Mirabeau’s Stephen Cronk bought a vineyard, its soil was so degraded from conventional agriculture that he couldn’t repair it by farming organically. Then he read about Mimi Casteel, the owner of Oregon’s Hope Well Wine. Using a set of principles called regenerative agriculture—improving soil and water health, increasing biodiversity,

integrating livestock, eliminating chemicals, and more—Casteel had created a diverse ecosystem capable of sequestering carbon while yielding great wines. “She was working with nature, not against it,” says Cronk.

Today, Casteel and Cronk are the co-founders of the Regenerative Viticulture Foundation (RVF), a new “hub to accelerate understanding of the science behind regenerative agriculture,” as Cronk describes it, supported by big players—Jackson Family Wines, Moët Hennessy, and Famille Perrier. Theirs is not the only such effort. In 2021, Spain’s Familia Torres, among others, formed the Regenerative Viticulture Association, now with 100-plus members across nine countries. It partnered with the RVF in 2023 on a certification program, which follows the U.S.-led Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC) program, launched by Patagonia and the Rodale Institute as part of the Regenerative Organic Alliance (ROA). Porto Protocol, International Wineries for



Climate Action, and other organizations have also taken up regenerative principles. It is a sea change for viticulture.

“Regenerative farming is spreading faster than we’d hoped,” says Jason Haas of Tablas Creek, the first ROC-certified winery. “The ROA just announced that there are a million acres under ROC certification worldwide. It’s



Stephen Cronk, Maison Mirabeau.

mostly been biodynamically farmed wineries who've jumped in, but it has potential to be more widely adopted. It's applying cutting-edge science on soil health, which helps address the critique that biodynamics is unscientific."

Given all the buzz, there is a danger of what Porto Protocol's Marta Mendonca calls "regenawashing." But third-party verification "allows for higher transparency and accountability," says Joseph Brinkley, the director of regenerative agriculture at ROC-certified Bonterra.

With that assurance, "it's going to be part of how progressive retailers look at sustainability, and might be built into procurement policies," says Tom Owtram, the operations and partnerships manager at Sustainable Wine Roundtable (SWR). "It's going to be the year for regenerative viticulture in 2024."

02 LABOR COMES INTO FOCUS—BECAUSE IT MUST

The motivation for converting Bonterra from biodynamics was ROC's social component. "For the longest time the conversation has been, 'how can we farm without exploiting the soil?' The labor part was left out," says Brinkley. "It misses the mark to think we can create certifications that don't consider the well-being of farm workers, but still impact the food system."



Joseph Brinkley, Bonterra.



A living wage, fair working conditions, a grievance process—wineries benefit from ensuring them. Weekly farmworker feedback sessions enacted as part of Tablas Creek's certification have led to more efficient workflow and less equipment breakage. "The living wage has meant that we're able to staff up whenever we need," says Haas.

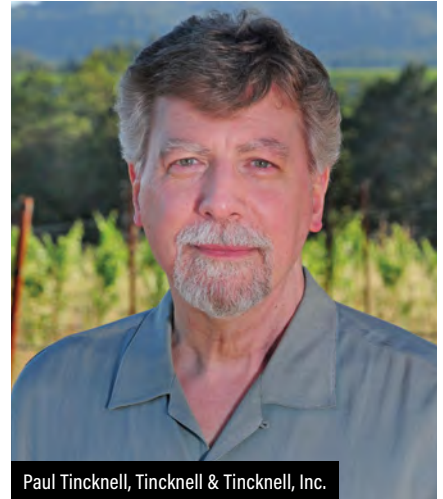
That's crucial in an industry where 45 percent of businesses struggle to find workers. Labor abuse and shortages go hand in hand, as workers refuse low-paying, onerous jobs, and desperate estates turn to unscrupled subcontractors. With all this surfacing in the past year, the conversation is now focusing on solutions.

Following convictions in Bordeaux and investigations in Champagne over human trafficking by subcontractors, and the death of five workers, the Comité Champagne formed a working group to recommend fair standards for seasonal workers. After an Oxfam report found abuse in the Italian wine industry, Sweden, Norway, and Finland's state monopolies sponsored a 2023 SWR series on labor issues and human rights. Now the SWR is developing guidance on best labor practices. "Retailers want to see it addressed by suppliers," says Owtram.

03 CONSOLIDATION—AND COOPERATION—RESHAPE THE INDUSTRY

"During COVID, selling wine was easy because people demanded escapism," says Massican Wines' founder and winemaker Dan Petroski. Post-pandemic sales have declined, and production costs are higher. That's led to consolidations, as larger players scoop up cash-strapped mid-sized ones. In the first half of 2023, the industry saw 11 major deals. The second half brought Duckhorn's \$400 million purchase of Sonoma-Cutrer, Treasury Wine Estates' acquisition of Daou for up to \$1 billion, and Gallo's buy of Rombauer and Massican.

With its massive logistics operations, Gallo will allow Petroski to focus on Mas-



Paul Tincknell, Tincknell & Tincknell, Inc.

sican's affordability and accessibility, and Petroski predicts more such deals in 2024.

Paul Tincknell, a partner at the marketing consultancy Tincknell & Tincknell, Inc., agrees. Global production is at its lowest in six decades. "I expect to read about mergers and acquisitions that consolidate buying power into fewer corporations, which distorts grape and bulk wine prices, forcing vineyard sales and closures."

It's even worse in distribution. "Multi-state distributors continue to merge with others and expand market share. Combined with big producers, who favor the reach of big distributors, this chokes off access for mid-sized wineries and shuts the door on smaller wineries," Tincknell explains.

The Treasury Department issued a 2022 report with recommendations for government agencies to discourage industry monopolization.

Collaborations also suggest a way forward. Jahdē Marley, the founder of [ABV] Ferments and distributor of the By the Hand portfolio, points to Vermont, where Shelburne Vineyards, Eden Specialty Ciders, and Iapetus Wines have merged. "It's not a big dog coming in, but small businesses banding together for efficiency," she says.

Custom crush facilities are becoming more cooperative, too, focusing on underserved populations, such as AVP Wine Collective in Oregon or Virginia's Common Wealth Crush.

04 CO-FERMENTATION BECOMES INCREASINGLY COMMON

Marley is incubating a Petit Manseng-pawpaw co-ferment at Common Wealth Crush. It will be among a growing number of co-fermented wines. These are not traditional vinifera co-ferments, nor are they the fruit wines that regional producers have long made for sweet palates. They're serious experiments in diversification by a young, eclectic generation of winemakers not beholden to vinifera. In Sonoma, Buddy Buddy's Not My Circus is a Gravenstein apple and Orange Muscat sparkling. In Virginia, Lightwell Survey co-ferments apples with the hybrid grapes Chambourcin and Vidal Blanc. Vermont's Fable Farm Fermentory co-ferments many ingredients for bottles such as Cuvée Viticole, a fizzy wine of apples, raw honey, maple sap, La Crescent grapes, chagga, sumac, and schisandra berries.

Wine pros are claiming co-ferments as expressions of non-European and non-mainstream traditions. Marley notes the cashew wine, mauby, and other fermented drinks of her Jamaican ancestry. Darwin Oniyx Acosta, who will make their own wine through the Common Wealth incubator in 2024, named their queer wine events platform Co-Fermented to express its non-binary nature. Julianny Gómez, the cofounder of the natural wine club Preshift!, points out that the new co-ferments "harken back to traditions of black winemakers, where ancestors made wine



Annette Boyd, Virginia Wine Board.

with fruit, like plum wine." As a sommelier of Dominican descent, she notes that these acid-driven wines "cater to BIPOC culinary traditions, complementing spices and cutting through fattier cooking."

They also offer an avenue to new consumers. "We're seeing more shops and bars carry co-ferments," observes Reggie Leonard, the founder of Virginia-based wine club Oenoverse. "Co-ferments seem fun, un-serious, and an on-ramp you can enjoy without a background in wine."

For winemakers, co-fermentation also presents a solution to climate challenges. When frost damaged Willamette Valley vineyards in 2022, Lois and Dave Cho padded out production with apples, adding the juice of seven heritage varieties to Pinot and Chardonnay skins for a force-carbonated sparkling at CHO Wines. Now they're planning apples, pears, maybe blackberries along with vines on land they just purchased. "Oregon is a place where all these grow well, so it's sustainable and smart," says Lois.

05 THE EAST COAST MAKES AN EVER BIGGER SPLASH

Much of the energy around co-fermentation and other trends is coming from the East Coast. "Some influential East Coast voices have come around to looking in their backyards," says Marley.

In Virginia, vineyard acreage grew from under 3,000 in 2012 to over 5,000 in 2022. "It's a big state with many microclimates," says Annette Boyd, the marketing

director for Virginia Wine Board. Viognier, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot; hybrids like Norton and Traminette—"There's a lot of experimentation and excitement for tasting what grows where." With cult winemakers like Ben and Tim Jordan, the cofounders of Common Wealth Crush, luring younger professionals, Reggie Leonard compares Virginia's scene to the Harlem Renaissance, "where people moved close to each other to cultivate that emergence."

A similar phenomenon is unfolding in Vermont, where Deirdre Heekin, the founder of La Garagista, has inspired a new generation. "Before her, everyone said it couldn't be done. Now interest for this region has grown exponentially," says Kathline Chery, Kalché's director of production.

New wineries are operating in Maine, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and in New Jersey, where wine had a \$4.69 billion impact in 2022. Humidity and a hurricane season that coincides with harvest are challenges, but the biggest problem, is "getting people to take us seriously," says Dustin Tarpine of New Jersey's Cedar Rose Vineyards and the management company Vinetech.

East Coast wine pros are helping. "When I started 10 years ago, no one considered drinking this stuff," says Frank Kinyon, the wine director at A.kitchen + A.bar in Philadelphia. "There's a lot of movement now, and a focus on hybrids, which are more sustainable. We sell them by saying you can think of them as the future of wine." ■



Reggie Leonard, Oenoverse.



Frank Kinyon, A.kitchen + A.bar.



4 SPIRIT AND COCKTAIL TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2024

FROM A NEW ERA FOR NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES TO A WIDENING WORLD OF WHISKIES, HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE YEAR TO COME

BY PAMELA VACHON

In 2020, IWSR Drinks Market Analysis reported that global beverage alcohol consumption was not expected to rebound to pre-pandemic levels until 2024. Here we are; but as we await actual figures, there's no denying both the surge that certain beverage categories have experienced since the pandemic began, alongside a marked shift in consumer behavior and consumption. And more change is brewing. With nearly half of Gen Z reaching the legal drinking age by the end of 2024, the years ahead will be dynamic, as this younger generation's value system begins to shape the course of spirit and cocktail consumption.



01 CONSUMER INTEREST GROWS IN A WIDER RANGE OF ASIAN SPIRITS

Asian spirits such as Japanese shochu, Korean soju, and Chinese baijiu are among some of the oldest and most widely consumed spirits worldwide, though they are still new to many American consumers. While buzz around sake and Japanese whisky has been build-



ing for several years, a broader range of Asian beverages are expected to gain momentum in 2024. Figures from Datassential show an increase in consumer interest in soju at 50 percent, in baijiu at 37 percent, and in shochu at 40 percent. The latter has benefited from the lobbying efforts of the Japan Sake & Shochu Makers Association to have it more clearly labeled in the U.S., with recent success in California and New York. (For decades it's been mislabeled as Korean soju, adding to consumer confusion.)

"While Gen Z is less engaged with the [beverage-alcohol] category overall, their 'love it' ratings for Japanese whisky and soju are on par with their affinity for more established categories like Kentucky bourbon," says Claire Conaghan, the associate director of Datassential. "This will likely help propel innovation in blended categories that include those ingredients, like sake soda or a soju seltzer."

02 NO- AND LOW-ALCOHOL BEVERAGES GO MASS MARKET

No- and low-alcohol beverage consumption has exploded in recent years, with a Nielsen IQ report showing double-digit growth for the non-alcoholic category between 2020 and 2022. This year saw the category expand and evolve even further.



ABOVE: Ritual Zero Proof non-alcoholic spirits range.

Ritual Zero Proof non-alcoholic spirits rolled out in 400 Walmart stores nationwide in October 2023, demonstrating new mainstream retail opportunities for alcohol alternatives. “As alcohol sales decline, Walmart has recognized non-alcoholic as a new revenue driver, and one that supports a more inclusive drinking experience,” says Marcus Sakey, the cofounder of Ritual Zero Proof.

Wilderton, a botanical zero proof spirit from Hood River, Oregon, opened America’s first non-alcoholic distillery tasting room in July 2023. “While the non-alcoholic category is growing exponentially, general consumer awareness is still limited as to what non-alcoholic spirits taste like, how they are made, and how easy they are to enjoy at home,” says Brad Whiting, the cofounder and CEO, who aims to address that with Wilderton’s tasting room. “The reception has been absolutely incredible.”

A fledgling mid-strength trend is also building with the arrival this year of brands such as Sommarøy Spirits, offering gin and vodka expressions with a mellower 27.5% ABV. “In a landscape where non-alcoholic options have gained significant traction, we recognized the absence of a mid-strength spirit that could meet the discerning standards of these moderation-minded consumers,” says Michael Barkin, its cofounder. So far, other brands in this subcategory are based in the U.K., such as Quarter and Luxlo, demonstrating its potential for growth in the U.S.

RIGHT: T. Cole Newton, Twelve Mile Limit.
OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT: The Tokki Soju range, which launched in 2016.

03 | COFFEE COCKTAILS MOVE PAST THE ESPRESSO MARTINI

Rising in popularity over the past few years to become one of the top ten cocktails in the U.S, according to a report by CGA by NielsenIQ, the Espresso Martini has ushered in a new era of coffee cocktails. “It’s a great starting point for interpretation,” says T. Cole Newton, the owner of New Orleans’ Twelve Mile Limit and the current president of the United States Bartenders’ Guild. “I was recently tasked with judging a cocktail contest that tasked competitors with updating a classic, and more chose the Espresso Martini than any other,” he says.

Many of the top cocktail bars are eschewing variants on the Espresso Martini in favor of other coffee cocktail expressions. Backbar, a bar inventory resource, did some math on that score: more than half of North America’s 50 Best Bars have coffee cocktails on their signature menus, with less than half of those cocktails appearing as Espresso Martini variants.

Beverage pros are placing bets on which coffee cocktail will unseat the Espresso Martini. “My money’s on a modern update to the Mind Eraser—a sparkling variation on the Black Russian—toppling the Espresso Martini from its throne,” says



ABOVE: Billy Abbott, The Whisky Exchange.

Laura Unterberg, the owner of The Fox Bar and Cocktail Club in Nashville.

04 | THE MAP OF WORLD WHISKEY EXPANDS

Alongside the popularity of Japanese and Taiwanese expressions, whiskeys from other lesser-recognized whiskey-producing countries are attracting attention among aficionados, and pushing established regions and brands toward innovation. Denmark’s Stauning, Israel’s Milk & Honey, Australia’s Starward, and Peru’s Black Whiskey have taken top prizes in competitions and evaluations in the last couple of years.

South America could be of particular interest to whiskey fans. “South American whiskeys are exciting as they come from an area without a long tradition, so almost anything goes,” says Billy Abbott, an ambassador for The Whisky Exchange and the author of *The Philosophy of Whisky*. “Add to that the continent’s excellent wines, giving the potential for maturation in casks [not typical] in more traditional whiskey countries, and you’ve got a recipe for new styles and flavors that we’ve not seen before.”

With whiskey projected to overtake vodka sales by volume in the U.S. for the first time in two decades, as reported by IWSR Drinks Analysis, look to see more of these world whiskeys enter the U.S. market in the coming year. ■



6

BEER INDUSTRY TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2024

ALTERNATIVES WITHOUT CARBONATION, IMPROVED CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND CONSOLIDATIONS ARE ON DECK FOR THE COMING YEAR IN BEER

BY: JOSHUA M. BERNSTEIN

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he brewing industry endured another bruising year of business. Craft breweries experienced close to zero growth in 2022, while sales declined two percent in the first half of 2023, according to the Brewers Association. The drumbeat of brewery closures bangs weekly, symptomatic of “a mature and competitive marketplace,” says Bart Watson, the chief economist for the Brewers Association.

Craft beer is no longer novel, but “this doesn’t mean the industry is in decline or going away,” says Trevor Nearburg, the founder of Beerburg Brewing in Austin, Texas. “It just means that we, as brewers, must get much more refined in our approach.”

To survive and thrive, breweries will focus on easygoing lagers with mass appeal, offer crowd-pleasing pizza and burgers at taprooms, and explore producing wine, spirits, and THC beverages—now legally stocked at Total Wine in Minnesota and specialty shops



such as Craft Beer Cellar in Belmont, Massachusetts.

“In 2024, craft will have to do what craft does best: adapt,” says Dennis Stack, the sales and marketing director at Lone Tree Brewing in Lone Tree, Colorado, which makes the Ufloric sparkling water with hops and hemp oil.

As the brewing industry navigates another 12 months of spirited competition and capricious consumer behavior, these six trends will resonate throughout 2024.

01 | TAPROOMS PUT A PREMIUM ON SERVICE AND HOSPITALITY

Smiling service hasn’t historically been taprooms’ strength. Why bother? In the late 2010s, customers queued for four-packs and pints no matter a bartender’s attitude. As taprooms evolve into full-service bars and restaurants, brewery owners will dial in service.



OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: Allagash Brewing in Portland, Maine. // RIGHT: Alternate Ending Beer Co. in Aberdeen, New Jersey.
ABOVE: 4 Noses Brewing in Broomfield, Colorado.

“People are looking for good beer and a good experience,” says Jason Bell, the founder of Living the Dream Brewing in Littleton, Colorado.

With interest rates stubbornly high, investing in internal operations is a low-cost tactic to boost a taproom’s appeal. Alvarado Street Brewery, which has three California locations in Monterey, Salinas, and Carmel-by-the-Sea, is delaying big-ticket projects and looking to improve its worker experience and tighten service standards, says J.C. Hill, the founder and brewer.

Even if the beer is excellent, subpar service can leave a bad taste in customers’ mouths. “The consumer experience in our taproom has to be best in class,” says Anthony Martuscello, the founder and president of WestFax Brewing in Lakewood, Colorado.

02 | BREWERIES GET MORE CREATIVE WITH FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Enticing drinkers to abandon couches for beer festivals remains difficult. “Breweries and event organizers need to be more creative,” says Rob Lutz, the brewmaster and a cofounder of StormBreaker Brewing in Portland, Oregon.



Trevor Nearburg, Beerburg Brewing.

In 2023, StormBreaker rebooted its Brewstillery Fest, pairing local distillers and brewers to curate a spirit-and-beer pairing. The Snallygaster Festival in Washington, D.C., combines rare beers with wine, cocktails, and live music, while Barrel & Flow Fest in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, centers Black brewers alongside musicians, artists, and nonprofits.

“I see continued upside in this area, especially for those breweries who give a great experience,” says Brady Barlow, the cofounder of West Sixth Brewing in Lexington, Kentucky. It runs an annual IPA festival at its Louisville, Frankfort, and Lexington locations, part of a style-driven approach gathering steam.

In particular, expect more celebrations focused on lagers, a growing interest for breweries. Bagby Beer in Oceanside, California, runs the Low & Slow celebration, while Buoy Beer in Astoria, Oregon, produces the Lager Fest. And this June, lager-focused Notch Brewing in Salem, Massachusetts, will debut the Forever Lager music and beer festival.

03 | MORE BREWERS PURSUE NON-ALCOHOLIC AND MINDFUL DRINKING OPTIONS

As the non-alcoholic category expands, companies will leverage brand equity to roll out non-alcoholic versions of popular beers and hard seltzer.

December welcomed White Claw 0% Alcohol, while Karl Strauss will release a non-alcoholic version of its stalwart Red Trolley Ale in its pubs during Dry January. Nationally, consumers will find non-alcoholic Blue Moon, the Belgian-style witbier from Molson Coors Beverage Company.

“Not every occasion calls for a beer,” says Lesley Albright, the vice president of



TOP, RIGHT: St. Elmo's non-alcoholic Hop Water.
ABOVE: Bryan Winslow, St. Elmo Brewing.

marketing for Sierra Nevada Brewing in Chico, California, and Mills River, North Carolina. The company is launching the non-alcoholic Trail Pass line, including an IPA and a golden ale, and adding Hop Splash Citrus, a non-alcoholic hop water.

Hop waters will find occasions outside beer-drinking hours. “Drinking multiple non-alcoholic beers in the morning seems strange,” says Bryan Winslow, the owner of St. Elmo Brewing in Austin, Texas, which makes a hop water. “But drinking sparkling water that tastes herbal and citrusy sounds nice.”

Hop-infused beverages help secure new drinking occasions and shelf placements. Last year, Brooklyn Brewery took a stake in Hoplark, the maker of non-alcoholic hopped teas and sparkling water. “It’s a great way to follow consumers into areas where beer doesn’t normally go while still working with beer ingredients,” says Eric Ottaway, the CEO of Brooklyn Brewery.

Mindful drinking can extend to serving size. Westbound & Down Brewing in Lafayette, Colorado, now packages barrel-aged beers in eight-ounce cans. “Less is more,” says head brewer and managing

partner Jake Gardner. The smaller format “fits into the new era of drinking.”

04 | BEVERAGE COMPANIES DITCH CARBONATION TO ATTRACT CUSTOMERS

Craft beer is no longer the new kid, and many early boosters are reaching middle age.

“With a younger generation steering away from a ‘traditional buzz,’ it is getting difficult to keep throwing the same beers at the same people,” says Dustin Ramsey, the director of marketing at 4 Noses Brewing in Broomfield, Colorado.

Molson Coors is keying on bloating carbonation as a tension point for of-age Gen Z consumers. “We think a large group of consumers will be entering their ‘bubble-free’ era in 2024,” says Jamie Rotnicki, the vice president of innovation for Molson Coors.

This March, the company will release the Happy Thursday “spiked still refresher” in bold flavors like pineapple starfruit. Happy Thursday will join Funny Water, a low-ABV line of flavored alcoholic waters, and NOCA’s uncarbonated boozy waters and hard iced tea.

Hard tea’s allure of big flavors and no bubbles is borne out in the continued growth of Boston Beer Company’s Twisted Tea brand, which dominates the category. Craft breweries will tee up uncarbonated hard teas tailored for their core markets. Last spring, Great Lakes Brewing in Cleveland, Ohio, debuted the low-sugar SunSail Hard Teas, and Cinderlands Beer Company in Pittsburgh released Cindi’s Hard Mountain Tea.



ABOVE: Eric Ottaway, Brooklyn Brewery.

05 | BREWERIES WILL CONSOLIDATE TO SHARE RESOURCES AND SURVIVE

Even five years ago, becoming a national brand felt inevitable for fast-growing regional breweries. Increased costs and competition, plus changing consumer tastes, have placed midsize breweries in an unenviable position.

“Breweries that don’t have the required scale to achieve massive national distribution, but aren’t small enough to be hyperlocal, will feel the squeeze,” says consultant Chris McClellan, the founder of Resin and the Draught Shop.

Market pressures will lead to consolidations and alliances to cut costs and fill excess capacity. Last spring, brand house Wings & Arrow merged with Ninkasi Brewing of Eugene, Oregon, to form Great Frontier Holdings; in November, Great Frontier purchased decade-old Ecliptic Brewing in Portland, Oregon, moving production to Ninkasi.

“The sale will allow me to pay back our debts and align the brand with a bigger entity to allow it to continue,” Ecliptic founder John Harris said in a statement.

Also in November, Smuttynose owner Finestkind Brewing acquired Brooklyn’s Five Boroughs Brewing and will move production to its Hampton, New Hampshire, facility. The same month, Dry Dock Brewing announced it was shuttering its Aurora, Colorado, production facility and relocating most of its production to Great Divide Brewing in Denver.

06 | BRAND VALUES BECOME A BIG SELLING POINT

During craft brewing’s 2010s boom, making great beer was a market differentiator. Now that terrific beer is table stakes, breweries will distinguish themselves through brand values.

Recently bought by Tilray Brands, 10 Barrel Brewing in Bend, Oregon, champions a fun-loving outdoor lifestyle. “New consumers view brands as an extension of their personalities and connect with these brands on a much deeper level,” says director of brand marketing Brian Hughes.

A brewery’s values can become a potent selling point. “Consumers are looking past the product itself and more at the company they’re buying from,” says Rob Tod, the founder of Allagash Brewing in Portland, Maine. The brewery is doubling down on its Certified B Corporation status by using more Maine-grown grains and strengthening nonprofit partnerships and community giving.

“Many breweries are deeply connected to their communities, and this is where they can shine over multinational conglomerates,” says Melissa Walter, the cofounder of Love City Brewing in Philadelphia.

Diverse breweries will also use beer to connect with overlooked communities. Lucky Envelope, a Chinese-American brewery in Seattle, makes beers with Asian ingredients like pandan leaves and hosts an annual Lunar New Year celebration. “There will be a more concerted push to appeal to a diverse, atypical beer drinker,” says Barry Chan, the cofounder and head brewer.

The last half-decade has seen breweries toss everything on tap, stoking interest through experimentation. The dizzying pace is unsustainable; there’s always another new beer, hard tea, or hop water awaiting. As Mike Contreras, the director of operations for 2SP Brewing in Aston, Pennsylvania, says, “The future of beer relies on building real currency with the consumer.” ■



Alternate Ending Beer Co. lineup of beers.