

# Beverage Journal

FEBRUARY 2022



**25 INNOVATORS  
REVOLUTIONIZING  
THE WORLD OF  
WHISKEY**

**2022 WHISK(E)Y  
GAME CHANGERS**



**TIPS FOR  
FINDING  
THE RIGHT  
DISTRIBUTOR**

**PERNOD  
RICARD USA  
PUTS PURPOSE  
TO WORK**



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COVER CREDIT: iStock

**2021...SOME FINAL NUMBERS**

On-premise employment continued modest growth into the final month of 2021, but overall employment levels remained well below pre-pandemic numbers.

Bruce Grindy, National Restaurant Association chief economist observed, "In total during 2021, eating and drinking places restored nearly 1.7 million jobs to payrolls. While this was easily the largest calendar-year employment increase on record, it still left the industry roughly 650,000 jobs – or 5.3% – below pre-pandemic staffing levels."

Although restaurant job growth slowed in recent months, demand for employees remains high. "For most restaurants, staffing was significantly below necessary levels. Among restaurants that were understaffed in November, 75% of operators said their restaurant was more than 10% below necessary staffing levels." Grindy continued, "Thirty-one percent of understaffed operators were more than 20% below necessary staffing levels."

**THE EFFECTS OF BEING UNDERSTAFFED**

So, what is the impact of 80% of the on-premise side of the industry being understaffed?

- shortened hours of operation
- reduced number of items on the menu
- closed on days that would normally be open
- reduced seating capacity

**STAFFING ISN'T THE ONLY PROBLEM**

Supply challenges and soaring food costs are also a concern of the on-premise operator. Grindy explained, "Restaurant menus were the most likely to be impacted by the recent supply chain challenges. Eighty-five percent of fine dining operators and 81% of casual dining operators said



their restaurant changed menu offerings as a result of food supply delays or shortages."

According to a National Restaurant Association survey, 91% of on-premise operators said their total food costs are higher than they were prior to covid. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) confirmed that food costs have jumped 12.2% between November 2020 and November 2021.

**THE ON-PREMISE OPERATORS' OUTLOOK FOR 2022**

Obviously, profits are down for the vast majority of on-premise operators. With staffing challenges, supply chain disruptions and increased food costs, it's a wonder that so many establishments are able to open at all.

According to the survey, most operators don't expect their profitability to improve in 2022. A mere 1 in 4 operators think their restaurant will be more profitable in 2022 than it was in 2021. Sadly, 1 in 3 operators expect to be less profitable in 2022.

**SOME GOOD NEWS**

This February edition marks the beginning of a new series of articles on 'theme' bars and restaurants in Maryland and the District of Columbia. There are on-premise establishments that are realizing profits in these tough times. Some operators are finding unique niche atmospheres for their customers to enjoy.

*Beverage Journal* staff writer, Teddy Durgin will be exploring these locales and sharing their stories throughout the year. His first stop? Five Iron Golf in Baltimore. Check out his first installment beginning on page 8, where you may, 'find your balls'. ■

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# NEW PRODUCTS



## 1. TEREMANA AÑEJO

Nearly two years after launching the small-batch, accessibly priced Teremana Tequila, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson and his partners have rolled out the vanilla- and oak-forward Teremana Añejo alongside the blanco and reposado. Once the blue Weber agave is slow-roasted in traditional brick ovens and distilled in copper pot stills at Destileria Teremana de Agave in Jalisco, the añejo is aged in American whiskey barrels. Finally, each bottle is hand-dipped in black wax prior to packaging.

**\$** SRP: \$39.99 per 750ml bottle

**🌐** [teremana.com](http://teremana.com)

## 2. BURNING MAST RUM

Burning Mast, Kirk and Sweeney’s limited-release Dominican rum available through 3 Badge Beverage Corporation, begins with hand-harvested sugarcane that is processed into blackstrap molasses for fermentation and distillation and aged in American and French oak casks. It combines 81 percent Kirk and Sweeney Reserva rum with 19 percent Kirk and Sweeney Reserva rum that was finished in red pepper barrels for between 11 and 19 days.

**\$** SRP: \$49 per 750ml bottle

**🌐** [kirkandsweeneyrum.com](http://kirkandsweeneyrum.com)

## 3. TEQUILA KOMOS

On the heels of Tequila Komos Añejo Cristalino’s 2020 debut, Casa Komos Brands Group has rolled out the high-end Tequila Komos Reposado Rosa (SRP: \$109.99) and Tequila Komos Extra Añejo (SRP: \$399.99). Upon aging in French oak, red wine barrels from Napa, the former, with chocolate and dark fruit notes, is stored in handmade, porcelain-glazed amphorae; the latter is aged for a minimum of three years in one-time French white wine and American oak whiskey casks, eliciting undertones of candied ginger and toasted pecans.

**\$** SRP: \$109.99 and \$399.99 per 750ml bottle

**🌐** [komos.com](http://komos.com)

## 4. CLYDE MAY’S

A slew of new offerings from Clyde May’s, part of the Conecuh Brands portfolio, includes the Clyde May’s Single Barrel Straight Bourbon 5-year-old, Clyde May’s Special Reserve Straight Bourbon 6-year-old, Clyde May’s Cask Strength Alabama Style Whiskey, and Clyde May’s Kentucky Straight Bourbon 15-year-old. The 120-proof Alabama edition, aged for 13 years, is the most recent release in Clyde May’s Cask Whiskey Continuity Program, which started in 2016 with an 8-year-old.

**\$** SRP: \$49.99 to \$199.99 per 750ml bottle

**🌐** [clydemays.com](http://clydemays.com)

## 5. HOOGHOUDT GENEVER

The genever collection from Family Distillery Hooghoudt, in the Netherlands, has arrived stateside via the Sazerac Company’s 375 Park Avenue Spirits division. Hooghoudt, established in Groningen in 1888, has an export portfolio comprising a “Holland Gin,” the five-year-old Aged Genever, the new-style Sweet-Spiced Genever bringing together ingredients like mace and apricot, and the non-alcoholic Zero Zero 24, a mix of floral distillates and extracts.

**\$** SRP: \$19.99 to \$39.99 per 700ml bottle

**🌐** [hooghoudt.com](http://hooghoudt.com)

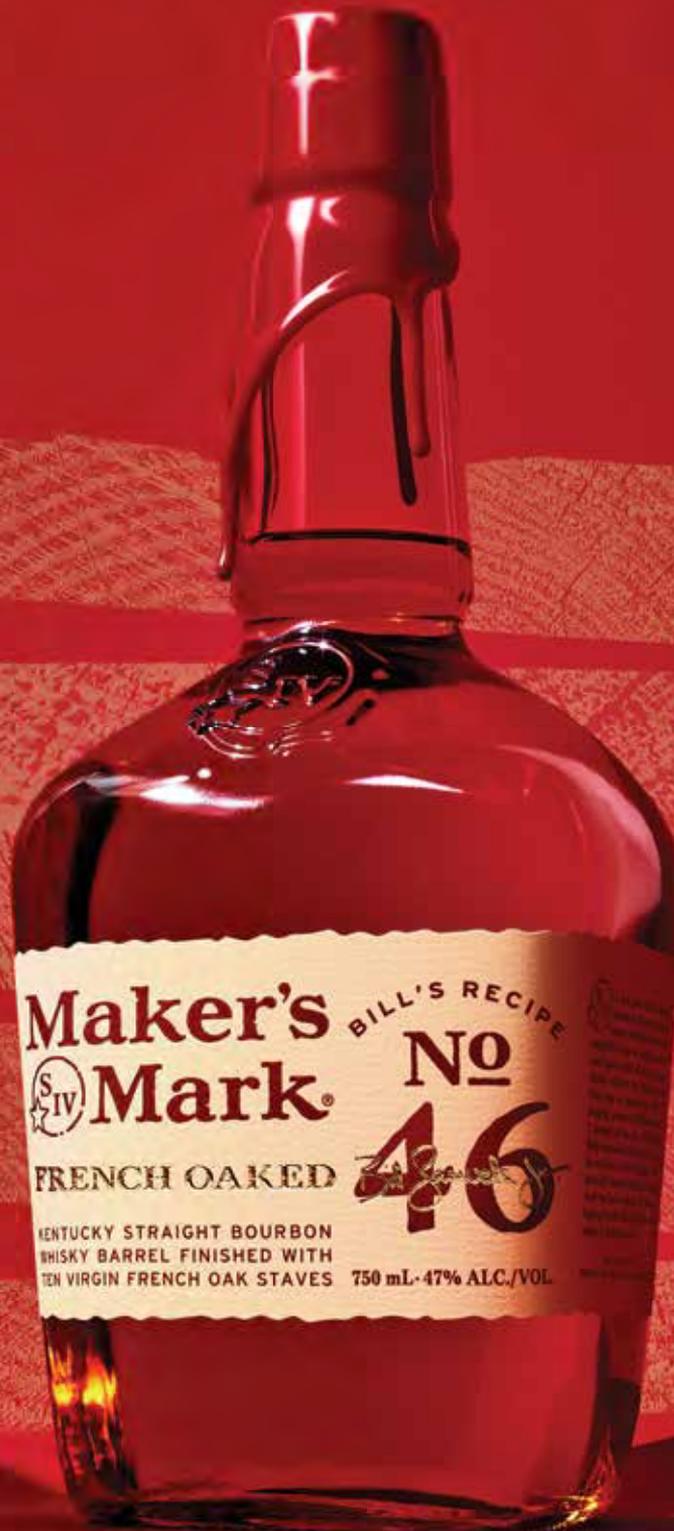
## 6. AUSTIN EASTCIDERS SPICED PEACH

Spiced Peach is the newest limited-release creation from Austin Eastciders. Melding fresh peaches with crisp, bittersweet apples and such mulling spices as orange, cinnamon, and nutmeg, it, like all products from the Austin, Texas, cidery, stars real fruit and shuns artificial sweeteners.

**\$** SRP: \$9.99 per 12-pack of 12oz cans

**🌐** [austineastciders.com](http://austineastciders.com)

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**7. FREY RANCH SINGLE GRAIN**

Colby and Ashley Frey, founders of Frey Ranch Distillery, are showcasing the individual grains grown on their 1,500-acre Fallon, Nevada, farm in the couple's new Single Grain series of whiskeys. Both bottled at 100-proof, the limited-run Frey Ranch Single Grain 100% Oat Whiskey (SRP: \$59) and Frey Ranch Single Grain 100% Wheat Whiskey (SRP: \$49) are spawned entirely from grains that were planted and malted onsite and aged for 6.5 years. Twelve additional varieties for the collection are currently maturing in casks.

**\$** SRP: \$49 and \$59 per 375ml bottle  
**🌐** freyranch.com

**8. ON THE ROCKS MANHATTAN**

On the Rocks, the range of premium, bar-quality ready-to-drink cocktails developed in partnership with Beam Suntory, now features a Manhattan. Prepared with Basil Hayden Dark Rye, vermouth, and bitters, it marries spice and fruit notes and joins an open-and-serve lineup already known for the Aviation, Cosmopolitan, Mai Tai, Margarita, and Jalapeño Pineapple Margarita.

**\$** SRP: \$12.99 per 375ml bottle  
**🌐** ontherockscocktails.com

**9. WHEYWARD SPIRIT**

Mildly sweet and creamy whey, a byproduct of cheese, is the backbone of Wheyward Spirit, sustainably made in collaboration with domestic dairies to help combat food waste. The first distilled specialty spirit of its kind, Wheyward is a choice stand-in for vodka, gin, and rum in classic cocktails like the White Russian, Martini, and Daiquiri because of its vanilla cream and spice flavors.

**\$** SRP: \$57 to \$59 per 750ml bottle  
**🌐** wheywardspirit.com

**10. SAGAMORE SPIRIT BOTTLED IN BOND**

For nearly a decade, Sagamore Spirit has been on a mission to revive Maryland's centuries-old tradition of making rye whiskey. Now there's the 100-proof Bottled in Bond, a limited-edition blend of two straight whiskeys (one a high-rye mash bill, the other low) that is produced entirely at Sagamore Spirit's Baltimore distillery before barrel-aging for four years at a nearby rickhouse. Just like it did during the country's colonial era, the versatile spirit exhibits rye spice and toasted caramel on the palate.

**\$** SRP: \$59.99 per 750ml bottle  
**🌐** sagamorespirit.com

**11. STELLUM BLACK BOURBON AND BLACK RYE**

Following the release of its flagship bourbon and rye, Stellum Spirits, produced by Barrel Craft Spirits, has unveiled the elevated, limited-release, 109.22-proof Stellum Black Bourbon and 114.26-proof Stellum Black Rye. These cask-strength Stellum Black spirits, distilled and aged in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, highlight a distinctive layering technique that blends older reserve barrels from the stocks into the original whiskeys.

**\$** SRP: \$99 per 750ml bottle  
**🌐** stellum.com

**12. HERMOSA ORGANIC TEQUILA**

Newcomer Hermosa Organic Tequila, available in silver, reposado, and añejo expressions, was founded by Mexico native Will Elger. Inspired by a 1939 bottle of homemade tequila gifted to Elger's father, the USDA and EU organic-certified Hermosa, which uses 100 percent blue Weber agave, is crafted the old-fashioned way, by the family-run Tequilas Las Americas NOM 1480 in Jalisco. To minimize waste, every part of the harvested agave plant is embraced at the distillery.

**\$** SRP: \$44.99 to \$59.99 per 750ml bottle  
**🌐** hermosatequila.com



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FIVE IRON GOLF



# Five Iron Golf

Sitting on Top of Baltimore's Leaderboard

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN JARED BELL



This is the first in a series of articles on theme bars and restaurants around the state of Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The first entry couldn't be cooler for those looking for a swinging club to swing their clubs. Five Iron Golf in Baltimore is part of a growing chain of businesses that offer golf simulators, indoor golf lessons, and top-quality food and drink choices. The goal is to re-shape urban golf culture with additional locations now up and running in Chicago, Las Vegas, Manhattan, Philadel-

phia, and elsewhere with more to come.

Frank Purdy, General Manager of Five Iron Golf in Baltimore, remarked during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, "We are the nation's leading indoor golf and entertainment experience. We don't have a 'thumb-your-nose' country club vibe. All are welcome. And we combine the golf with excellent food and beverage service, as well. We have golf simulators where you're hitting a golf ball off a matt onto a screen. But after 15 minutes, you get lost in the [virtual reality] that

you're playing Pebble Beach or one of the great courses the PGA has to offer."

He continued, "There are a couple of courses in the city and a couple of driving ranges. But as those tend to book up on the nicer days really quickly, we offer another avenue for you to get your golf fix without having to travel outside the city 15 or 20 minutes at minimum. Five Iron Golf is a good thing to have in an urban area. They can walk over with their clubs or we have clubs for them to use. They can walk

(continued on page 10)

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"We are the nation's leading indoor golf and entertainment experience. We don't have a 'thumb-your-nose' country club vibe. All are welcome. And we combine the golf with excellent food and beverage service, as well. We have golf simulators where you're hitting a golf ball off a mat onto a screen. But after 15 minutes, you get lost in the [virtual reality] that you're playing Pebble Beach or one of the great courses the PGA has to offer."

**Frank Purdy, General Manager, Five Iron Golf**

right in and get a round in."

And, of course, customers can walk right in and have a fine meal or a round of appetizers or just drinks. The golf-themed menu has creative categories like "Go for the Green" (salads) and "The Majors" (burgers, sandwiches, and entrees). Meanwhile, the drink selection is a solid mix of beers, wine, soft drinks, and specialty cocktails.

"We really lean into what our community likes to drink," said Purdy. "We listen, we pay attention. We want to make sure that we are bringing them the options they want. We have a constantly changing menu. Actually, I would call it a 'constantly adapting' menu. We have our golfers who love their certain types of drinks. Our service philosophy is whether we're setting you up on a Track-Man (a radar-based, \$20,000 unit that gives you real-time measure-

ments about your swing) or just bringing them a soda or a nice glass of whiskey, we want that service to be the same across the board. So, whether we're setting someone up on a golf simulator or just bringing them food and beverage to a table, we want that to be the best."

Purdy and his staff also offer certain drinks that golfers would expect to order if on a real course or clubhouse. "Our John Dalys and our Transfusions are our biggest sellers," he noted, "basically because they're 'golf drinks.'"

He added, "We've also developed some great relationships with our distributors. For example, we have a great relationship with one of the craft beer breweries, and they let us rename/re-brand one of their beers. It was the Duckpin Pale Ale, but it's now the 5i Pale Ale." Five Iron's Baltimore location also boasts a really





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KENTUCKY STRAIGHT BOURBON  
**WHISKY**



Five Iron Golf's Fitting Lab is a combination of best-in-class technology and club-fitting experts. Not to mention an expansive selection of club, shaft and grip options.

good bourbon collection, with Pappy Van Winkle being particularly popular.

Before getting into hospitality, Purdy started his professional career in corporate event coordination on the audio-visual side. He transitioned into an accounting role with a consulting company. On the side, he worked several odd jobs including sales at Bay Wine & Spirits in North Beach, Md., where his mother is the co-owner.

"Five Iron combines two of my favorite things in the world – golf and a bar!" he exclaimed. "I've worked my way up from server to manager to eventually being in charge of our Baltimore location, and here we are. Five Iron has been a unique experience in that we're not just food and beverage. The fact that we have the golf simulators, we were able to follow all of the rules put in place by our municipality as far as COVID restrictions. We initially opened back up as just a golf simulator and kept our kitchen and bar closed for a while. As restrictions started easing, we were able to open up with each new step and were able to serve food and drink and offer that whole customer experience. People in Maryland, they love their golf. And in the wintertime, when you can't go outside, our loyal customers come in, and we can't keep golfers away from hitting balls."

Along the way, Purdy has soaked in advice from several mentors across various industries. One key piece of advice that helped him as GM of Five Iron Golf was to "develop relationships." Purdy says

he treats every interaction as an opportunity for a new relationship, whether it's Five Iron's members who come in frequently or the various distributors who go from location to location. Perhaps the best advice he was given was from a former co-general manager at Five Iron Golf: "He once told me, 'The best ability is availability.' That will stick in my head forever."

Looking ahead to 2022, Purdy says there is reason for optimism at least with regards to Five Iron Golf. In early November, the four-year-old startup secured a \$30 million investment from golf-behemoth Callaway. Meanwhile, the Baltimore location's subscriber base continues to grow.

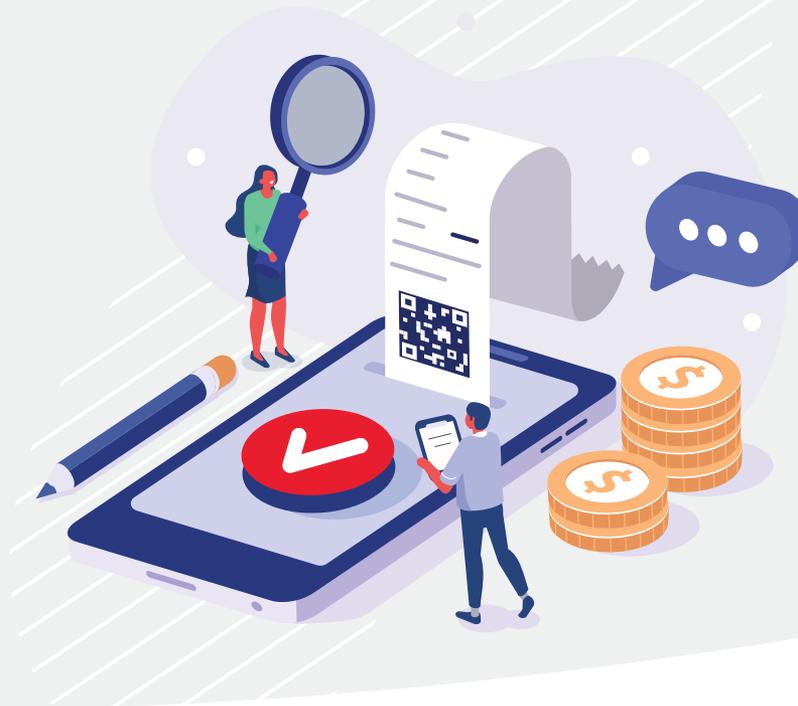
Purdy concluded, "I take it one day at a time, especially given how things are constantly changing. We like to be adaptable. I believe we have been here at Five Iron. Given how the community has stood behind us from the very beginning of the pandemic all the way through now, I am optimistic that we are going to continue to see success." ■



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# WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



## FOR THE LOVE OF BEER

**Woodford Reserve's** 90.4-proof Five-Malt Stouted Mash is essentially master distiller Chris Morris and assistant master distiller Elizabeth McCall's love letter to heavy, wintry beer. This 17th limited-edition Master's Collection release stars roasted, malty, cocoa-rich stout flavors enlivened with spice, baked fruit, and orange zest.

SRP: \$129.99 per 750ml bottle

## A WELCOME SEQUEL

Allt Glean, the second single malt Scotch whisky in **Torabhaig's** Legacy series, is the follow-up to Legacy 2017, which debuted in 2021. Torabhaig, the second-ever distillery on the Isle of Skye, part of the Mossburn Distillers portfolio, embraces a style of whisky self-described as well-tempered peat. The 92-proof small-batch Allt Glean is heavy on the peat, yet refined and rife with maritime character.

SRP: \$62 per 750ml bottle



## ANOTHER ROUND

BCS Gold Label Bourbon, a 113.54-proof limited-edition spirit from independent blender and bottler **Barrell Craft Spirits**, brings together 16- and 17-year-old straight whiskeys distilled in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee and matured in a variety of casks, including ones that impart distinctive milk chocolate notes. Before the liquids from those barrels were added to the mix, they underwent the highly unusual step of a second maturation in toasted, virgin American oak casks.

SRP: \$499 per 750ml bottle

## SERIES FINALE

Booker's Batch 2021-04, also dubbed "Noe Strangers Batch," is the final release in the **Booker's Bourbon** 2021 collection. This uncut, unfiltered whiskey is selected from barrels with four different production dates by seventh-generation Beam master distiller Fred Noe as an homage to the convivial nature of Fred's late father Booker Noe, the brand's sixth-generation distiller and creator of his eponymous bourbon. Aged for 6.5 years in charred white oak barrels, the 124.4-proof 2021-04 leads with vanilla and brown spice aromatics.

SRP: \$89.99 per 750ml bottle



## ALL TOGETHER NOW

Diageo's annual release of limited-quantity single malts has made its way stateside. The 80- to 91.6-proof 2021 Distillers Edition collection features complex bottlings from six venerable Scottish distilleries—**Oban, Talisker, Lagavulin, Cragganmore, Dalwhinnie, and Glenkichie**—using their core offerings as a base. Each of the chosen whiskies, from a specific year, is double-matured in different wood casks that held sherry or Port.

SRP: \$84.99 to \$109.99 per 750ml bottle



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# WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



## IRISH OAK

The fourth installment of the **Midleton** Very Rare Dair Ghaelach collection celebrates Kylebeg wood from Ballykilcavan Estate in Ireland's County Laois. Through a sustainable forest management system, seven trees were selected, from which casks were fashioned in Spain. Back in Ireland, they were filled with single pot still whiskeys previously aged in American oak barrels for between 13 to 25 years and bottled at cask strength in proofs ranging from 110.8 to 112.2. Robust spice is rounded out by stewed apple, orange peel, and dark chocolate.

SRP: \$340 per 750ml bottle



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

After the successful launch of its 24-year-old version, Diageo's Orphan Barrel Whisky Co. has unveiled a second single grain Scotch whisky, the limited-release Muckety-Muck 25-year-old. Culled from the rare, salvaged stocks of the now-shuttered 200-year-old Port Dundas distillery, the 91-proof whisky is named for the prized pig who once dwelled at Port Dundas and tastes of crisp fruit, subtly toasted oak, and butterscotch vanilla.

SRP: \$249.99 per 750ml bottle

## THE COMEBACK

**Knob Creek** 15-year-old first made a splash on the market in 2020. Now, the pre-Prohibition-style Kentucky straight bourbon is back on shelves for a limited time. The 100-proof, full-bodied whiskey, Knob Creek's most mature offering yet, was created from barrels that were most amenable to aging. It fuses layers of caramel and toffee with toasted oak and leather.

SRP: \$99.99 per 750ml bottle



## ZESTY UPGRADE

Mules, highballs, smashes, and Cosmopolitans alike can all be made now with **Jameson Orange**, a bright riff on the original triple-distilled Jameson. Taking cues from the classic Old Fashioned cocktail, this 60-proof Irish whiskey creation is blended with natural orange flavoring and exhibits a palate of spicy, nutty vanilla that culminates in a sweet citrus finish.

SRP: \$24.99 per 750ml bottle

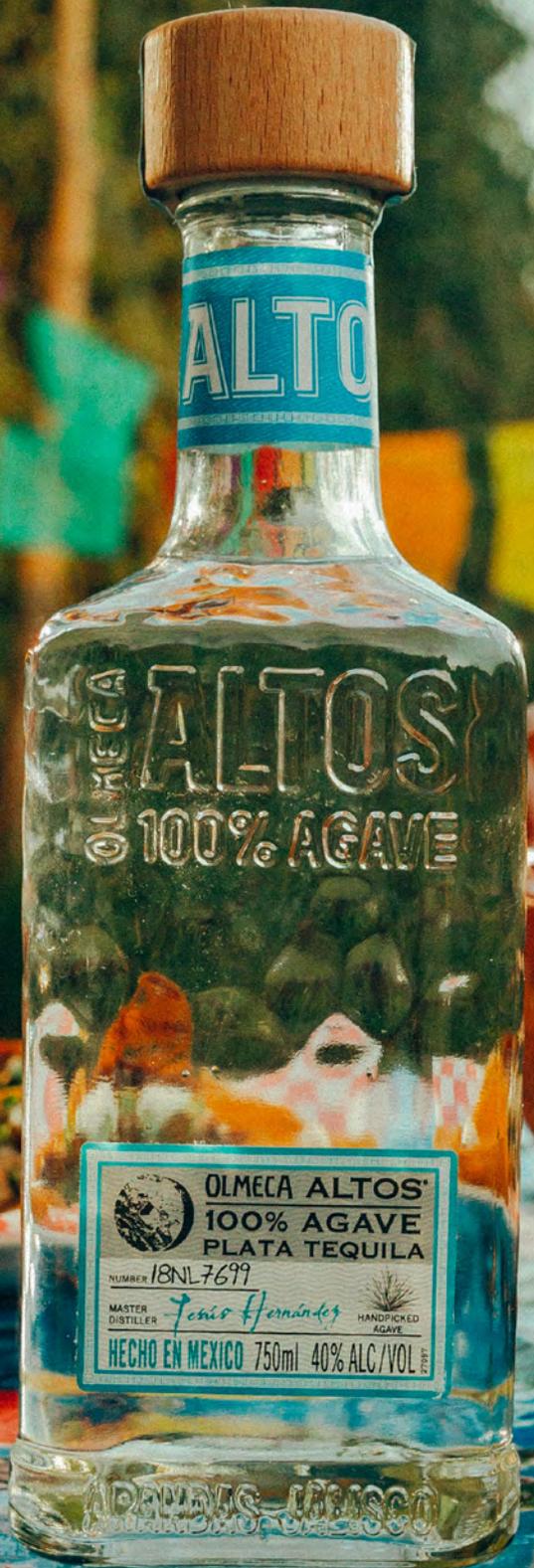
## TOP OF THE LINE

**Crown Royal Aged 18 Years**, the brand's most premium expression to date, unites an "extra rare" blend of Canadian whiskies that express stone fruit, caramel spice, and nougat. For the launch of the 80-proof spirit, Crown Royal collaborated with celebrity grillz makers Scotty ATL and Eddie Plein. Their luxe sets, benefiting the Atlanta Artist Relief Fund, were studded with VVS diamonds and opals that drew inspiration from the liquid and its bottle design.

SRP: \$139.99 per 750ml bottle



VOTED A BEST TEQUILA  
*for margaritas*  
BY BARTENDERS  
SINCE 2019



OLMECA ALTOS  
100% AGAVE  
PLATA TEQUILA  
NUMBER 18NL7699  
MASTER DISTILLER *Jesús Hernández* HANDPICKED AGAVE  
HECHO EN MEXICO 750ml 40% ALC/VOL

OLMECA **ALTOS**  
100% AGAVE



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# 2022 *WHISK(E)Y* *GAME CHANGERS*

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MEET 25 INNOVATORS BRINGING DYNAMIC NEW IDEAS,  
TECHNIQUES, AND INGREDIENTS TO REVOLUTIONIZE THE  
WORLD OF WHISKEY

BY NOAH ROTHBAUM

W

hen I first started writing about whiskey more than 20 years ago, it was all about history.

After the category's crash in the 1970s, whiskey brands were in free-fall for several decades—trying to hold on while working out ways to win drinkers back from vodka. History (whether true or finessed) became the anchor of marketing efforts, many of which appealed to a new generation obsessed with craft products of all kinds. At the time, innovation was a no-no, and there was a fervent insistence that whiskey, whether made in the U.S., Scotland, or Ireland, was made the same way it had been hundreds of years ago.

In 2014, legendary drinks historian David Wondrich asked me to help him

research and edit the massive *Oxford Companion to Spirits & Cocktails*. For the next seven years, we worked with more than 150 contributors from around the world to understand and explain how drinks have evolved and developed. My work on that book (published November 2021), as well as my role as editor of *The Daily Beast's* Half Full section and the podcast *Life Behind Bars*—which I host with Wondrich—unearthed stories that showed a major shift for whiskey.

There has been a tremendous evolution in the whiskey industry. As sales skyrocketed and new innovators entered the category—at both established distilleries and new start-ups from India to Wales to Colorado—the category has been, and continues to be, reinvented.

Creativity is surging. It now seems almost like nothing is off-limits as distillers and blenders experiment with new techniques, ingredients, and even philosophies of production and maturation. It has been truly fascinating to watch and report on.

So as you can imagine, putting together a list like this wasn't easy. There are now so many people in the industry breaking new ground. But the people I wanted to recognize are the ones who are making meaningful contributions to our industry that will change not only how we drink today, but also in years and decades to come.

Read on to meet 25 people who are currently leading the charge and shaping the category's dynamic future.

**TREY ZOELLER,  
JEFFERSON'S BOURBON, KENTUCKY**

**FOR BRINGING BACK  
OCEAN-VOYAGE AGING**

While many recent whiskey innovations have revolved around maturation, one of the most interesting of these new

techniques has a very long history. Trey Zoeller, the founder of Jefferson's Bourbon, has been experimenting with aging his whiskey aboard a ship on the high seas. It is an age-old idea that dates to when liquor was first transported around the world in casks. Distillers found that their spirits not only survived these lengthy voyages, but also tasted better. This epiphany led to distillers embracing the idea of barrel aging on dry land, which wasn't usually done. Zoeller's Ocean Bourbon is well traveled, visiting 25 ports and five continents before being bottled.



years ago, while reading a government study from the turn of the century, he discovered the long-forgotten three-chamber still. This key piece of distilling machinery had famously been used for decades to make rye before disappearing in the 1930s. Leopold was fortunately able to convince Kentucky-based Vendome Copper & Brass Works to fashion him one of these stills. After several years of trial and error, he just released the first rye whiskey made on the still, and it's an incredible taste of liquid history.

**TODD LEOPOLD,  
LEOPOLD BROS., COLORADO**

**FOR RECLAIMING THE EXTINCT THREE-  
CHAMBER STILL**

Distiller Todd Leopold stumped many whiskey know-it-alls with the introduction of his Three Chamber Rye Whiskey. Several



ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF ISTOCK / TREY ZOELLER BY ANDREW KUNG / TODD LEOPOLD BY LADD FORDE



**NICOLE AUSTIN,  
GEORGE DICKEL, TENNESSEE**

## FOR SHAKING TENNESSEE WHISKEY UP

It takes quite a bit of gumption to start making bourbon in Tennessee. Distillers in the state have historically gone out of their way not to call their whiskey bourbon, but that's what distiller Nicole Austin did this year. What no doubt helped squash any dissent is that Austin is one of the best distillers working in America today—and the whiskey is delicious. Her annual bottled-in-bond releases are eagerly anticipated and the first one was named Whisky Advocate's whiskey of the year in 2019. Given Austin's creativity and curiosity, I can't wait to try what other whiskeys she'll dream up.

**ROB DIETRICH, BLACKENED  
AMERICAN WHISKEY, COLORADO  
AND DREW KULSVEEN, WILLETT  
DISTILLERY, KENTUCKY**

## FOR CREATING AN UNLIKELY WHISKEY COLLABORATION, BLACKENED X WILLETT

Distillers can be a closely guarded bunch, not known for collaborating with the competition. So it's heartening to hear how distillers Rob Dietrich from Blackened and Drew Kulsveen from Willett joined forces to create a special release, Blackened X Willett—with a little

**SCOTT BLACKWELL AND  
ANN MARSHALL, HIGH WIRE  
DISTILLING, SOUTH CAROLINA**

## FOR CELEBRATING AND POPULARIZING HERITAGE CORN VARIETIES

Leave it to Scott Blackwell and Ann Marshall, the founders of High Wire Distilling in Charleston, South Carolina, to give corn its proper due. Several years ago, they created a whiskey made exclusively with local heritage-strain Jimmy Red, named New Southern Revival Straight Bourbon. It quickly became their signature spirit, and High Wire has persuaded farmers to plant more acres of Jimmy Red every year. Their whiskey is the test case for using local



and regional corn varieties in place of using ubiquitous, and less flavorful, commodity corn.

help from the legendary heavy metal band Metallica. This cask-strength rye whiskey was aged in both American oak barrels and Madeira casks—all the while being blasted with the music of Metallica, which is the Blackened signature maturation technique. Look out for more collaborative releases from Dietrich and other whiskey makers.



**MATT HOFMANN,  
WESTLAND AMERICAN SINGLE  
MALT WHISKEY, WASHINGTON**

## FOR TAKING LOCAL INGREDIENTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Several whiskey makers are trying to use local ingredients and invest in their communities. But few have taken this idea more seriously than Westland cofounder

# THE BOTANIST

## ISLAY DRY GIN

Conceived, distilled  
& hand-crafted  
on the island of  
**ISLAY**

# 22

hand-foraged local  
Islay botanicals



Certified



This company meets the  
highest standards of social  
and environmental impact

Corporation

and master distiller Matt Hofmann, a leader of the American single malt movement. The brand is proudly from the Pacific Northwest and Hofmann not only grows his own heirloom grain varieties, but has also experimented with local peat and an indigenous species of oak to make his barrels. Hofmann and his colleagues continue to find new ways to connect their single malt whiskey to their region, showcasing the power of provenance.

**KEVIN O’GORMAN, IRISH DISTILLERS/MIDLETON, IRELAND**

**FOR WIDENING THE WORLD OF OAK**

While much of the whiskey world has fixated on using either old bourbon barrels or old sherry casks, famous Irish distillery Midleton is using very rare Irish



oak for its series of Midleton Very Rare Dair Ghaelach whiskeys. Last year, the distillery introduced the third whiskey in this pioneering series, which had been finished for two years in barrels made from oak grown in the Knockrath Forest in County Wicklow. The trees had been planted in the 1870s. Midleton master distiller Kevin O’Gorman helped choose

the oak and closely monitored the whiskey until he felt it was ready to release. The Irish wood imparts a subtle spice and hint of a sandalwood-like flavor.

**BRIAN NATION, O’SHAUGHNESSY DISTILLING CO., MINNESOTA**

**FOR MAKING THE FIRST MODERN IRISH-AMERICAN WHISKEY BLEND**

Brian Nation had one of the best jobs in the world. As master distiller of Midleton in Ireland, he was responsible for making Jameson and several other legendary whiskey brands. He surprised everyone when he left his post there to join upstart O’Shaughnessy Distilling Co. in Minneapolis in 2020. While he waits for the whiskey he’s making in the Twin Cities to age (the first release will be in the next couple years), he is currently producing for the distillery’s Keeper’s Heart line a whiskey that combines Irish pot still and Irish grain whiskey with American rye to create a so-called Irish-American blend. It is unique and delicious, and will no doubt inspire other companies to create international whiskey blends.



**SHINJI FUKUYO, SUNTORY, JAPAN**

**FOR RAISING THE PROFILE OF JAPANESE WHISKY**



One of the biggest stories over the last decade has been the explosion in popularity of Japanese whisky. Shinji Fukuyo is one of the innovators responsible for its success. Fukuyo has been Suntory’s chief blender since 2009 and his dedication is legendary: He eats the same lunch of plain soba noodles every day to ensure his palate is neutral. Fukuyo helped move the Japanese whisky category forward by creating a number of award-winning blends and experimenting with a range of different types of whiskeys and barrels. He also teamed up with his American colleague Fred Noe to blend bourbon from Jim Beam’s warehouses into a brand called Legent.

**MEREDITH MEYER GRELLI,  
WIGLE WHISKEY, PENNSYLVANIA**

**FOR BRINGING AMERICAN WHISKEY  
HISTORY TO LIGHT**



Thanks to Lin-Manuel Miranda’s hit musical Hamilton, the story of Alexander Hamilton’s life and untimely death is once again well known. Hamilton also played a pivotal role in spirits history when he instituted taxes which caused the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania. This moment in American history inspired Meredith Meyer Grelli and her family to open Wigle Whiskey, which is named for one of the protestors. She co-wrote the book *The Whiskey Rebellion and the Rebirth of Rye* with her father, Mark Meyer, and created the Whiskey Rebellion Trail that stretches from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. There are few people who have been able to connect whiskey to meaningful local and national history the way that Grelli has done.

**MEGHAN IRELAND AND MITCHAEEL MAHAR, WHISTLEPIG, VERMONT**

**FOR AGING WHISKEY ON THE ROAD**

From small barrels to heavy metal sound waves, there is no dearth of cutting-edge



**LAURA DAVIES AND  
AISTA PHILLIPS, PENDERYN  
DISTILLERY, WALES**

**FOR CREATING A WELSH SINGLE  
MALT IN THE SHADOW OF  
SCOTLAND**

There is a major whiskey distilling boom happening all over the United Kingdom. While brands in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and even in England are receiving most of the headlines these days, there is also

a budding scene in Wales. With the help of legendary blender Jim Swan, Penderyn, located in the foothills of the Brecon Beacons mountain range in South Wales, was created in 2004—the first whisky distillery in Wales in over a century. Distillery manager Laura Davies and blender Aista Phillips have spearheaded the distillery’s creation of a real identity and style, and their single malts, made with a single commissioned copper pot still designed by the famous engineer Dr. David Faraday, have won international acclaim.

ideas for aging whiskey. But WhistlePig’s distiller Mitchael Mahar and blender Meghan Ireland have tried something very different with their RoadStock Rye Whiskey. They filled a tractor-trailer full of barrels—christened the “Rolling Rickhouse”—and drove more than 6,000 miles across the country, including cruising Route 66. A mobile warehouse is a fascinating idea and offers a lot of interesting possibilities for innovation: What would happen if you aged a brand’s whiskey in different climates or elevations? Mobile aging is most certainly a new frontier in experimentation.





**HEATHER GREENE,**  
MILAM & GREENE, TEXAS

## FOR BRINGING A BIT OF SCOTLAND TO THE LONE STAR STATE

Texas-based Milam & Greene stunned the drinks industry this summer when its Port Finished Rye was named Best in Show by the American Craft Spirits Association (ACSA), beating numerous iconic craft spirits for the prestigious honor. But for folks who have been following the career of Heather Greene, the brand's cofounder, CEO and talented master blender, the news was no surprise. Greene has been in the industry for nearly two decades, working first for William Grant & Sons and later writing *Whisk(e)y Distilled: A Populist Guide to the Water of Life*. (She also wrote some stories for my Daily Beast section Half Full.) Greene has brought her experience blending Scotch to the Lone Star State to create a range of bottlings from both sourced and produced whiskey.

**IVÁN SALDAÑA,** ABASOLO  
ANCESTRAL CORN WHISKY,  
MEXICO

## FOR CREATING A MODERN MEXICAN WHISKY CATEGORY

Mexico is famous for its agave-based spirits, tequila, and mezcal, but the country is also the ancestral home of corn. Farmers in the area have been growing it for thousands of years, and it's synonymous with Mexico's culture and heritage. Serial entrepreneur Iván Saldaña was inspired by the need to save many disappearing native strains of corn, so he launched Abasolo Ancestral Corn Whisky in 2020, made entirely from the Cacahuazintle corn variety. He's helping pioneer a Mexican corn whisky movement, which aims to put the category on the world liquor map. He knows a thing or two about starting brands, as one of the masterminds behind Ancho Reyes and Montelobos Mezcal, which were both acquired by Campari.



**GARRETT OLIVER,** MICHAEL  
JAMES JACKSON FOUNDATION FOR  
BREWING & DISTILLING, NEW YORK

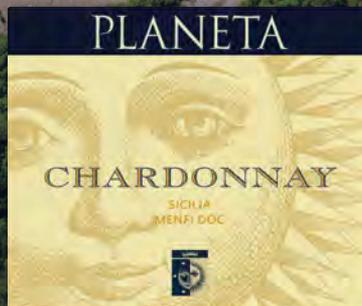
## FOR MAKING THE DISTILLING INDUSTRY MORE DIVERSE

Garrett Oliver is one of the world's preeminent beer experts, brewmaster at the Brooklyn Brewery, and editor of the *Oxford Companion to Beer*. He also runs the Michael James Jackson Foundation for Brewing and Distilling, which this past March began offering educational scholarships to Black, indigenous, and people of color who want to further their drinks knowledge or enter the spirits industry. This year the organization is awarding 13 scholarships and next year hopes to offer even more of them. His important program has the potential to positively change the direction of the spirits industry and attract a new generation of whiskey makers.

# PLANETA

## The Landscape Becomes Wine

  
The Chardonnay Vineyards  
Menfi • Agrigento  
[planeta.it](http://planeta.it)



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**MARIANNE EAVES, FREELANCE  
DISTILLER, KENTUCKY**

## FOR BEING THE GO-TO DISTILLING EXPERT FOR WHISKEY ENTREPRENEURS

Distiller Marianne Eaves is the force behind some of the whiskey industry's most interesting projects, whether it's helping tennis champ Andy Roddick start a Tennessee bourbon or assisting California winemaker Lindsay Hoopes turn her smoke-damaged grapes into brandy. Eaves was trained by Chris Morris at Brown-

Forman before helping the relaunch of Castle & Key as the brand's first master distiller. She is currently a distilling consultant, hired by many entrepreneurs who need her expertise in attempting groundbreaking—and challenging—new whiskey endeavors.

**MARK REYNIER,  
WATERFORD WHISKY, IRELAND**

## FOR RETHINKING THE ROLE OF BARLEY AND TERROIR IN WHISKY

After reopening the Scottish Bruichladdich distillery on Islay and then selling his company to Rémy Cointreau, no one would blame Mark Reynier for wanting to rest on his laurels. But the entrepreneur isn't ready to retire. He recently launched Waterford Whisky in a former Guinness brewery in Waterford, Ireland, to celebrate and explore the beauty of Irish barley. Central to his new brand is the idea of terroir: that whisky should reflect the environment and climate where the barley is grown. Similar to the single-vineyard concept in the wine world, Waterford has a whole series of whiskies made from grain that comes from single specific farms. (The



brand also sells blends of these whiskies as well as ones made with organic and biodynamically grown barley.) While this is a fairly controversial concept for whisky, these ideas will no doubt become more common in the coming years given Reynier's track record.

**RACHEL BARRIE,  
GLENDRONACH, BENRIACH, AND  
GLENGLOSSAUGH, SCOTLAND**

## FOR BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC SCOTCH SINGLE MALTS

unusual techniques. The Naarangi Single Malt is the perfect example of Amrut's ingenuity: Three-year-old whisky is aged a second time in a barrel that previously held Oloroso sherry and orange peels. When I tasted the whisky a few years ago with head distiller Ashok Chokalingam, I was blown away by the flavor of the whisky and the brilliant idea of seasoning a cask with fruit peels.



**ASHOK CHOKALINGAM,  
AMRUT, INDIA**

## FOR RETHINKING THE WAY WHISKY IS PRODUCED

India boasts a thriving whisky industry and Amrut produces a staggering variety of delicious whiskies. The distillery makes use of standard distilling and aging practices and has also created its own interesting and

Master blender Rachel Barrie has a gift for figuring out how to get the best out of some of the most historic single malt distilleries. She has an innate sense of which barrels should be used—and which barrels should not be used—to showcase a brand’s signature style and quality potential. During her nearly 30-year career, Barrie started as a whisky research scientist before her role as master blender at Glenmorangie. She has since held key positions across the whisky industry and is currently working with GlenDronach, BenRiach, and Glenglassaugh. These three single malts really allow her to experiment with whiskies made with a range of techniques—from traditional floor malting to a third distillation to peated barley—and produce an ever-evolving portfolio of bottlings.



### ALEX MUNCH, STAUNING DANISH WHISKY, DENMARK

#### FOR REINVENTING TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES TO CREATE A NEW WHISKY CATEGORY

No one would blame you for thinking the sprawling modernist facility in

### FAWN WEAVER, UNCLE NEAREST WHISKEY, TENNESSEE

#### FOR CORRECTING A HISTORICAL INJUSTICE

Nathan “Nearest” Green helped start Jack Daniel’s, one of the world’s most successful spirits brands. Green was the brand’s original distiller and taught Daniel how to make whiskey. But Green’s name and his pivotal role were largely forgotten, as Black people are largely absent from the story of American whiskey’s origins. Fawn Weaver wants to set the record straight and celebrate Green’s achievements. She started a Tennessee whiskey brand named Uncle Nearest, which not only honors Green’s memory, but also the contributions of countless Black distillers who helped create the American whiskey industry.



Hopefully this is just the beginning of telling this story.

West Jutland, a remote village on the western coast of Denmark, was an avant-garde art museum. But the gorgeous building with glass walls and soaring peaks houses the Stauning Distillery, which was started more than 15 years ago by nine friends, including CMO Alex Munch. The company has become a leader in Scandinavia’s rapidly growing whisky industry. Stauning’s impressive facility features 24 old-fashioned, direct-fire stills, and remarkably the brand only uses local, floor-malted grains to make its range of rye and single malt whiskies.





# PUTTING PURPOSE TO WORK

**PERNOD RICARD USA HAS BUILT A BUSINESS MODEL THAT INEXTRICABLY LINKS GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICES WITH DOING GOOD, AND THEY'RE URGING THE ENTIRE DRINKS INDUSTRY TO FOLLOW SUIT**

The drinks industry has faced a series of unprecedented challenges since COVID-19 arrived in 2020, but rather than seeing those challenges as insurmountable roadblocks, the team at Pernod Ricard USA utilized reasoned struggle to reevaluate everything. Focused on their three “D’s” —data, demand, and diversity—Pernod Ricard USA emerged with a business model that inextricably links good business with doing good.

It’s not just a model other brands can emulate: It’s a lead Pernod Ricard USA is actively inviting the entire industry to mimic.

“There will always be competition in the commercial sense, but that should never stand in the way of key industry players collaborating in creating growth for our industry and a better world for our employees, our families, our communities, our consumers, our customers, and the planet,” explains John Barrett, Pernod Ricard USA’s chief commercial officer. “We believe there should be a shared responsi-



**Pernod Ricard USA**  
CREATORS OF CONVIVIALITY

bility to fight for the future of the industry we are privileged to work in and the businesses we serve.”

By prioritizing this goal, the team has created a road map for good in the drinks business—a significant challenge considering the industry’s white- and male-dominated history. Pernod Ricard USA feels now is the time to embrace their purpose-driven approach because



John Barrett,  
chief commercial officer



Pam Forbus,  
chief marketing officer

conscious consumers, engaged employees, and impact investors will continue to demand more transparency and commitment from producers—and reward the brands that deliver.

“We’re on a journey to ensure that everything we do is grounded in our purpose: to be creators of conviviality by unlocking the magic of human connection,” adds Pernod Ricard USA chief marketing officer Pam Forbus. “And purpose is the biggest innovation in our industry since the advent of digital.”

## PUTTING PURPOSE TO WORK

“For every single metric of brand success, from trial to advocacy to loyalty, purpose-driven brands win,” says Forbus, citing data from Nielsen and BrandZ global studies. The exponential growth of purpose-driven brands, or labels rooted in creating environmental, political, racial, or other social change, is proof that consumers are shopping for more than a product in 2022. By concentrating on data related to purpose-driven work in tandem

with sales metrics, Pernod Ricard proves everyone can win.

For example, when pandemic restrictions decimated the in-person connections Pernod Ricard had historically used, the team was forced into digital channels. In doing so, they rediscovered the power of purpose within trusted legacy brands like Absolut, Jameson, The Glenlivet, and Martell isn't limited to traditional channels.



“We maintained and built stronger connections with our consumers via enhanced use of social media, so they didn't socially distance from our brands,” says Forbus. The brands promote everything from the arts to inclusion and safe sex. “We're monitoring consumer behavior in real time to understand new, emerging, or changing habits, allowing us to offer the right products at the right time to the right consumers, for every occasion and in every market.”

And their data-driven connections aren't only measurable in Instagram likes and shares: In 2021, Pernod Ricard USA experienced its highest-ever year-over-year growth, increasing 16 percent over 2020.

“Data is the digital signature of consumers, and therefore a powerfully rich tool,” says Forbus. “It is a critical means to the end, but not the end itself.”

### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The proverbial “end” combines data with demand and diversity to yield an accurate picture of the complex U.S. drinks ecosystem—which is easier said than done. But by sharing purpose-driven ideas and bal-

ance sheet successes across the industry, Pernod Ricard USA is making huge strides toward that goal.

“Without data transparency and access to the right signals, how can we respond to what our consumers want and better reflect who they are? How do we know what to innovate against? And how do we make sure there is enough supply in the market?” Pernod Ricard CEO Ann Mukherjee asked the industry at large this year during her Shanken Impact seminar. “Without data fluidity we are not able to understand long-term supply and respond responsibly with sustainable strategies.”

So Pernod Ricard built a solution: By hosting listening seminars, mining new forms of consumer data, and sharing the results—thus developing a full understanding of both economic and social demands of stakeholders—Mukherjee and the Pernod Ricard USA team are investing in the infrastructure required to transform the drinks industry to reflect the diverse communities it serves.

Rather than focusing solely on ROI, the team has begun focusing on ROR—return on responsibility. “Our industry has a responsibility to reflect the consumers we serve—in both our leadership and employee base—so we can better meet their needs,” says Forbus. “This means widening the circle, and growing the pie for all of us.”

The organization's tangible investments in equality through partnerships with Better Up, VetJobs, Women in Hospitality United, U.S. Bartenders Guild COVID Relief Fund, and Restaurant Workers' Community Fund, among others, prove Pernod Ricard isn't just slapping a diversity and inclusion page on their website or limiting its efforts to full-time employees. Instead, the organization remains at the vanguard of purpose-driven work in the private



## #ENGAGE #RESPONSIBLY

sector: By engaging at the industry, brand, and national level, they are creating a road map for ongoing holistic change.

“Return on responsibility also means that our brands meet the highest standards of responsible advertising. It makes doing the right thing the most immediate, urgent priority in service of our consumers and communities,” says Barrett, noting that ROR inspired the team to found the #engageresponsibility campaign, which combats online hate speech. “As industry leaders, we cannot ask people to engage with us on social platforms and then absolve ourselves of accountability for the hate they may experience in those spaces.”

### HOLDING THE DOOR OPEN

What's really impressive about the Pernod Ricard approach is its full-tilt commitment. The company has added a vice president of diversity to the leadership team, created a dedicated team of experts in culture and inclusive marketing, and it organized inclusive leadership training for its top 100 leaders across markets and departments.

But that's the point. Right now, every brand and the drinks industry at large still has the opportunity to evolve, serve a purpose, and impact meaningful change. By investing in and looking critically at the right data, understanding the drivers of demand, and truly embracing diversity, any brand can be a part of the solution and help make the drinks industry at large an example of purpose-driven, inclusive, diverse success.

And probably boost the bottom line while doing it. ■



# INSIDER TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT DISTRIBUTOR

EXPERIENCED WINE AND SPIRITS PROFESSIONALS SHARE HOW TO SELECT THE BEST-FIT WHOLESALE PARTNER

BY ANDREW KAPLAN

“It’s not just about the numbers and hitting the goals,” says James Stewart, the co-proprietor of Yountville, California-based Stewart Cellars, about his distribution partners. “It’s about making friends. These people that I’ve worked with over the years, they’re my friends. I’m genuinely interested in their well-being and the well-being of their families.”

A relationship like the one James Stewart has with his distributors doesn’t always happen. But there are certain steps a small to midsize wine or spirits supplier can take at the outset that can increase the chances that it does—while ensuring strong sales and representation in the local market.

From determining the right size of distributor to understanding where a brand will fit within a portfolio and becoming aligned on expectations early, here a number of suppliers and distributors offer insider tips on choosing distributor partners wisely.

## UNDERSTAND EACH SPECIFIC MARKETPLACE

Every U.S. market is unique, even within state lines. Is that market already flooded with what you are selling? Will your brand have a niche? At the same time, take into consideration the current market environment and economic conditions.

The goal is to gauge all this before sitting down with a potential distributor so there are reasonable expectations.

“A lot of times people don’t understand the big picture, and they’re totally unreasonable about what they expect the distributors to do,” says Scott Osborn, the president and co-owner of Fox Run Vineyards in New York’s Finger Lakes region. “It’s partly because they don’t understand what their role is with the distributor.”



James Stewart, Stewart Cellars



John Beaudette, MHW, Ltd.



Eric Stewart, Vanguard Wines



Rebecca Oliver, Lemelson Vineyards

Eric Stewart, the president and owner of Vanguard Wines, an importer and distributor in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana, echoes this sentiment. “The biggest mistake I see made is the lack of patience, really taking that time to investigate the market before you enter into it,” he notes.

### STUDY THE DISTRIBUTOR'S BOOK

Looking at the distributor's overall portfolio is a crucial step in determining if a brand fits.

“Look at some of their priority brands; can you see your brand getting its fair share of attention?” asks John Beaudette, the president and founder of national import, distribution, and service provider MHW, Ltd. “That's a critical element.”

“I see which other Oregon brands are in their portfolio and where they are priced,” says Rebecca Oliver, the national sales manager for Lemelson Vineyards in Carlton, Oregon. “The sales rep may have 40 Oregon Pinot Noirs to sell to one account, so you're just trying to capture mindshare. You need to stand out.”

Also important: Does the distributor carry any in-demand brands? “I like to see what key brands that they have in their book would make them relevant to a buyer,” says Oliver. “That buyer, that sommelier, is going to want to talk to that salesperson. So, they've already got a foot in the door.”

Suppliers should also consider whether they would differentiate a distributor's portfolio or fit in with it seamlessly; either can be valuable. “Some distributors are better known for beer, wine, or specific types of spirits,” says Laura Kanzler, a regional sales manager with Hotaling & Co.

in San Francisco. “You might be their only shiny whiskey, or their only shiny rum, or maybe you want to be with a distributor who is known for their rum book so you'll just be one of the cool kids in that book.”

The distributor will be making the same evaluations as well. Nick Demjen, the general manager for emerging spirit brands at Horizon Beverage in Massachusetts, says he strategically evaluates the impact a new brand will have on his portfolio. “Will this new potential brand take away from existing sales?” he says. “If it's only going to complement your existing portfolio, then it's something that you would consider to bring on.”

At the same time, there's a balance. “Obviously the lifeline of a distributor is bringing on new brands and new products but at the same time you also still want to grow your existing supplier brands and not take any focus away from them,” adds Demjen.

### LARGE VS. SMALL WHOLESALERS: DETERMINING THE RIGHT SIZE FOR YOUR BRAND

Small to midsize suppliers must decide whether a similarly small, mom-and-pop distributor who can better identify with growing brands is the right fit for them, or whether a large wholesaler may have the resources and multi-state footprint to streamline logistics.

With plans to launch with well-known travel companies like Amtrak and Virgin Voyages, Crafthouse Cocktails had to adjust to the new realities of 2020. One of the solutions was working with smaller distributors in targeted markets.

For example, in Colorado the brand decided to partner with European Wine & Spirits, which focuses on top-tier accounts in that market. “Their ability to execute even during the pandemic was impressive, and Colorado remains one of our most successful markets to date,” says Casey Iaccino, Crafthouse's chief growth officer.

The size of the distributor's sales force is something that's important to Ben Kaehler, Lemelson's general manager. “How are they able to service the account?” he says. “I think especially for smaller to medium-sized brands, that's really critical. You make a placement, but if they don't continue to service the accounts you can lose that placement, and that's a huge loss.”

Yet a large sales force does not equate to better sales performance for all brands. Bruce Murray, the owner of Boundary Breaks Vineyard in the Finger Lakes, whose winery sells between 5,000 and 7,000 cases a year, says he prefers the attention he gets from a smaller distributor. “They tend to have a different perspective on wines like ours,” he says. “They're the ones finding the diamonds in the rough.”

Some like smaller distributors because they often align with independent and specialty accounts—which are good fits for new brands trying to gain traction. John Carrabus, the director of sales for the Northeast at One Eight Distilling in Washington, D.C., has found smaller wholesalers tend to focus on the craft-friendly accounts where his spirits thrive. “Our brands are positioned similarly to a lot of other smaller craft and emerging brands,” he says. “And being able to get that extra

attention and that kind of foot in the door at some of these more kind of curated places is helpful.”

James Stewart, of Stewart Cellars, believes emerging brands have a better chance of being cultivated in a smaller house. “The larger distributors are not always in the business of growing something. You go to those really large companies once you’ve already grown and you’re an asset to them,” he says.

Adds Kanzler, “With a larger distributor you might not be able to move as quickly because there are more people and more logistics to deal with. With a smaller one, you can maybe do things more quickly on certain fronts but you might not have the reach.”

Solutions like the Independent Distributor Network (IDN) may offer the best of both worlds. A network of independently owned and operated distributors across 29 states, IDN can provide the fine wine culture of a small house, but offer multi-state representation at the same time. Being close to the ground in each of its member markets, IDN seeks to help mid-to-large-scale wineries and distilleries gain national distribution.

“Our goal is to be in all 50 states,” says David Browne, the network’s president. “We’re a mix of all different types of distributors but we are all family owned and operated and multi-generational, so that’s kind of the people that we are trying to attract. People looking to grow their business and move business forward. We want to help some suppliers get a national footprint.”

**KNOW THE PEOPLE—  
NOT JUST THE COMPANY**

For a smaller winery or craft distillery trying to grow its business, the talents and experience of each individual member of the distributor’s sales team can be crucial. As a result, Murray, of Boundary Breaks, recommends taking some time to research the individual members of the distributor’s sales team. A lot of this information can be found on the distributor’s website.

“If their bio says a salesperson has been with this distributor for eight years, that tells me they’re probably a professional salesperson that knows wine and is respected by the accounts in their territory,” he says. “If there’s a lot of turnover, they may be new to the industry and not have the relationships with the accounts that would be well-established and trusted.”

“There is this joke that the whole wine industry is like a game of telephone,” says Seth Fagelman, the president and co-CEO of Serendipity Wines. “Part of our job is to make sure that the brand’s story gets told correctly and makes its way all the way to the end customer. So having really knowledgeable people is critical to making sure that story gets told properly.”

By knowing the individual team members, brands can attempt to connect with them one-on-one. “Are there some key sales reps that you can sort of latch on to that are going to be the ones that spark that fire for your brand?” adds Beaudette, of MHW.

**GET ALIGNED ON  
EXPECTATIONS UPFRONT**

What kind of support the distributor is expecting from the supplier—and vice versa—is something that Giles Thomas, the founder of South African wine importer Baobab Wines, likes to discuss upfront. “We talk about samples, and what the producer’s expectations are on things like marketing allowances, because you really need to understand the financial obligation you’re getting into to make sure there’s enough margin for everyone to pull through the product,” he says.

Being very clear about details—such as sales expectations in year one, the number of market visits the supplier will make, how many samples will be shown, and to which accounts—will prevent frustration down the road. “What specific goals or expectations do you have? And support it by data,” advises Vanguard’s Eric Stewart. “That’s so much better than feelings. We avoid the ‘Field of Dreams’ wineries that ‘if you bottle it, they will come.’ That is a recipe for disaster every single time.”

**CHOOSE A TEAM YOU’RE PREPARED  
TO SUPPORT**

Suppliers should realize that distributors are looking for true partnership. “With everything that’s going on, especially right now, the squeaky wheels are the ones getting the attention,” says Browne, IDN’s president. “We need partners that are going to be out there on the road, that are connecting and educating our people and customers.”



Nick Demjen, Horizon Beverage



Ben Kaehler, Lemelson Vineyards



Bruce Murray, Boundary Breaks Vineyard

“There are so many good products now; so many more wineries and distilleries than there ever was,” Browne continues. “But the ones that are most successful, in my opinion, are those that have the relationships, whether it’s with the distributor or with the customers—the retailers and the restaurateurs. So, they need to be active. The people that have those relationships in the end win.”

Kate Palmer, whose company, Hearts + Tales Beverage Co. in Vallejo, California, specializes in helping artisanal brands get to market, says it’s no longer just about what’s in the bottle. “The craft spirits movement has been around for long enough now that they don’t want to hold your hand anymore. They don’t have time,” she says. “They’re looking for industry experience and a commitment to be successful in the market. You just have to be way more buttoned up as a supplier than you were 10 years ago.”

Brands will need to demonstrate a willingness to do some of the heavy lifting in order to secure a partnership with a distributor, including acting as a brand ambassador, generating sales and leads, and engaging on social media platforms. “Chances are they’re not even going to get to the second meeting if they have not produced a package that shows ‘Hey, we’re going to be active in the market,’” says Beaudette.

Horizon’s Demjen says such support is important. “Something that I know that our reps and team appreciate is when there’s somebody on the street level that they can reach out to from

the supplier and get some support from them,” he says.

“The work doesn’t stop once the wine arrives in our warehouses,” adds Fagelman, of Serendipity Wines. “The work must continue on both of our parts to communicate to the end users, and to help our customers, the restaurants and the retailers, sell these products to their customers as well.”

**THE BENEFIT OF BEER DISTRIBUTORS**

Sometimes, the distribution solution lies with a wholesaler that doesn’t solely focus on, or even mainly focus on, wine and spirits. For example, beer distributors with a small fine wine team can be a good fit for many brands. Thomas, of Baobab Wines, has found benefits in partnering with companies like Burke Beverage in Illinois and Savannah Distributing in Georgia. “They have the distribution footprint and gateway to many accounts, yet their wine program is generally more niche,” he says. “It is like having a small wine wholesaler sitting in a major wholesaler. I can find a home quite happily in that kind of distributor.”

Last year, Fox Run Vineyards also decided to partner with a number of beer distributors within its home state of New York. “All have much smaller territories and a much more concentrated focus,” says Osborn. “And that has so far been the right choice for us. They have a small portfolio of wine and spirits and we are tending to fit within that much better than in the other wine distributors that we were with.”

**VALUE AND CULTURE ALIGNMENT MATTERS**

In today’s hyper-connected social media environment, doing a deep dive into the business practices of distributors and the other brands they carry may be worth the time and effort. “Does that distributor align with your core values?” asks Karen Blackburn, the director of brand strategy for Serendipity Wines.

“They will be the face of your brand in that market,” adds Kanzler. “What is their reputation out there with other accounts and buyers?” Talking to customers and other suppliers to find out what their experiences are like with that distributor can offer important intel.

As an importer of South African wines, Thomas says he is especially sensitive to labor practices, for example. “The last thing I want to be is tied to a distributor that is supporting another brand that is not operating in an ethical way,” he says.

**GO WITH YOUR GUT**

Remember that this is a people business, and often the distributor relationship that works can come down to that personal connection, or even vibe, felt at meetings with the team. Do you feel like this is a group that really gets you and your brand?

Chemistry is critical, says Beaudette, because “these are mini marriages.”

“You’re going to rely on your metrics, you’re going to rely on third-party information, but then you’re also going to rely on the vibe you get from the person,” says Thomas. “That’s always important.” ■



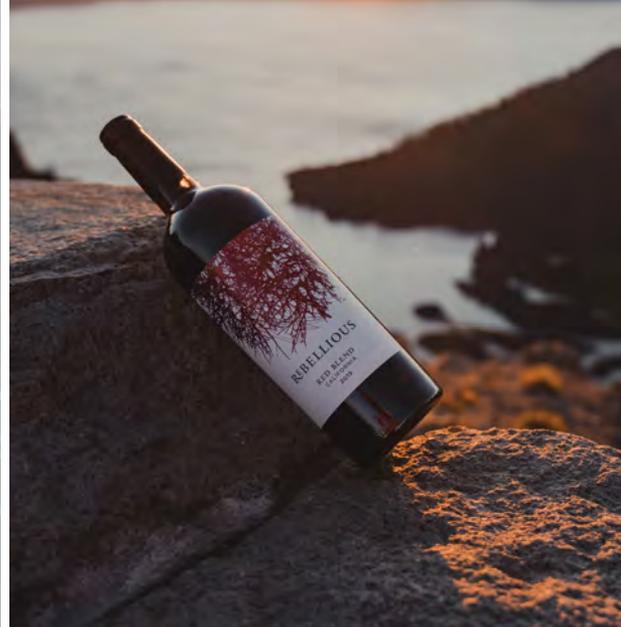
Scott Osborn, Fox Run Vineyards



Kate Palmer, Hearts + Tales Beverage Co.



Baobab Wines team with distribution partners in the winelands of South Africa



# THE EVOLUTION OF RED BLENDS— AND WHY THEY AREN'T ALL CREATED EQUAL

NEAR THE TOP OF THE U.S. MARKET, RED BLENDS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE MIX FOR RESTAURANTS AND RETAIL SHOPS. HERE'S HOW REBELLIOUS, A RED BLEND FROM CALIFORNIA, DELIVERS UNMATCHED EXCELLENCE IN THIS POPULAR CATEGORY

**R**ed blends have become a blockbuster success over the past 10 years, reaching the No. 2 spot for red wine styles and grape varieties purchased in the U.S. according to Nielsen's off-premise data for the 52 weeks ending Sept. 11, 2021. While these full-bodied, smooth, easy-drinking wines have carved their own spot amidst the many varietal wines that top the charts of American consumers' favorite options, not every red blend is created equal—and there's one that buyers should keep an eye on.

Explore the evolution of the red blend category throughout history and discover the many reasons why Rebellious, a California red blend born from exceptional, carefully selected fruit, is a cut above the rest.

## A CATEGORY WITH A RICH HISTORY

While the modern American red blend has spiked in popularity recently, many exciting and important wines are red blends,

including some of the most enchanting and memorable bottles in the world. Consider the icons from Bordeaux or France's Rhône Valley, for instance—these are all symbols of the heights that red blends can reach.

Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin both prized bottles from Bordeaux, making this style of wine relevant in the New World. And as settlers from France and Italy established vineyards in

the United States, the formula from home was often transferred. "There's a deep history of red blends in the U.S.," says Nick Poletto, the vice president, director of education at Kobrand. "Just as there is throughout the Old World."

The U.S. market has fashioned its own response to these blends, many made with fruit from California. Since the mid-1990s, New World producers have modeled the methods of the classics, but with a renaissance that reflects the most desirable flavor and branding elements of the time.

These days, the category has become indispensable, and many of the country's best-selling bottles are blends. Poletto says that red blends represent more than the use of several grapes in a single cuvée. "The category has a complete personality of its own," he says. "It is a style."

## "Red blends are important, and the category isn't a fad. The data shows that it's not going away."

— Nick Poletto, Kobrand

The style is wildly significant with wine producers and consumers in the U.S.—second only to Cabernet Sauvignon—with double-digit dollar growth (according to Nielsen's off-premise data for the 52 weeks ending Sept. 11, 2021) and expectations that interest isn't waning anytime soon. "Red blends are important, and the category isn't a fad," says Poletto. "The data shows that it's not going away."

### WHY CONSUMERS LOVE RED BLENDS

What's so enticing about these wines? A crowd-pleasing taste profile, labels that are easy to understand and often attractive, and an approachable price point are all part of the magnetism of red blends. Today, no wine list or retail offering would be complete without options from the category. "We've come to expect product diversity in the U.S." says Poletto. "It's important to give a broad selection of wines, which includes red blends."

These are wines that help sell themselves, thriving without a language barrier and often simply (but appealingly) labeled. "They are consumer friendly," says Poletto. "Easy to understand and explain." This is approachable not only for the consumer but also for sales and service staff. Wine education takes time, and for employees new to the hospitality or retail industry, red blends are a first stop in becoming familiar with one of today's most popular

categories. New hires can quickly become acclimated with the product and can pronounce, recognize, and explain red blends with comfort and ease.

"Red blends have grown into their own category, and this category has a specific taste profile," says Poletto. "Full-bodied, juicy, fruit-forward, and rich." He describes the best of them as powerful, lush, and hedonistic. But there's no single equation to arrive at this point, which requires skilled blending by the winemaker.

### AN EXCEPTIONAL RED BLEND

Enter Rebellious, a red blend that stands above the rest by crafting a full-bodied, luxurious wine from superior grapes. The wine, a blend of eight varieties leading with Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon, impressed Poletto in a blind tasting. "I was impressed with how it tasted against peers," says Poletto. "The balance was superior, the alcohol was integrated, the tannins were soft, and it was harmonious."

He credits this to the quality of the fruit, which was carefully selected for Rebellious. These are difficult hillside vineyards, which produce smaller, more concentrated, highly intense berries. Aromatically this promises notes of dark cherry, brown sugar, dark chocolate, and hints of exotic spice. On the palate, the lush, dark berry fruit flavors remain vibrant thanks to the bright acidity. The addition of cedar and spice flavors add to the long finish.

While red blends share a common platform in the marketplace, they also offer bottle-by-bottle character and personality. Rebellious, for example, holds a surprise. The blend actually includes a splash of Sauvignon Blanc for bright acidity and fresh aromatics. This talking point is an interesting way to introduce Rebellious and set it apart from other wines on a list or shelf.

"This small portion of Sauvignon Blanc

acts like Viognier in the northern Rhône, softening the wine's tannins and allowing the fruit aromas to pop," says Poletto. He's pointing to one of the prestigious wines of France, Côte-Rôtie, a red wine primarily made with Syrah but often blended with a bit of Viognier.

"The grapes for this wine were planted in difficult conditions," says Poletto. "These vines have been pushed to their limits, forced to rebel, thrive, and then succeed." The vineyards of Rebellious are located in Sonoma and Mendocino, and vines are planted on challenging, low-nutrient, high-draining soils, forcing the true spirit of Rebellious and survival. The name is inspired by the power of Mother Nature around the world, and especially in the vineyard, where the roots of the vines must reach deep into the earth for water.

It's a struggle that results in an expressive wine. "I've tasted a lot of red blends, and this one stands out," says Poletto. ■



# 'BETTER-FOR-YOU' WINE JUST GOT EVEN BETTER

THE SIMPLE GRAPE PROVES THAT BETTER-FOR-YOU WINES CAN DELIVER ON ALL FRONTS FROM TASTE TO TRANSPARENCY

**G**o ahead: Judge The Simple Grape wines by their labels. With nutrition information prominently and proudly displayed on the front label of all its products, The Simple Grape is a new brand built to deliver—not just on taste, but on the values health-conscious consumers are seeking today.

Through what the brand calls “radical transparency,” The Simple Grape models how “better-for-you” and better-for-the-planet brands can thrive. Made from premium, certified-sustainable California grapes, The Simple Grape displays key ingredients, grape sources, and its sustainability commitment in clear, front-label type and symbols, bottling the desires of health- and eco-conscious consumers while producing a fantastic-tasting bottle of wine with full alcoholic strength.

With wellness at the forefront, the result is a portfolio of “better-for-you” wines that don’t compromise flavor or body, and eliminate confusion—giving drinkers all the information they need to make informed decisions when incorporating wine into their balance-focused lifestyles. Demand for transparent labeling has increased among millennial and Gen Z consumers, and The Simple Grape capitalizes on this trend while showcasing that California wines can deliver on all fronts from taste to transparency. Their “all flavor, no sacrifice” commitment appeals broadly as consumers continue to

zero in on their personal values and connect with purpose-driven brands—while still seeking out great-tasting wine.

Each bottle of The Simple Grape—which currently includes a Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Pinot Noir—displays key nutritional facts on the front label with easy-to-identify symbols and consistency across varieties. Much of The Simple Grape’s research indicates that health-conscious consumers are looking to cut sugar, not alcohol, so the wines are never manipulated to reduce alcohol or add sugar. The entire portfolio is low-carb, zero-sugar, all-natural, vegan, gluten-free, full-alcohol, and keto-friendly, making it simple for wine lovers to enjoy a glass without compromising their health goals.

The brand’s commitment to consistency across SKUs also makes it simple for



drinkers to experiment comfortably with in The Simple Grape portfolio, since every bottle voluntarily displays nutritional facts and caloric metrics on the back label. Unlike other “better-for-you” alcohol brands, however, The Simple Grape wines maintain standard alcohol levels, each sitting at 13.5% ABV, providing drinkers with a full-bodied, full-flavored, traditional wine experience.

But The Simple Grape’s radically transparent ethos goes beyond calorie counts: The wines are made only from vineyards certified sustainable by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. Their labels are likewise made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper, certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, an organization that helps to ensure responsible use of forest resources. The Simple Grape even donates a portion of their profits to the Pollinator Partnership, a national charity focused on promoting the health of pollinators. The result is a wine that offers equal incentives to wellness-focused consumers and environmentally-conscious wine lovers.

During an era when conscious consumption is a peak trend, The Simple Grape delivers on a simple goal: Great wine without compromise. ■

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# SHOCHU IS JAPAN'S BEST-KEPT SECRET—AND THE U.S. IS FINALLY CATCHING ON

THE DUO BEHIND KOJI-BASED SPIRITS IMPORTER HONKAKU SPIRITS DETAILS THE OVERLOOKED HISTORY OF JAPAN'S MOST POPULAR SPIRIT—AND WHY THE U.S. IS READY TO EMBRACE IT

BY STEPHEN LYMAN AND CHRISTOPHER PELLEGRINI

**K**yushu Island in southern Japan is often overlooked by tourists visiting the country. Even its main international draw, Nagasaki, is overshadowed by its more convenient cousin, Hiroshima, a short bullet train ride from Osaka. Kyushu's regional capital, Fukuoka, is the sixth-largest and fastest-growing city in Japan, yet it's almost unknown outside Asia. U.S. consumers have heard of Kumamoto thanks to the oysters and Miyazaki thanks to the eponymous anime director, but the rest of the region is an afterthought.



Stephen Lyman



Christopher Pellegrini

Tourists should not feel the slightest bit embarrassed by this. Kyushu has also been ignored by most of Japan for most of its history. Only when the Satsuma Domain (modern-day Kagoshima Prefecture) conquered Okinawa in 1609 and became one of the most powerful domains in the country did the Shogun begrudgingly take notice. This oversight proved fatal, as Satsuma ended up leading the rebellion that overthrew the Shogun in 1868, ushering in the modernization of Japan.

Due to its long backwater status, Kyushu's local drink had also been ignored both in Japan and internationally—until recently. Honkaku (authentic) shochu—a resolutely traditional spirit that must be made using koji mold for saccharification, can only be fermented from approved agricultural ingredients, and passes through a pot still just once—did not become a national drink in Japan until the 1970s. Before that, it was considered blue-collar grog in southern Japan, much like bourbon in America until just a few decades ago.

But shochu has quietly outsold sake in Japan every year since 2003—and seemingly nobody has noticed. Now, U.S.

consumers are finally catching on—and Japan’s best-kept secret seems to be out of the bag.

**THE EVOLUTION OF HONKAKU SHOCHU**

With its hot, humid climate, Kyushu is a tough place to make sake, which turns out best when made in cool temperatures. This is why sake-making is traditionally a winter activity. The introduction of the pot still to Kyushu from either Okinawa or Korea in the 1400s was a godsend to the locals. Farmers and fishermen throughout the region began distilling their rustic rice fermentation.

Honkaku shochu became so pervasive by the 1600s that the ruling samurai of Nagasaki outlawed the use of rice for alcohol production. Tax payments were made in rice at the time, but it was disappearing up the necks of illicit stills at an alarming pace.

Necessity being the mother of invention, barley shochu was born. Soon after that, sweet potatoes were introduced to Kyushu from Okinawa. It turned out they grew very well in the rocky volcanic soil of southern Kyushu, where rice refused to grow. Within a few decades of their introduction, they were being made into honkaku shochu as well.

Today, more than 50 base ingredients can be used to make honkaku shochu, which is very much defined by how it’s made rather than what it is made from. Koji, Japan’s national mold, which is used to make sake, soy sauce, miso, and a wide variety of other traditional Japanese culinary staples, must be used to saccharify starches in the production of honkaku shochu. After fermentation, it must be distilled in a pot still, and nothing can be added after distillation other than water and time. As a result, shochu’s aroma profiles are as diverse as the dozens of ingredients used to make it. In terms of flavor, shochu spans the spectrum from earthy, spicy, and funky to soft, ethereal, and sweet.



**Koji, Japan's national mold, which is used to make sake, soy sauce, miso, and a wide variety of other traditional Japanese culinary staples, must be used to saccharify starches in the production of honkaku shochu.**

Nearly all honkaku shochu continues to be made in Kyushu, where there are more than 280 distilleries in an area about half the size of Scotland. Barley shochu dominates in northern Kyushu, rice in Kumamoto, and sweet potato down south in Kagoshima. Industry volume-leading Miyazaki makes all three styles in abundance along with soba (buckwheat) shochu. Kokuto sugar shochu can only be made in the Amami Islands, situated between Kyushu and Okinawa.

Meanwhile, sake lees shochu is produced just about everywhere in Japan as a waste management solution for the solids

The koji mold plays an essential role in shochu fermentation.

left over after sake production. The resulting shochu lees can then safely be used as fertilizer.

**PRIME TIME FOR SHOCHU IN THE U.S. MARKET**

In light of shochu’s history and current domestic dominance, how has this diverse spirits category fared in the U.S.? Until very recently, not particularly well. A gaggle of factors has conspired to slow shochu’s uptake in America.

Primary among them is the fact that most Japanese shochu is distributed through large Japanese food importers. When the sales team needs to hit beverage alcohol quotas, it has historically been much easier to lean on sake rather than put in the extra effort to educate people about shochu.

California soft liquor license statutes have been a hindrance as well. Thanks to lobbying, in 1998 California began allowing restaurants with beer-and-wine licenses to also sell spirits under 25% ABV, as long as “soju” appears on the label. Subsequently, many Japanese shochu makers have op-

**Fortunately, there is now a crop of importers ... both singly focused on koji spirits and ready to expend human and financial resources to get the branding, marketing, and education right.**

portunistically mislabeled their products as soju, the Korean spirit with a similar-sounding name but very different production methods. To loophole their spirits into Golden State restaurants, Japanese shochu makers dilute products to 24% ABV from Japan's standard 25% and print "soju" on the label, guaranteeing extra sales and generations of misinformed consumers.

That doesn't just happen in California. The same mislabeled bottles appear on liquor store shelves nationwide, so most Americans conflate the two drinks. It is difficult to overstate how debilitating this has been for shochu's progress in the U.S. market, with koji-fermented, single-pot-

ABOVE RIGHT: The post-fermentaton pot still.  
BELOW: Three different shochus from Honkaku Spirits.



distilled shochu being mistaken for what is essentially low-proof sweetened vodka.

But things are looking up. Crucially, a raft of other drink categories—notably mezcal—has found footing in the U.S. while shochu has patiently waited in the wings. Low and behold, consumers now see that clear spirits can be nuanced and enjoyed on their own.

As consumers seek out different expressions from across Mexico, the trend toward mezcal also indicates that the notion of terroir has found its way back into the spirits conversation. The U.S. was already the largest mezcal market by 2019 and is projected to represent 65 percent of world consumption within the next several years.

Complementary to this is the continued enthusiasm generated by the natural wine movement and how its adherents have assiduously broadened their palates to accommodate new flavor and aroma profiles. Last March, Nielsen data indicated that the past four years saw a greater than 500 percent increase in the value of biodynamic and organic wines sold off-premise in the U.S. The rapid growth mirrors the shift in mezcal from worm-added rotgut to a premium tippie in fine establishments across the country. Could it finally be that American drinkers are ready for something Japan has been saving mainly for itself?

Fortunately, there is now a crop of importers, some in business well before the pandemic. They are both singly focused

on koji spirits and ready to expend human and financial resources to get the branding, marketing, and education right. Our experiences preaching the shochu gospel in the U.S. have us excited about what the future holds for the category.

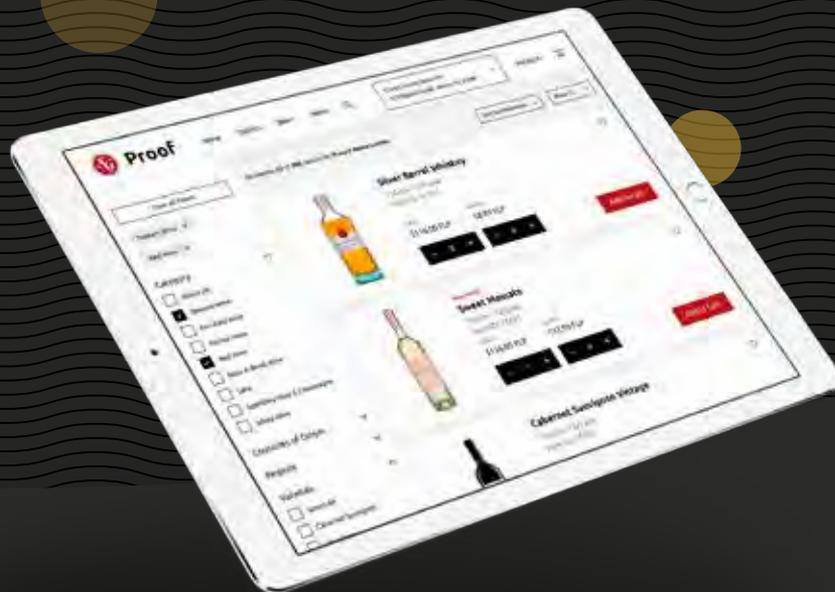
A few short years ago, it wasn't easy to get people to sample honkaku shochu in the U.S. And we tried! But Bar Convent Brooklyn 2021 was a revelatory experience; people were seeking us out. After guided tastings, there were quite a few minds blown and identities self-questioned. "How did I not know about this?!" was an oft-heard refrain. The follow-up was frequently, "Who are you distributed through?"

Thousands of honkaku shochu brands are brewed, distilled, aged, and sold in Japan every year. The wide range of permitted ingredients plus a single pass through a pot still means that it's the most diverse spirits category on the planet. It's as central to Japan's culinary culture as any other drink produced domestically, and it's starting to show up on menus in serious cocktail bars in the U.S.. We are optimistic that shochu will not remain Japan's best-kept secret much longer. ■

Stephen Lyman is the author of the James Beard Award-nominated *The Complete Guide to Japanese Drinks*. His deep appreciation for koji-based spirits inspired him to help launch Honkaku Spirits. He did this with one goal in mind: to realize his dream of being able to enjoy shochu and awamori in every bar in America. Christopher Pellegrini discovered shochu and awamori after moving to Tokyo as a full-time professor at Waseda University. Christopher launched Honkaku Spirits in March 2020 with the mission of bringing intensely artisanal Japanese spirits to discerning consumers worldwide.

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# Feebs Distilling

Delaware  
Entrepreneurs  
Enter Maryland Market

BY TEDDY DURGIN



**F**eebs Distilling of Milford, Delaware, is looking to make inroads in the Maryland spirits market. It not only has the right products to sell, it has the right story to sell. Co-founder **Eric Fibelkorn** and his wife, **Stacey Arnold**, had dreamt of going into the beverage business. But it took Arnold's cancer diagnosis in 2017 and subsequent survival to convince them that life is too short not to follow one's bliss. Feebs Distilling, whose name is based on a Fibelkorn family nickname, was subsequently born.

In a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, she recalled, "I went through all of the radiation and chemo and ended up on this side of the dirt. That's when we decided we were going to go for it. But we were not going to mortgage the house. We don't have investors or bank loans. We do everything out of pocket. When we

started out, we would buy a barrel when we had the money. So, we only had one, 30-gallon barrel to make bourbon. That obviously has changed. We now have 30 barrels aging in the distillery."

## THE PRODUCT

The entrepreneurial couple hand-crafts small batch brandy and corn liquor. Most of their liquors are indeed classified as brandy by the federal government due to their distilling process and chemical make-up.

Arnold stated, "We have five flavored brandies and then the corn liquor. What's the favorite? So far, there is not a top seller. I pull the report every Monday, and they're still neck and neck. Peach is a fan favorite. My favorite is blueberry. Eric's favorite is apple. We also have a strawberry and a blueberry brandy."

She continued, "We offer the most bang for your buck. We call it 'real deal liquor.' Craft is a whole market of its own. It's never going to sell like Jack Daniels or Absolut. But there's a whole market of people who appreciate what we do – the time, the cost, the ingredients, all of those things. We put in the work to create a product that is true to tradition."

From the get-go, Fibelkorn has been insistent that all of Feebs' liquors are made using the Tennessee method for making moonshine. Feebs Distilling gets all its fruit from Fifer Orchards in Camden-Wyoming, Delaware, and all of their grain is sourced from the nearby town of Laurel. Arnold said, "Our label says 'moonshine,' and we honor that tradition. So, if it doesn't grow on the ground or on a tree, we don't use it. We don't use any artificial colors or flavors either."

## BATTLE-TESTED -- ALREADY

Feebs Distilling may be a relatively young company, but its first years in business have been a trial by fire. The business is located in an old warehouse owned by Penco Products. The couple rents the 1,762 square feet of space for the distilling process, along with a small tasting room they open on weekends for tastings and sales.

Most of its time in business, Feebs has been operating amid the pandemic. "We got started on May 30, 2019," said Arnold. "By the time we had enough of everything to bottle and open the doors, it was the third week of December. People came, the business picked up in January 2020, and it was all going great in February. And then March happened, and everybody shut down."

The husband-and-wife team immedi-

*"Craft is a whole market of its own ... We put in the work to create a product that is true to tradition."*

**Stacey Arnold**  
Co-Founder  
Feebs Distilling Co.

ately switched to a "call ahead-pay-curb-side pickup" model. The result? Business went through the roof! She marveled, "Every time our governor extraordinaire went to give a new speech on the virus, people were like, 'Oh my God. What if he closes down liquor stores? I usually get three bottles. But I'm going to buy five bottles!' It was insane. Word of mouth really kicked in. People who couldn't come in and sample ended up just buying our products. We

stayed closed until September. Finally, when we did re-open, there was this whole new group of people who were suddenly our core customers."

## THE FUTURE

Feebs Distilling is indeed now looking to get its products on the shelves of Maryland's packaged goods stores. It helps that Arnold is a Maryland native, originally from Harford County. "I'm a transplant, who's been here for 16 years," she declared. "I still have friends from Maryland who come and get our liquor. It's not unheard of any weekend to have customers from Dorchester County or Salisbury. . . . What we've realized with Feebs Distilling is everybody wants good liquor, and they want it triple-distilled and clean so they can still get up the next morning and function." ■

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**KORN UNAGED CORN WHISKEY**

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*Stacey Fibelkorn*

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**TWICE AS COMPELLING**

Along with the Lassègue 2018, a Saint-Émilion Grand Cru wine composed of Merlot (62 percent), Cabernet Franc (35 percent), and Cabernet Sauvignon (3 percent), **Château Lassègue** released its 2014 library vintage blending the same grapes in slightly different proportions—Merlot (60 percent), Cabernet Franc (30 percent), and Cabernet Sauvignon (10 percent). While the 2018 bursts with red and black fruit, the prime-drinking 2014 unites notes of licorice, spice, and subtle oak.

SRP: \$60 per 750ml bottle



**EVERYDAY CELEBRATING**

To commemorate the 125-year anniversary of **Stags' Leap Winery**, the Napa Valley icon has debuted its 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon. Rounded out with Merlot, Malbec, Tannat, and Petit Verdot, the food-friendly wine marries juicy blackberry and cassis with warming allspice and black pepper. For this tribute vintage, winemaker Christophe Paubert maximized fresh fruit flavors by aging 37 percent of the wine in new French oak barrels and the remainder in seasoned ones.

SRP: \$60 per 750ml bottle

**ALTERNATIVE DRINKING**

With demand for alcohol-free options on the rise, semi-sweet, sparkling Italian wine brand **Stella Rosa**, imported by Riboli Family Wines in California, has responded with Stella Rosa Non-Alcoholics, designed to sip chilled, over ice, or mixed into mocktails. Featuring 30 percent fewer calories than the boozy original, the fruit-forward range includes a rosé and peach, as well as the blueberry-, blackberry-, and raspberry-flavored Black and the Red that tastes of raspberry, plum, and wild strawberry.

SRP: \$11 per 750ml bottle



**GOLDEN YEAR**

Every year, historic Port house **Taylor Fladgate** puts a limited-release single harvest Port from its reserves in the spotlight. For its eighth installment in the series, the brand has selected the 1971, a year that produced elegant wines suitable for long-term aging. Light and silky, with well-balanced acidity, this rare Port still flaunts nuanced black coffee and marzipan notes with undertones of tobacco leaf and black tea.

SRP: \$395 per 750ml bottle



**FRANCE IN CALIFORNIA**

Sonoma winery **Aperture Cellars**, in Healdsburg, stands out for Jesse Katz's Bordeaux-style wines made with hand-harvested fruit. Among the brand's newest releases is the 2019 Bordeaux Blend. Aged for 18 months, it's dominated by Malbec (40 percent) and Merlot (34 percent) and accented with Cabernet Sauvignon (14 percent), Cabernet Franc (10 percent), and Petit Verdot (two percent).

SRP: \$55 per 750ml bottle



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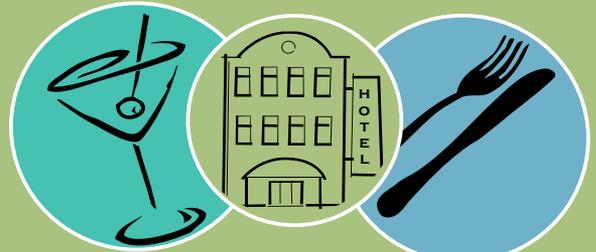
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### FIRST-TIME BUBBLY

Shane Moore, the winemaker at **Gran Moraine** in Oregon's Willamette Valley, describes the recently released 2014 Blanc de Blancs as "an Oregonian James Bond." The extended-tirage sparkling wine, the winery's first-ever Blanc de Blancs, is crafted from estate-grown Chardonnay and integrates layers of Meyer lemon, orange peel, and brioche.

SRP: \$90 per 750ml bottle



### TROPICAL PARTY

Tiki Rum Punch is the newest canned cocktail flavor from San Diego's **Cutwater Spirits**. Conjuring retro punch bowls, it's made with a mix of Cutwater's own Bali Hai rums, orange-passionfruit punch, and natural flavors. The effervescent ready-to-drink libation (7% ABV) is just the fix for bouts of winter wanderlust.

SRP: \$12.99 per four-pack of 12oz cans

### CALIFORNIA SPARKLE

Created using the traditional method of secondary fermentation in the bottle, the affordable, quaffable Ten of Cups Brut NV from **Banshee Wines** is a creamy blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier grapes sourced from well-regarded California vineyards. It's loaded with notes of tropical fruit, green apple, and citrus.

SRP: \$24.99 per 750ml bottle



### RARE BREED

The **Glendronach** 50-year-old, the brand's oldest and most prestigious (and expensive) Scotch, spent five decades resting in rare Pedro Ximénez and Oloroso sherry casks in the warehouses at the Highlands distillery. Then, master blender Rachel Barrie personally selected barrels from the collection, melding them for a final maturation to make just 198 hand-numbered bottles of this special 87.6-proof whisky evocative of dark chocolate, tobacco, and cocoa.

SRP: \$25,000 per 750ml bottle

### REDISCOVERING HISTORY

Before the rye whiskey was produced in Canada during Prohibition, **Chicken Cock** was made in Kentucky. Smuggled back to the U.S. in tin cans, it became the whiskey of choice at famed Harlem speakeasy the Cotton Club. The brand, resurrected by Grain & Barrel Spirits, now honors that rebellious chapter with a 100-proof limited edition.

Aged in old bourbon barrels for 20 years, the Chicken Cock Cotton Club Canadian Straight Rye Whiskey (90 percent rye, 10 percent malted barley) is packaged in a replica 20th-century apothecary bottle.

SRP: \$499.99 per 750ml bottle



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# THE RED BEE

A RED COCKTAIL TO KEEP COZY

BY MARLENA HOFFMAN

Inspired by the Bee's Knees, Julia Momosé of Bar Kumiko in Chicago created the Red Bee for the cold winter months. Momosé chose to use a Nikka Coffey Gin base containing, she says, “a special ingredient—apples, which are a nod to the company's roots as an apple wine and cider producer back when Taketsuru-san first started the Dai Nippon Kajitsu Gaisha in Hokkaido.”

For a winter cocktail, Momosé wanted to capture spiced apple notes through the gin. “One of my favorite ways to enjoy apples in the wintertime is spiced and cooked down with honey and tea. I wanted to recreate that profile by allowing the botanicals of the gin to shine as the spices, and to bring in a burst of color from the Campari along with the perfect amount of bitterness for balance.”

The color of the cocktail is also ideal for the winter season. A bright red hue from the Campari is eye-catching for Valentine's Day, and the chamomile-honey syrup is sure to keep imbibers cozy. ■

## ● RED BEE

### Ingredients:

1 ½ oz Nikka Coffey Gin  
¼ oz Campari  
½ oz chamomile-honey syrup\*

½ oz lemon juice  
Garnish: sage leaf

**Method:** Shake all ingredients in a mixing tin until well-chilled and frothy. Serve up in a coupe glass with a sage leaf for garnish.

### \*Chamomile-honey syrup:

1 ½ tbs Emperor's Chamomile from Rare Tea Cellar  
10 oz hot water (208 - 212°F)

**Method:** Steep for 6 minutes. Strain and weigh the liquid. Measure honey and chamomile using a 2:1 honey to chamomile weight ratio and combine.