

Beverage Journal



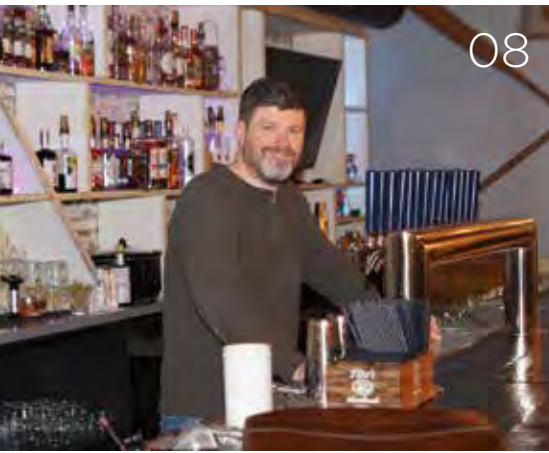
FEBRUARY 2023

THE EDUCATION ISSUE

TRACING THE EVOLUTION OF WINE AND SPIRITS
EDUCATION FOR TODAY'S PROFESSIONALS

HOW WINE EDUCATION
HAS TRANSFORMED

CREATING AN ACE STAFF
EDUCATION PROGRAM



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ON-PREMISE CONTINUES COMEBACK, FOR NOW

I recently checked in with Bruce Grindy, the National Restaurant Association's chief economist. Below are excerpts from his latest research into the restaurant industry.

Restaurants have been adding jobs for 24 consecutive months. While the month-to-month gains were uneven during this period, the industry made steady progress toward rebuilding its workforce since most of the covid-era operating restrictions were lifted.

Despite the steady employment gains during the last two years, the on-premise side of the industry is still below its pre-pandemic staffing levels. Of all U.S. industries, on-premise operations have the largest post-pandemic employment deficit.

Although the industry added back many of the jobs lost during the pandemic, most restaurants remain understaffed. Sixty-two percent of operators say their restaurant needs more employees to support its existing customer demand (according to a National Restaurant Association survey from November).

Regardless of whether they are understaffed, help wanted signs are hanging longer for most restaurants. Overall, 8 in 10 restaurant operators say they currently have job openings that are difficult to fill.



Most restaurant operators will be actively looking to boost staffing levels in 2023. Overall, 87% of operators say they will likely hire additional employees during the next 6-12 months if qualified applicants are available.

Restaurant operators will have to continue to balance staffing needs with business conditions. Fifty-seven percent of operators say they would likely lay off employees during the next 6-12 months if business conditions deteriorate, e.g., the economy dives further into recession and/or any operating restrictions are again implemented.

So, what is on the horizon? Unfortunately, many economic indicators are not predicting a boom, and we are seeing a spattering across the country of students again being required to wear masks. I suggest you be on guard and make your voice heard sooner rather than later. Would you be surprised if the government's heavy hand attempted to again impose operating restrictions on the industry?

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1. YEALANDS WINES

New Zealand's Yealands Wines has expanded its line-up of sustainable offerings with Lighter Sauvignon Blanc. The inaugural 2022 vintage, highlighting fruit from Awatere and Wairau Valley vineyards, is rife with herbaceous and tropical flavors and features a 9% ABV that dovetails with rising consumer demand for low-alcohol products.

\$ SRP: \$15.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 yealands.co.nz

4. REBELLIOUS WINE

Its full-bodied, food-friendly red blend was a hit, and now Rebellious is following it up with a silky California Pinot Noir. For an extra burst of acidity, a touch of California Chardonnay has been woven into the wine to soften the tannins.

\$ SRP: \$19.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 rebelliouswine.com

2. GEORGE DICKEL

Back in 2016, George Dickel 17-Year-Old Reserve debuted in a 375-ml bottle that quickly racked up a fan base. Now it has returned in a larger format, culled from barrels that Cascade Hollow Distilling Co. general manager and distiller Nicole Austin sought out as an ode to the original liquid. The 92-proof Tennessee whisky leads with apricot aromatics before transforming into plum and juniper on the palate.

\$ SRP: \$250 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 georgedickel.com

5. MATUA

Wine coolers of yore get a sophisticated upgrade with the Matua Cooler. This 80-calorie ready-to-drink quencher stars New Zealand's bright, citrusy Matua Sauvignon Blanc, sparkling water, and a splash of kiwi.

\$ SRP: \$12.99 per four-pack of 250-ml cans
🌐 matua.co.nz

3. NOCHELUNA

Fourth-generation maestro vinatero Don Eduardo Arrieta, sotol expert Ricardo Pico, and master distiller Iván Saldaña have teamed up to bring Nocheluna to life. The sotol, harvested from 12- to 15-year-old wild *Dasylirion* plants growing in Mexico's Chihuahuan Desert, can be served neat or in cocktails with the likes of pineapple and prickly pear.

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

6. MAISON FERRAND

Chinese New Year kicked off last month, and to celebrate, Maison Ferrand owner and master blender Alexandre Gabriel rolled out the limited-edition Ferrand Cognac 10 Générations Port Cask Year of the Rabbit. The 88-proof Grande Champagne Cognac—symbolic of the lucky number eight in Chinese culture—is made solely with Ugni Blanc. It is double aged, first in French oak and then Port wine casks, characterized by a long, creamy fig- and plum-tinged finish.

\$ SRP: \$64.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 ferrandcognac.com



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7. LA CREMA WINERY

A duo of markedly different California wines converges in La Crema's two-bottle Russian River Valley gift set. The first, the versatile Chardonnay, balances juicy apple galette and jolts of pear and tangerine, while the Pinot Noir is a mélange of boysenberry, cherry, and pomegranate.

\$ SRP: \$85 per box
🌐 lacrema.com

8. HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY

The 16th edition of the Parker's Heritage collection comprises 67 percent 13-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey that has been double barreled for four weeks and then blended with 33 percent 15-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey to unearth layers of oak and spice. A portion of proceeds from the 132.2-proof whiskey will be donated to ALS research and care in honor of master distiller emeritus Parker Beam.

\$ SRP: \$174.99 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 heavenhilldistillery.com

9. DELILLE CELLARS

Known for its Bordeaux-style blends, pioneering Washington winery DeLille Cellars has broadened its reach with Métier, a spinoff brand illuminating the approachability of the state's Columbia Valley AVA. The Cabernet Sauvignon 2020, soon to be trailed by a 2021 vintage and red blend, is wrapped in an eye-catching label by Seattle artist Becca Fuhrman.

\$ SRP: \$30 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 delillecellars.com

10. ST. AGRESTIS

Joining the Phony Negroni that arrived in 2022, the Brooklyn aperitivo and digestivi brand St. Agrestis has introduced its second non-alcoholic cocktail. Reminiscent of an amaro highball, Amaro Falso echoes the bitter, herbal spice and citrus of its spirituous counterpart with gentian root, carbonation, and nitrogen.

\$ SRP: \$59.99 per 12-pack of 200-ml bottles
🌐 stagrestis.com

11. DINGLE DISTILLERY

Dingle Single Malt Whiskey, Dingle Distillery's first core expression, is now available stateside. Produced entirely from the Irish distillery's own spirit, the 92.6-proof triple distilled, non-chill filtered whiskey is aged in former bourbon and PX sherry casks for six to seven years, resulting in a honeyed finish.

\$ SRP: \$100 per 750-ml bottle
🌐 dingledistillery.ie

12. EVERLEAF

Drawing from his background as a bartender and conservation biologist, Paul Mathew launched Everleaf, a line of complex non-alcoholic aperitifs, in the U.K. in 2019. The three nature-inspired varieties, new to the U.S. market, include the bittersweet Everleaf Forest, crisp Everleaf Marine, and aromatic Everleaf Mountain, all of which can be buoyed with tonic water to create refreshing spritzes.

\$ SRP: \$33 to \$35 per 500-ml bottle
🌐 everleafdrinks.com



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Free State Atlantic Bar

Bringing Maryland to D.C. Customers

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

Brian Leonard, owner-manager of the Free State Atlantic Bar in Washington, D.C., describes his establishment as being “hyper locally focused.” That might be an understatement. This is the last installment in our series of great theme bars and restaurants around Maryland and Washington, D.C. So, what better place to feature for this final feature than a D.C. bar that is . . . Maryland themed!

Yes, for all those homesick Marylanders living in the nation’s capital who are too lazy to drive or Metro it out to the suburbs, the Free State Atlantic Bar offers a wide range of beers, wines, and spirits from Mary-

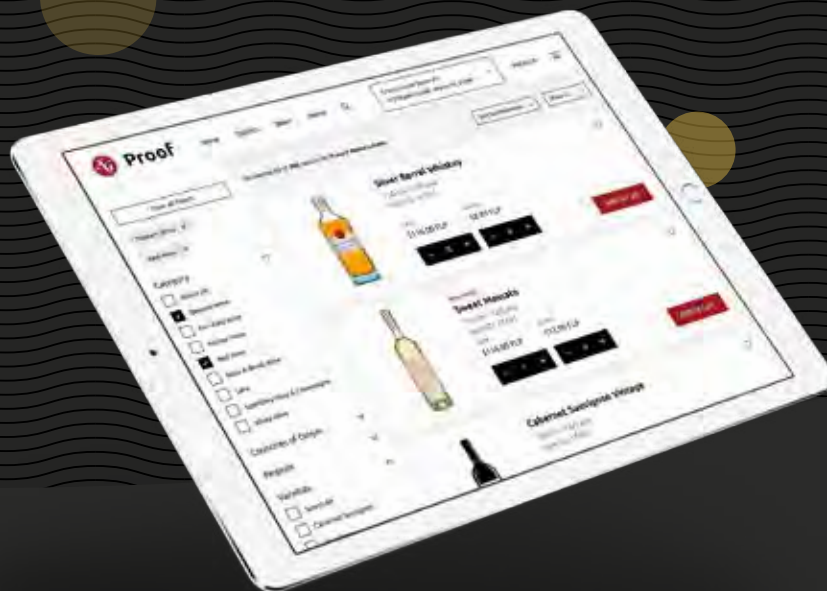
land and the Mid-Atlantic region. Leonard, who grew up in Aberdeen and went to the University of Maryland, co-owns the bar with his wife Hilarey. He said during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, “We try and focus on small-batch, local producers. As much as possible, we try and serve beer and spirits from within the Mid-Atlantic region. All of our beer and 90 percent of our spirits are from makers in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, along with a little of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and North Carolina.”

Indeed, beers on the menu as of early December included Nepenthe Brewing and Union Brewing from Bal-

timore; Distillery Lane from Jefferson, Md.; and Capitol Cider House of the District of Columbia. Spirits, meanwhile, ranged from Case 1 Caribbean Rum (Baltimore) and Gray Wolf Lone Vodka (St. Michaels) to McClintock’s Forager Gin (Frederick) and Cotton and Reed Spiced Rum (D.C.)

Leonard stated, “People love that they can order a beer that they typically might only see when they are visiting Baltimore, or on vacation in Ocean City, or out in the suburbs of Maryland. We are going into our sixth year in business, and we have a loyal following and a good customer base. We have found being next to the Capital One Arena, we get an in-

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Brian Leonard
Owner / Operator
Free State Atlantic Bar

flux of people from out of town who come in for the Wizards and Capitals games. So, we get a lot of business from that crowd, who aren't necessarily in the area all of the time."

He continued, "We strive to be a neighborhood bar of Chinatown, which is a little tough because the neighborhood is driven more towards the arena and the nearby office buildings. So, there are not as many residents as other neighborhoods in D.C. But we try to be a home for the residents who are there. Otherwise, we have a very large following of Wizards fans and Caps fans and concertgoers. We tend to see a lot of the same faces for different events. We have a lot of regulars who may only be in town once a month."

While the Free State Atlantic Bar does not have a kitchen, its food offerings do extend the Maryland theme offering such pre-packaged local snacks as Otterbien's cookies and Fisher's popcorn.

According to Leonard, "We try to support other small businesses in the community by selling their products and using their products in cocktails. We've fostered a lot of relationships over the years and have really good brewing partners. It can get tricky, because not all types of alcohol are produced locally. So, some things can be a bit more expensive than using your big, national brands. Wherever we can, we strive to use a small-batch

maker."

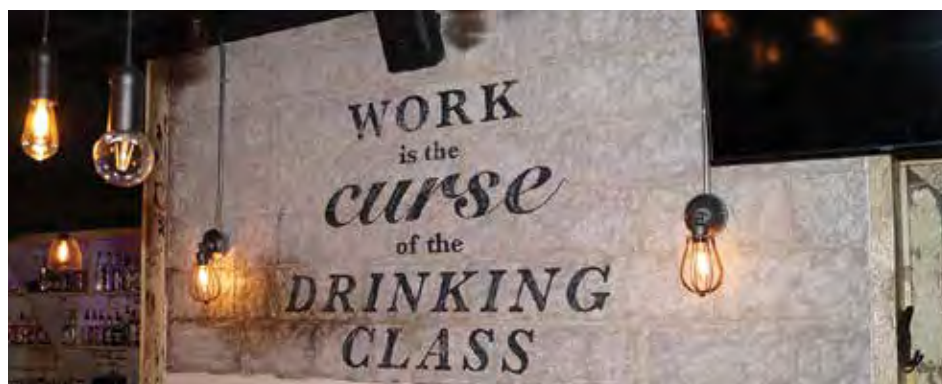
He added, "But it's all about the customers. I love talking to guests. I started bar backing and bartending 20 years ago now. I'm not behind the bar as much as I once was. But when I am there at night for different events, it's still great to talk to the customers, especially the ones who started coming in six years ago when Free State Atlantic Bar first opened and I was behind the bar all of the time. It's a good feeling to walk in every day and see at least one person that you know."

Free State was Maryland's state nickname when it opposed Prohibition. The overall establishment has a nautical/Chesapeake Bay look complete with old maps, ship lanterns, and oars. The maps were a touch the Leonards added personally. He said. "My wife and I went antiquing on the Eastern Shore and found a bunch of cool, old maps that we turned into

a collage and put on the wall. A few years later, she and I moved to Annapolis. By happenstance, I was looking at one of the maps and saw our neighborhood. That was pretty neat!"

The couple and their staff have definitely seen the highs and lows of the business since opening. Early on, they had only been up and running for a couple of years when the Capitals went on their Stanley Cup run in 2018. Two years later, though, the pandemic hit and Brian and the Mrs. had to put everything he had ever learned about the business into motion to stay open.

He remarked, "Free State is our second bar. The first was Lost and Found a couple of years prior, and we had a bunch of unforeseeable issues with the building. I was talking to another buddy of mine who owns a bar in the city and he told me, 'The problems are what this job is all about. There is going to be an issue, you're going to figure out how to solve it, and then you are going to move past it.' That's just something I try to keep in my head, especially the last few years we've gone through with the pandemic. You've got to be able to figure things out and then move on."





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Only 350 bottles of the 98.2-proof **Mortlach** Highland Malt, the distillery's most complex expression yet, are released annually. The rare 30-year-old Scotch whisky, distilled in six stills exactly 2.81 times, is finished in barrels seasoned either with Bordeaux, Calvados, or Guatemalan rum, and then united in custom quarter casks. Deep and full-bodied, it culminates in a peppery finish.

SRP: \$4,999.99 per 700-ml bottle



THE TRIO

Three distinctive Sweet Mash Rye whiskeys—Malted Rye, the espresso-like Chocolate Malt, and the Caramel Malt reminiscent of sticky toffee—comprise the limited-edition Master Distiller's Reserve collection from Hard Truth Distillery Co., a new annual winter tradition. The trifecta of barrel-strength liquids is mashed, distilled, aged, and bottled at the Brown County, Indiana, distillery from a select group of eight to 10 barrels.

SRP: \$89.99 per 750-ml bottle

VINTAGE GRAIN

Named for the renowned plant breeder Dr. Herbert Hunter, this flavorful barley variety first grown in 1959 and abandoned by the late 1970s has been revived by **Waterford Distillery** to create Heritage: Hunter. The 100-proof single malt Irish whisky, part of Waterford's Arcadian Farm Origin series, tastes of clove, orange cake, and wood char.

SRP: \$129.99 per 750-ml bottle



MADE IN LOUISIANA

First came rice vodka, and now J. T. Meleck Distillers, led by Mike Frugé, has launched a whiskey distilled entirely from South Louisiana rice tended by Frugé's family of fifth-generation farmers. Aged in American oak barrels for nearly five years, the 96-proof whiskey morphs from flavors of butterscotch and caramel to dark chocolate and gentle spice.

SRP: \$47 per 750-ml bottle



AQUATIC ADVENTURE

Forests of the Deep, Talisker's oldest expression, is a 44-year-old single malt Scotch whisky inspired by an expedition undertaken by the conservation organization Parley for the Oceans to one of the world's largest sea kelp forests near the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. The 98.2-proof spirit—which has an extremely limited release of just 1,997 bottles globally—was finished in casks fashioned out of staves that were aboard the ship and later charred with sustainably farmed Scottish sea kelp.

SRP: \$4,449.99 per 700-ml bottle



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TRIPLE ROSE LEMONADE

2 oz. Malfy Rosa Pink Grapefruit Gin
4 oz. pink lemonade

Method: Build gin and lemonade in a glass over ice and stir gently to combine. Top with dry sparkling rosé. Garnish with a rosemary sprig and grapefruit wedge.



ROSÉ SPRITZ

1 oz. St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur
2 ½ oz. strawberry-infused rosé wine (infuse four cups of quartered strawberries into a 750 ml bottle of rosé wine for at least three hours, then double strain)
2 oz sparkling yuzu

Method: Build ingredients over cherry blossom ice cubes in a wine glass.



GOLD MOON HIGHBALL

1 ½ oz. Johnnie Walker Black Label
*¼ oz. Lapsang Souchong syrup
2 oz. San Pellegrino Clementina

Method: Build all ingredients into a chilled highball glass filled with ice. Give one quick stir to combine and garnish with a piece of candied ginger.

** Lapsang Souchong Syrup

1 Lapsang Souchong	250 ml Water
tea bag/four grams	230 g Sugar
loose tea	

Steep tea in boiling water for five minutes. Strain or remove tea bags and stir in sugar until dissolved. Bottle and refrigerate.



COSMOPOL-ETTE-AN FROM ETTÉ VODKA

1 oz. Ette's Flora Rosa Vodka
½ oz. Cointreau
½ oz. Aperol
½ oz. lemon juice
1 ¾ oz. cranberry juice

Method: Fill a cocktail shaker one half to three quarters of the way full with ice. Add all ingredients into the cocktail shaker and shake. Strain into a martini glass and garnish with edible flowers and a lemon twist.



THE MACALLAN HOGMANAY FLIP

1 ½ oz. The Macallan A Night on Earth in Scotland
½ oz. almond liqueur
1 large egg white
½ oz. heavy cream
1 tsp praline syrup

Method: Add all ingredients to an ice-filled shaker and shake vigorously. Double strain into a coupe glass. Serve with a slice of shortbread.



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COLD-WEATHER RED

Among Napa Valley winery **Charles Krug's** everyday wintry reds is the recently unveiled medium-bodied Merlot 2020. Its bouquet of violet, blueberry compote, and dark chocolate paves the way to layers of cherry, red currant, and toasted oak.

SRP: \$28 per 750-ml bottle

SPRUCED UP

Lucente 2020, the latest release from Tuscan winery **Tenuta Luce**, is graced with a new front label depicting the sun encircled by 12 flames, an image that is poised to appear on all Tenuta Luce wines. A blend of Merlot and Sangiovese, the Lucente 2020 opens with blueberry and wild blackberry aromatics.

SRP: \$30 per 750-ml bottle



HISTORIC VINES

Carmenère, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot come together in the lush 2019 vintage from **Clos Apalta**, the wine estate of Domaines Bournet-Lapostolle in Chile's Apalta Valley. Exhibiting notes of ripe plum, dried fig, and restrained spice, the wine is born from an enclosed vineyard dating back to 1910—one of the country's oldest—that is surrounded by the Tinguiririca River and Andean foothills.

SRP: \$160 per 750-ml bottle



PINK STREAK

Sacha Lichine helped invigorate the U.S. rosé scene with Whispering Angel, and now he's keeping momentum going with **The Pale**. The dry, fruity rosé from Provence melds Grenache, Cinsault, Syrah, and Rolle and stands out with a fluted bottom bottle and convivial label evocative of 1920s illustrations from *The New Yorker*.

SRP: \$16.99 per 750-ml bottle



NEW BEGINNING

New Mexico wine legend Laurent Gruet ventured to Albuquerque's **Vara Wine & Distillery** in 2020. His first two sparkling offerings for the brand showcase intriguing combinations. The Silverhead Brut NV pairs 72 percent Chardonnay and three percent Syrah from Washington's Ancient Lakes AVA with 25 percent Xarel-lo/Macabeo from the Alt Penedes DO of Spain, while the Silverhead Brut Rosado NV is solely an Ancient Lakes expression of 75 percent Syrah and 25 percent Chardonnay.

SRP: \$25 (Brut) and \$27 (Brut Rosado) per 750-ml bottle

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* Cote des Roses Pinot Noir published on 12/01/2022
Cote des Roses Sauvignon Blanc published on 12/31/2022

GÉRARD BERTRAND

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF WINE EDUCATION

SHIFTS IN TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL BODIES AND A WAVE OF NEW RESOURCES HAVE IMPROVED ACCESS TO WINE EDUCATION—BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

BY CAITLIN A. MILLER

Over the past several years, broad cultural movements—#MeToo, Black Lives Matter, the shift to remote work—have impacted the wine industry as much as any other. Within the wine education space specifically, the impacts of these movements have been widespread, spurring change at almost every level—with no signs of slowing down.

“This is where wine education is changing,” explains Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW, an independent consultant, educator, and Bordeaux specialist and the former director of the International Wine Center (IWC) in New York City. “You’re having this migration from it being this elite language that you’re almost born with, to something for people who have never had anything to do with [wine].”

From where to find educational resources to who can access them—and even the importance of formal certifications themselves—the wine education landscape looks significantly different than it did just five years ago. *Beverage Media* spoke

with schools, teachers, students, and organizations to understand what’s changed, what’s working, and where wine education goes from here.

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES

“Wine education used to be quite formal,” says Gorman-McAdams. “Now, wine education is everything from ‘edu-tainment’ to credentials.” Deniece Bourne, a wine and spirits business development consultant and a Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET) certified educator, echoes this sentiment: “Wine education has blown up. It’s become increasingly important over the last five years and not just for the trade, but for the consumer as well.”

The expansion of wine education has been driven in part by changing demand. Industry professionals are looking for a greater range of educational opportunities after scandals shook student confidence in industry strongholds like the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas (CMSA). At the same time, curious consumers are showing a real interest in both formal and informal wine education; according to information provided by the WSET, consumer enthusiasts now represent approximately 50 percent of all students who take their wine courses.

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“In a recession, you’re never sure what will happen with enrollments,” says Adam Chase, the director of Grape Experience Wine and Spirit School in San Francisco. In 2008, enrollments went up “because people were looking for new jobs and they felt they needed credentials to get them to switch to wine. To some extent, that has also been true during COVID.”

To keep pace with demand, new delivery methods have been essential for traditional educational programs like WSET and the formal wine schools that provide them. “We’ve seen a whole change in how wine education is done,” says Chase. “There’s always been the self-study platform that WSET offers, but with the advent of Zoom and other technologies, you can now run a course online and actually get [wine] samples.” The Grape Experience began offering these courses during the pandemic as student demand shifted from away from the classroom.

Some schools are even combining delivery methods. “When we run [WSET] Diploma D1 and D2, we run it as a combination of the WSET’s online classroom and three Zoom classes,” says Chase. The Grape Experience still runs traditional in-person courses, albeit fewer of them. “The student can choose what they want and what’s going to work for them,” he adds.

Now under new leadership, the CMSA in particular is undergoing even more fundamental changes as a result of recent criticism. The organization plans to evolve from an examination body into an organization that supports the profession more broadly through education, mentoring, and credentialing.

“We create opportunities for beverage professionals to advance their careers, and in turn those service professionals elevate the beverage and hospitality experience for everyone,” says Julie Cohen Theobald, the executive director of the CMSA, who joined the organization in

2021. “We have taken significant steps toward inclusivity and transparency over the past several years.”

NEW LEARNING RESOURCES

As both professional and curious consumers look for new sources of wine education, a diverse range of resources have sprung up. Mostly started during the pandemic as a way to connect when travel wasn’t an option, Zoom tasting, webinars, and even online conferences have become standard offerings, even as pandemic restrictions have subsided.

“There are so many delivery platforms now, it’s almost like the Wild West,” says Gorman-McAdams. “There are so many people on social media, on YouTube, delivering their version of wine education.” Alternative delivery platforms have become popular because “a lot of [the formal educational platforms] are geared towards that academic approach, and not everyone learns in that way,” says Bourne. Examples range from informal content, such as the YouTube channel run by Master of Wine Konstantin Baum and Bon Appétit’s World of Wine video series lead by sommelier André Mack, to slightly more advanced material, such as Symington Family Estates’ School of Port, which provides a comprehensive online video course about the fortified wine, or Wine Australia’s robust education website that provides guides, maps, and videos about the region.

“The biggest benefit of the development of online sessions is being able to listen to and learn from winemakers from across the world,” says Matthew Gaughan, a WSET-certified educator and current Master of Wine student. “For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, Tyson Stelzer, who writes about Champagne, had live interviews with winemakers whom none of us would have been able to meet without visiting the region—and even if we were able to do so,



“A lot of [the formal educational platforms] are geared towards that academic approach, and not everyone learns in that way.”

—Deniece Bourne, consultant and WSET certified educator

we still might have not been able to meet them in person.” Before the pandemic, it was extremely difficult to gain access to certain people and information—now it’s becoming a common part of the education landscape.

As technology has advanced, so have the education offerings; online interactions aren’t just accessible around the world, they’re much more comprehensive. “With the improvement of software, not only can we take you and do a fly over [of a wine region], we can zoom in and go street level and all of a sudden you’re there,” says William Davis, the director of education at Wilson Daniels.

For the Bâtonnage Forum, the pandemic resulted in an opportunity to grow their offerings through a virtual format called Bâtonnage://Connect. It took place over four weeks in the summer of 2020, featuring 10 sessions with participation from more than 35 speakers and 20 women winemakers and

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chefs; over 600 people from five countries attended, according to Katie Canfield, a partner at the Bâtonnage Forum. “When the Forum returns, it will likely be a hybrid scenario with in-person and online components,” she says. “Now that we’ve built this international community, we must continue to cultivate it.”

EXPANDING EDUCATION ACCESS

With so many new entry points to wine education, access has changed significantly, and many industry professionals agree that broader access to education has been one of the positive results of the COVID-19-induced changes the industry has experienced.

For decades, formal wine education programs were primarily offered in large, metropolitan cities. If a student was not able to commute to a course site, it was difficult to find an alternative method of instruction. “Most people, even in the trade, perceive that each major [wine education] outlet has some barrier to access. For WSET, it’s the cost, if not location. It’s not readily available in every country in the world,” explains Bourne.

Now, that’s changing for many U.S.-based students. Online courses are being offered by schools throughout the country,

making it easier for students to access educational resources when one’s location or schedule doesn’t allow for in-person learning. According to data provided by the WSET, the demand for remote learning in the U.S. is strong; students in the Americas have been the quickest to embrace WSET’s online courses, with approximately 30 percent of all level one and two exams taken remotely—more than double the pre-pandemic rate.

Similar changes are taking place at the CMSA. “We are currently enrolling thousands of students from across the world in our online courses, which are accessible in every geography,” says Theobald. “While COVID necessitated the need for hosting programs online, the format is great for accommodating different learning styles.” Despite returning to in-person teaching, the CMSA has retained a strong online roster for its introductory sommelier course and exam. “It’s currently an equal split in preference between in-person and online,” she adds.

“It has leveled the playing field,” says Gorman-McAdams. “Now, there’s much more equal access and that’s a good thing.” Moreover, at many wine schools, including the IWC and Grape Experience, online courses are cheaper than in-person ones, bringing down the cost of entry. “In any major landscape change, there’s always a fallout because there’s a realization that you don’t need to have these kinds of costs. They’re just circumstantial to place or location,” says Gorman-McAdams.

However, it’s the proliferation of informal education programs that has likely provided the greatest increase in access to wine education. Students—both industry professionals and consumers—can now access quality education content for free across many different platforms. “For a long time, wine education has been stale, male, and pale,” says Gorman-McAdams. “Now, you’re drowning in opportunities. You could be listening to

an Instagram Live, a webinar. I think one of the challenges is ... how do you navigate what is in the tsunami of possibilities.”

THE DOWNSIDES OF CHANGE

While online education options have helped with access from both a cost and location perspective, these delivery methods come with a different set of challenges. “I have to confess, I’m not a big fan,” says Gaughan, referring to Zoom classes. “I can’t imagine being a full-time, everyday teacher having to teach solely through Zoom. Students who take in-person classes have much higher pass rates; it’s impossible to fully replicate the classroom experience where students and educators taste the wines together.”

At the Grape Experience, Chase has found that the online format works better for some courses than others. “It’s great for WSET’s levels one and two, but level three, I think, needs to be combined with some in-person or at least live Zoom to work,” he says. “You can lose sight of the amount of detail you need to learn.”

Formal programs are starting to adapt to changing demand, but there’s still a long way to go. “The student has changed,” says Chase. “They are used to an on-demand world where they can schedule their own things, where data is 24/7. I think the WSET is getting there, but they’re not there. The student is expecting more flexibility.”

For students that chose to pursue alternative education options online, finding reputable sources is essential, but can be difficult to recognize without guidance. “The biggest challenge we’ve seen with social media is the onslaught of misinformation,” says Davis. “For those that are coming into wine education, they may be learning bad information from day one and it could take months or years to unlearn. We have to be extremely careful with the democratization of wine education. There’s a lot of bad information that’s out there.”

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ARE CERTIFICATIONS STILL IMPORTANT?

With so many diverse resources now available, it begs the questions whether traditional, expensive wine certifications are still necessary. “I don’t think formal certifications are necessary to be successful in the industry,” says Gaughan. “If I were an employer, I would take many other factors into consideration.”

Canfield agrees that certifications don’t necessarily get a student where they want to be in terms of their career. “While wine certifications can be beneficial for wine professionals entering the industry, in most cases it falls short in setting candidates up for success in their respective careers,” says Canfield. “At the end of the day, what most employers are looking for on a CV is experience.”

For Davis, certifications still have an essential role to play. “The reason they are important is because you’re being tested on a baseline. If you’ve done the certification, then that usually means you’ve done the work.”

Even Gaughan admits, “The knowledge of spirits I learned from WSET courses, even though my focus was wine, was vital in building up a substantial collection of spirits and related drinks in [retail] shops and in aiding sales.”

Alisha Blackwell-Calvert, a sommelier at the Cider House in the Four Seasons hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, recently passed the CMSA’s Advanced Sommelier exam and found the certification to be worthwhile. “Certification has been closely tied to my career goals,” says Blackwell-Calvert. “Each ‘level up’ has offered new opportunities for my career that may not have been possible without taking the initiative to set myself apart.”

Even so, Blackwell-Calvert points out that “many talented wine professionals have become successful without a pin and paper. I suggest envisioning what you



Mary Gorman-McAdams, MW

Students in the Americas have been the quickest to embrace WSET’s online courses, with approximately 30 percent of all level one and two exams taken remotely—more than double the pre-pandemic rate.

want your path to look like when it comes to choosing which educational body to study towards.”

WHAT STILL NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Most of the people interviewed feel that progress has been made in terms of the diversity of students and, to a much lesser degree, teachers. However, very few organizations or schools track this information, making it difficult to say how much progress has actually been made.

Tracking diversity data is an essential first step towards measurable change. The WSET is looking into gathering this data, but doesn’t currently track it, while the CMSA recently started gathering diversity data. “Beginning in 2021, we added the option for candidates to share their race and ethnicity in their student profile and as they register for our programs,” says Theobald. Many agree that there’s much more work to be done to make the landscape more diverse.

In recent years, the industry has seen a slew of new scholarships focused on helping women and people of color access wine education. While this offers a good starting point, it doesn’t ensure that

students of diverse backgrounds continue the path and ultimately end up working in the industry. “There’s a lot more work to encourage and get more people through the WSET program and into the industry to make sure a more diverse group of people is making it through the career path as well,” says Gorman-McAdams.

The road to becoming an educator can be even more difficult, in part because the career path often feels shrouded in mystery. “I still get people asking me ‘how do I become an educator?’” says Bourne. “People just don’t know how to do it, and that’s part of the lack of diversity that you see in the education space. They don’t know how to access it; it’s not readily available knowledge.”

Even fewer accommodations have been made for students with disabilities. Bourne recalls a diversity scholarship recipient with hearing impairment who had trouble accessing the course. “When we think about access, we usually default to financial access, access for people of diverse backgrounds, but we don’t always think of physical ability, seeing, hearing,” she says. “Has that access increased? Not so much, because people aren’t thinking about those demographics when they think about access and diversity.”

The world has changed significantly in recent years—and so have wine students. Professional and casual learners alike have a new appetite for learning, and new expectations around access and flexibility. Students want educational materials that suit their individual needs, whether that’s a different delivery method or a non-traditional course topic.

New options are popping up everywhere to meet that demand, offering more diverse learning opportunities and presenting new challenges as students figure out what’s worthwhile and what’s not. In all likelihood, accelerated change will be the new normal going forward—and that’s a good thing, as the world of wine is constantly evolving. ■

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Juan Pablo Murgia, winemaker

Purchased by Alejandro Bulgheroni in 2012, Argento has quietly become Argentina's largest organic grape grower, dedicating unparalleled levels of investment

towards cutting-edge techniques for holistic biodiversity in every part of the vineyard. But Argento also takes that dedication to doing good beyond the vineyard, creating a Fair Trade program to support the local community.

Leading this charge is Mendoza winemaker Juan Pablo Murgia, who was awarded top winemaking honors from Tim Atkin, MW, and *Descorchados* in both 2021 and 2022. Murgia's Argento wines are hailed for their polished nature and masterful expression of unique vineyard sites.

These highlights, among many others, would not be possible if not for Murgia's guidance in the cellar, as well as his dedication to unprecedented vineyard diversity and the decade-long process of converting Argento's 425 hectares to organic viticulture. Prior to planting key vineyards in Mendoza proper and the Uco Valley, an extensive soil mapping project was under-

"We take a deeply holistic approach to working in balance with the ecosystem."

- Juan Pablo Murgia

taken to expose an amazing diversity of soil types. This research allowed Murgia and his team to be as precise as possible when planning each vineyard, block by block.

The soils of Argento's 230-hectare Alto Agrelo Vineyard, for example, span from sand-clay soils at the low end to well-draining, rocky soils higher up. This breadth allowed for a range of grape varieties—including Malbec, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sémillon, Chardonnay, Petit Verdot, and Syrah. In contrast, Altamira, the winery's prized 20-hectare vineyard, offers a heterogeneous mix of sand, silt, and rocks, with a covering of limestone. It was deemed a haven for Malbec, with different clones and rootstocks planted to complementary soil types and irrigation techniques.

The direct result of this painstaking work can be seen in Argento's single-vineyard and single-block Malbecs and Cabernet Francs. To best showcase the sites, Murgia utilizes large French oak foudres and inert concrete eggs, which provide a transparent lens for the pure fruit and energized nature of the alluvial soils to shine through.

A leader of Argentina's organic movement, the team at Argento has partnered with public and private institutions, including the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, to create *MatrizViva* (Living Matrix). With a

■ ARGENTO ESTATE COLLECTION MALBEC

A certified organic, vegan, fair trade wine made with 100 percent Malbec. It offers fresh aromas of red fruits, plums, and distinct balsamic notes.

■ ARGENTO ESTATE COLLECTION MALBEC-CABERNET FRANC

Also certified organic, vegan, and fair trade, this wine offers a blend of 70 percent Malbec and 30 percent Cabernet Franc that entices with aromas of black fruits, baking spices, and balsamic notes.

special department of staff dedicated to the project, the initiative's aim is to research grape growing and winemaking methodologies that work in harmony with the local ecosystem, focusing on the five axes of water, organisms, soil, vines, and the environment.

Recent findings include a new, natural method for controlling a destructive ant species in Mendoza. Left unchecked, the species will cut the flora in the vineyard, resulting in massive reductions in grape yields. But a research project showed that the ants can be led out of the vineyard using enticing cover crops and guided to create their nests beyond the vineyard, allowing the ants to live harmoniously while deterring them from impacting the vines.

The theme of discovery is constant for Murgia, and his pioneering spirit has led him to a new frontier with Otronia, the world's southernmost vineyard. Planted in 2010, it is located at 45° 33' in Patagonia, where an extreme, cool climate lends the

"We believe that terroir includes all of the organisms that share the land, and the honor is ours to coexist with nature's amazing bounty. The resulting Argento wines are unique and expressive, and for me, personally rewarding."

- Juan Pablo Murgia

project to red, white, and sparkling wines made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Drawing from his experience in Mendoza, Murgia brings the same dedication to soil mapping to this Patagonian site, utilizing natural tree barriers to minimize wind impact and innovative frost



management techniques. Murgia's Otronia wines are fast becoming touted as some of Argentina's most exciting and are as stunning as the landscape. ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Argento.

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CREATING BETTER BAR EDUCATION

A GOOD ON-PREMISE TRAINING PROGRAM DOESN'T JUST OFFER BEVERAGE BASICS—IT ALSO AIDS STAFF RETENTION AND BOOSTS SALES

BY AMY ZAVATTO

In the hospitality industry, an establishment can have the most lauded chef, Instagramable menu, and glowing nods in regional and national publications, but an under-educated staff can mean those merits are not effectively translated to the guests. Certainly, much effort goes into training staff on dishes and ingredients, not to mention, at the very least, a perfunctory knowledge of the wine list. Spirits and cocktails—let alone beer, cider, and

non-alcoholic offerings—need the same level and effort in education or a business is losing out on both positive customer experience and the sales that come with it.

The challenge of finding skilled workers and retaining them makes staff education more important than ever to the industry, which lost over one million workers in 2021 due to the CO-

The Bar Methods Summit hosted in New York City.

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VID-19 pandemic—many of which never returned.

“Many skilled and seasoned employees were either forced or made the decision to leave the industry,” says Christopher Bidmead, the cofounder of Bar Methods, a Brooklyn-based skills and systems masterclass for the bar industry. “This means that we are looking at an entirely new generation of bar and restaurant staff that doesn’t have the benefit of senior personnel to guide them or help teach. This leaves the burden on the owners or managers who are already spread too thin trying to navigate the ever-changing landscape of post-COVID hospitality.”

BEVERAGE BASICS MATTER

Equipping staff with the very fundamentals of beverage education is the first step of training a new hire. But those basics are also pivotal in creating a long-term employee who has the tools to thrive in their position. When it comes to foundational training, start simple and build.

“Staff are given a 101 training on how to work in a space, but it’s always missing the foundational elements like, ‘this is what whiskey is; this is what beer is.’ Those things often aren’t available,” says Gregory Buda, the former director of education for The Dead Rabbit, who developed

“It’s inexcusable that a bartender knows everything about the cocktail list and spirits, and the servers know nothing”

– Gregory Buda, Buda Consulting

a successful, modular, knowledge-building beverage curriculum that’s become the core of his bar consulting business, Buda Consulting.

Buda’s proven methodology? Write it down. It sounds simple—or, perhaps, like a slog to put together—but creating the material or finding a subcontractor who can provide it to your business, is meaningful for many reasons, not least that it offers the basics in bite-sized lessons.

“Put it in a format that’s easy to digest one element at a time: a document on each category of spirits; how to develop a menu; how to train staff,” says Buda. “Then you can build on stuff that’s part and parcel to your venue.”

ABOVE LEFT: Christopher Bidmead, the cofounder of Bar Methods. // ABOVE RIGHT: An industry masterclass led by Gregory Buda on Irish whiskey for the Halifax bar community.

Also, this information doesn’t depart when an employee leaves. “One of the most frustrating elements of hospitality staffing is that it can be somewhat transient,” says Buda. “People leave and take knowledge with them. The more you can put on paper, the more stable your business. The knowledge remains.”

Education isn’t just about focusing on new employees, though. “The other common error I see is businesses forgetting to retrain their existing staff,” says Bidmead. “It’s not just about the new hires; everyone on staff should receive refreshers. Ongoing education invites the opportunity to discover new points of view that may introduce efficiencies or solve problems that you didn’t know existed.”

EXPAND TRAINING ACROSS CATEGORIES AND STAFF

Derek Brown, the founder and owner of the recently shuttered Columbia Room in Washington, D.C., has been especially plugged into the non-alcoholic cocktail sector with his consulting company, Positive Damage, which creates low- and no-alcohol bar programs. Understanding low-proof drinks and educating staff on how they’re made can enliven a sector of consumers who are often left out. “If that part of your menu is not welcoming and your servers aren’t educated about it,

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you've missed out on an opportunity to meet a person's needs and make money from it," says Brown. "Almost 25 percent of consumers don't drink alcohol."

In addition to diving into overlooked consumer categories, Buda argues that effective education is also about ignored sectors of your staff. Looking at your training beyond those behind the stick is crucial. "It's inexcusable that a bartender knows everything about the cocktail list and the spirits, and the servers know nothing," he says. "They are in control of more experiences of guests who walk through the door."

Bidmead agrees, adding that beverage training in both technique and knowledge directly impacts both the bottom and top-line growth of a business. "It doesn't matter if you're serving tables or behind the bar; that knowledge is going to show in your performance and engagement with guests," he says. "This registers with guests and improves their overall experience leading to organic marketing for your business as well as higher check averages."

TRAINING AIDS IN STAFF RETENTION

"Giving staff educational tools and encouragement is to take away the expectation of transiency," says Shawn Soole, the bar manager for Clive's Classic Lounge in Victoria, British Columbia. "I think the biggest mistake most establishments make is the mentality of, 'What if they leave?' They worry about investing in their team. My argument is always: How much does it cost to replace good staff? Training in the grand scheme of things [costs] a minimal amount based on staff retention, measurable return on investment in increasing sales, and per head spend[ing]."

At Clive's Classic Lounge, he's created a program that offers all employees complimentary BarSmarts online education, and compensates them for the time they spend in class. Clive's also offers annual WSET Spirits courses, and they are adding particular spirits category-focused

A student at the Bar Methods Summit.

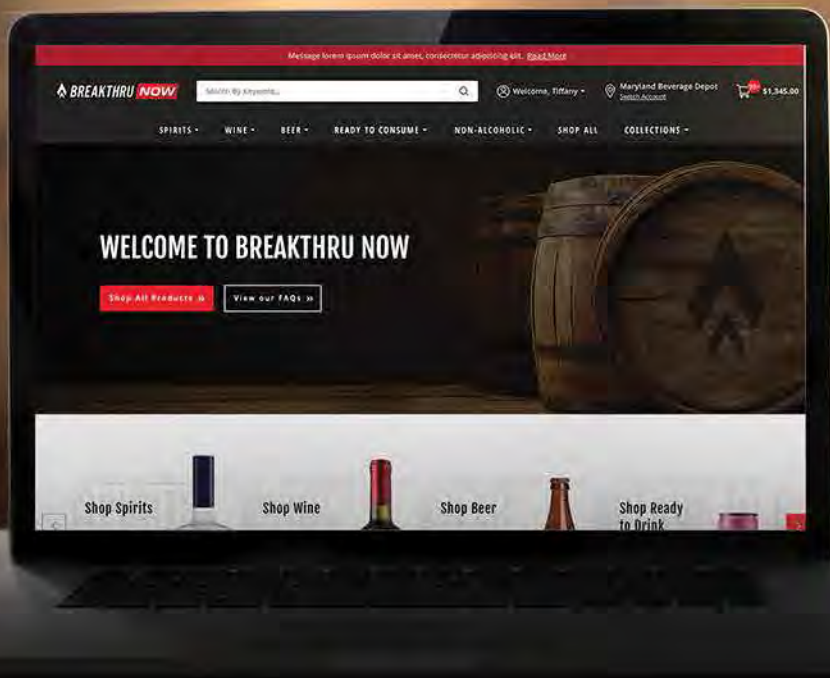
educational programs in the future—an expense that's paying off.

"I have staff post-pandemic that have been with us two years, 18 months, and 12 months consecutively, and I have had minimal turnover since reopening," he says. "I think training has always been important but now it can mean a difference in staff retention. The intangible value-add for staff is unquantifiable post-pandemic."

Buda is in the process of opening a Mediterranean-skewed aperitif bar in Montreal called Bisou Bisou that he co-owns with Kevin Demers, who also owns El Pequeño and Coldroom. For the latter, Demers has experimented with a staff bonus structure that rewards knowledgeable sales that increase profit. But it also looks to reward good decision-making that is the result of education in the bar business. For example, staffing effectively, ordering efficiently to take advantage of delivery schedules and deals, and ordering the right amount of food so less goes to waste would warrant bonuses under the scheme. "It's bold and generous but it's also really clever. He's rewarding people for making his business a success," says Buda.

Learning on the job is an ongoing process that, ideally, builds upon itself. But that environment is created at the top, and encouragement is key. Hospitality is a tough business and establishing a workplace that celebrates the wins helps foster more of them.

"I feel like a lot of establishments and owners look at money in the wrong way. They look at the cost of training and see that as a dollar amount that can be cut back on rather than seeing it as an avenue for staff retention, and to save money in the long term," says Buda. "I don't know if that's greed or shortsightedness or lack of understanding of finance, but the simple idea is that you don't invest in a place—you invest in people." ■



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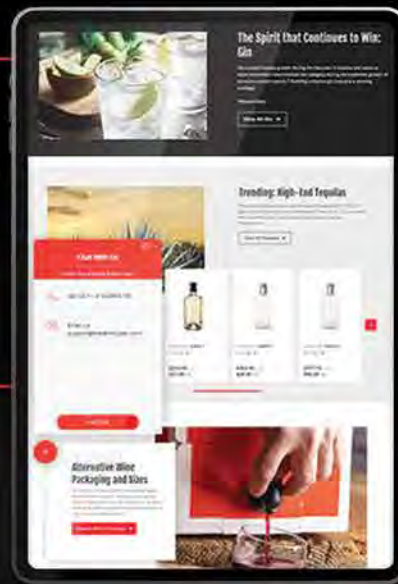
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Romilo's Restaurant

Paradissis Has Found Paradise in Severna Park

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX

Romilo's Restaurant in Severna Park will be celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Chris Paradissis has owned the establishment for almost the past six years, continuing to serve the same Greek-Italian-American breakfasts, lunches, and dinners it has been known for from the get-go.

Lately, though, it's Romilo's bar that has been drawing in the locals. In a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, Paradissis stated, "Many people didn't know we had a bar! Last April, we expanded [the space] and added new signage on the front

of the building, really highlighting that we have a bar. We offer the full variety of a liquor menu, mixed drinks, wines, and beers to both the dining room and bar area. We run Happy Hour seven days a week from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Our liquor sales are up over 200 percent in the last year based on the changes we've made, the renovation and expansion, and the increased promotion. It's been a huge boost."

In addition to the every-evening Happy Hour, Romilo's offers other promotions. For instance, Thursdays mean 50 percent off the price of bot-

tles of wine all day. There is also Trivia Night (every Wednesday) and live entertainment (Fridays and Saturdays) featuring bands that usually play oldies or soft rock hits.

According to Paradissis, "One of the things we worked with the liquor board in getting is a dancing license. That was a challenge. A lot of establishments in Severna Park don't have that. We have a large enough establishment on the bar side where we have a dance floor and a full band set-up. Romilo's is really a great place for people to come out and have drinks, great food, and live entertain-



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Chris Paradissis
Owner / Operator
Romilo's Restaurant

restaurant, especially when it comes to advertising our special events."

At the holidays, for instance, Romilo's packed 'em in with an Eat, Drink & Be Ugly Sweater Party. The contest featured prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places and was a lot of fun. "I love when I get feedback from customers about how much they enjoy our establishment," Paradissis said. "We have customers who have been coming into this restaurant from the time it's been open. It's been a staple of Severna Park for three decades now. I also enjoy how our employees interact with our customers."

The social aspect is one of the things he and his staff really missed during the COVID-19 crisis. Fortunately, Romilo's already had a successful carryout business in place when customers were suddenly forced to social distance and stay home. Paradissis declared, "We do carryout, DoorDash, Grubhub, and Uber Eats. Through the pandemic, that saved Romilo's. Also, based on

Maryland law, we were allowed to have [beverage alcohol] delivered. Our carryout has always been known. We do between 35 and 40 percent of our total business through carryout to this day. During the pandemic, it was much higher than that. Without that, we most likely wouldn't have made it."

Paradissis came to the bar and restaurant business from the retail grocery industry. His prior professional credits included lengthy stints as a regional Vice President of Operations for Giant Food and Vice President of Operations & Store Merchandising for Natural Markets Food Group.

He remarked, "As in that business, it's true in restaurants and bars. The key to success is people. The biggest challenge has been finding good people. We're very selective about who we choose to hire at Romilo's. We hire friendly people who can really take care of our customers from a service standpoint."

And from a management side, he

ment that you can literally dance to."

He continued, "Customers love us because they don't have to drive to Annapolis. We're in the Robinson Crossing Shopping Center. We're a little bit hidden, but our customers like to describe us as a 'hidden jewel.' A lot of customers who come in for the first time say, 'Wow, we didn't know you were here!'"

As a result, marketing has been key to Romilo's growing beyond its core local clientele. Romilio's has a food truck that extends the brand beyond the restaurant's Ritchie Highway trapings. "Our food truck goes out to special events and into the various neighborhoods," Paradissis said. "It features a limited menu, but we do serve our top drivers. It definitely gets the name out into the community."

Paradissis and his staff also try and keep Romilo's visible on Facebook and other online platforms: "We're really trying to work on our exposure through marketing and social media. One of the challenges is we have an older clientele. Many of our customers are 40 years old and up. Some of them don't utilize social media. So, my best advertising is still word of mouth. But we still do a lot on Facebook and Instagram to promote the



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stressed that one of the big keys to success is to take care of one's employees. "Take care of your people has been my motto for this restaurant. It was my motto for when I was Vice President of Operations for Giant Food for almost 15 years. It's all about people and good service and fresh foods. I can see it in my employees' faces when they come to work,

especially when there's live entertainment. They're enjoying themselves. They're enjoying the fun and the atmosphere. And when they're having fun, it can't help but reflect on the customers."

He added, "You have to have a passion for what you do. You have to love what you do. It's very important that you enjoy working with people.

If you don't have that passion and enjoyment, it's going to be very difficult for you to be successful."

The *Beverage Journal* had the benefit of sitting down with Paradissis near the end of one year and the beginning of another. While times aren't nearly as tough as 2020 going into 2021, the year ahead does pose its share of challenges. Paradissis concluded, "I am optimistic, but I'm also very cautious. I'm very optimistic based on the fundamentals of my restaurant. But I am also cautious because of inflation right now, the price increases. Once we came out of the pandemic, we hit significant inflation and it affected how we had to operate. There were price adjustments, menu adjustments, etc. We'll survive, but it has resulted in a lot of unpredictability in the business." ■

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OF THE SEASON

Seattle's **Elysian Brewing** has re-introduced Bifrost, a winter favorite. The medium-bodied, malty pale ale (8.3% ABV) is fittingly redolent of warming caramel apple, spice, and orange zest.

SRP: \$11.99 per six-pack of 12-oz. cans



GO-TO COCKTAIL GIN

First up in **Barr Hill's** experimental Distillery Selection series is Tom Cat Kingdom Strength, a rich, high-proof aged gin that stands out in Martinis and Gimlets alike. Along with juniper, citrus, and cedar notes, the gin has sweet and smoky undertones of vanilla and oak.

SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle



BOLD BOTANICALS

Bittersweet Aperitivo, from the Portland, Oregon, non-alcoholic spirits company **Wilderton**, marries grapefruit, gentian, and orange blossom with the likes of aromatic cassia cinnamon, Chardonnay grape juice, and Turkish rhubarb root. The addition of soda water and a lemon twist garnish elevate it to mocktail status.

SRP: \$36.99 per 750-ml bottle



SUBTERRANEAN TREASURE

The VVOP, the newest offering in **Taylor Fladgate's** range of rare, limited releases (only 3,000 bottles are available), has been mellowing in the Port wine house's granite-walled cellars since before the Second World War. Despite the numerous decades of maturation, the Very Very Old Tawny is a bright and balanced digestif underpinned by butterscotch, dried fig, and marzipan.

SRP: \$1,150 per 750-ml bottle



BARREL BLENDS

For the first installment of The Oak Collection, **Pursuit Spirits** is putting the spotlight on two 108-proof whiskeys: Pursuit United Bourbon Finished with Toasted American and French Oak, and Pursuit United Rye Finished with Sherry French Revere Oak. The former is based on a proprietary combination of three straight bourbon whiskeys from Tennessee, Indiana, and New York, while the latter mingles rye whiskeys from Sagamore Spirit Distillery in Maryland and Kentucky's Bardstown Bourbon Company.

SRP: \$74.99 per 750-ml bottle