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PROFITABLE PROMOTIONS FOR FEBRUARY

February offers a plethora of opportunities for profitable promotions. With St. Valentine's Day, the Super Bowl, and the lingering winter blues, establishments can leverage these events to boost sales and engage customers. Here's a guide to some potential promotion ideas.

St. Valentine's Day Delights:

On-premise can capitalize on the romantic atmosphere by offering special Valentine's Day-themed cocktails, wine pairings, or exclusive promotions for couples. Discounts on champagne and wine can attract both couples and groups celebrating love.

Off-premise can highlight St. Valentine's Day gift packages. This could be a good opportunity to move any champagne that's still inventoried from New Year's.

Super Bowl Spectacle:

The Super Bowl is a major sporting event that draws crowds to bars and restaurants. Tailor promotions around game-day specials, such as discounted beer buckets, themed cocktails, or appetizer platters. Consider running contests or giveaways during the game to keep the energy high and customers engaged.

For those staying home, Super Bowl party packs can attract customers looking for convenient and festive options.

Winter Warmers:

Combat the cold weather with promotions on warm and comforting drinks. Offer discounts on hot cocktails like mulled wine, spiked hot chocolate, or Irish coffee. Deals on

winter-themed beer and whiskey pairings can also entice customers looking to warm up and relax.

Craft Beer Celebrations:

February is an excellent time to showcase craft beers. Restaurants and bars can host a beer-tasting event featuring local breweries or a curated selection of seasonal brews. Consider partnering with a brewery for tap takeovers or offering discounts on craft beer flights to encourage exploration of different flavors.

Liquor stores can also invite the distributors of local or seasonal craft beer selections to do tastings in store. Creating displays featuring brands that, when purchased together, create tasty winter warmers at home will lead to impulse purchases otherwise never realized.

Social Media Engagement:

Leverage social media platforms to promote your February specials. Engage customers with polls, contests, and sneak peeks of upcoming promotions. User-generated content contests, where customers share their experiences with your drinks, can create buzz and attract new patrons.

February provides a rich canvas for beverage alcohol promotions. By aligning with popular events and creating enticing offers, you can not only boost sales but also foster a memorable and enjoyable experience for your customers. Whether it's a romantic evening, a sports-filled weekend, or a cozy winter night, strategic promotions can make February a lucrative month for your business. ■

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1. EMPIRICAL

Empirical, the flavor company founded by alums of Noma in Copenhagen, has teamed up with Doritos, part of the PepsiCo and Frito-Lay North America portfolios, to create a limited-edition innovation. Empirical x Doritos Nacho Cheese Spirit employs Empirical's savvy vacuum distillation process to preserve the umami taste of Doritos tortilla chips. Layers of nacho cheese and corn make it ripe for spins on the Bloody Mary and Margarita.

\$ SRP: \$65 per 750-ml bottle
empirical.co

2. RON RUBIN WINERY

One of only five B Corp-certified wineries in California, Sonoma Valley's Ron Rubin Winery has launched the eco-conscious Blue Bin collection. The 2022 vintages of Vin Rosé, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc come in bottles developed with the responsible packaging company Amcor that are crafted with 100 percent recyclable materials—including an ultra-thin layer of the protective glass Plasmax—that are meant to be recycled themselves.

\$ SRP: \$15 per 750-ml bottle
ronrubinwinery.com

3. LUCANO

Historic Lucano's versatile zero-proof (0.5% ABV) herbal counterpart, Amaro Lucano Non-Alcoholic, can be sipped neat or as a botanical-forward substitute for gin and vodka in mocktails. Aromas of myrtle, citrus, rosemary, and chamomile lead to an equally harmonious bitter, floral, and sweet palate.

\$ SRP: \$29.99 per 750-ml bottle
kobrandwineandspirits.com

4. PAULANER

Consumer demand has given way to a taller, bigger, 19.2-ounce can of Paulaner Brewery's Münchner Lager. Imported by Paulaner USA, the German beer's large, single-size format, more convenient than a six-pack, is ideal for toting around to concerts and sporting events.

\$ SRP: \$3.49 per 19.2-oz. can
paulaner.com

5. CASA LUMBRE

Imbibers are transported to the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico's citrus capital, with Alma Finca Orange Liqueur. Casa Lumbre's most recent creation, it is made by cofounder and master distiller Iván Saldaña from a blend of sweet and bitter orange peels, fresh Persian lime leaves and citrus blossoms, and local spices harvested between October and December by a cooperative of local farmers in the town of Oxtutzcab. Try it in a Cosmopolitan or all-Mexican Margarita.

\$ SRP: \$34.99 per 700-ml bottle
almafinca.com

6. FORREST WINES

New Zealand's Forrest Wines, long a champion of screw caps, has launched its low-ABV Brigid label with an herbal Sauvignon Blanc and red fruit-laden Pinot Noir. Both of these 2022 vintages, from grapes grown in the Wairau Valley of Marlborough, contain just 9.5% alcohol (and 80 calories per serving) via a new viticulture practice led by winemaker Beth Forrest that naturally restricts the vines' ability to produce sugar as they ripen.

\$ SRP: \$19.99 to \$24.99 per 750-ml bottle
forrest.co.nz

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7. CONTRALUZ MEZCAL

Housed in a dark crystal bottle, Contraluz 11:11 reposado mezcal is the follow-up to the brand's cristalino expression. Like the original, it's distilled from 100 percent Espadin agave, but aged in American oak bourbon and Sakura Japanese whisky casks for 11 months and 11 days, yielding notes of vanilla, cherry blossom, and gentle smoke.

\$ SRP: \$200 per 700-ml bottle
mezcalcontraluz.com



8

8. RENEGADE RUM

Grenada-made Renegade Rum has debuted a flagship range of four terroir-driven Caribbean spirits. The aged All-Island Cuvée: Nova, the Single Farm Cuvée: Dunfermline, and MicrOrigin: Hope, which is distilled from a single field of cane on the eastern side of the island, all explore the notion of cuvée in rum. By contrast, Cuvée: Aura is an unaged, pre-cask assemblage that highlights pure cane flavors.

\$ SRP: \$49.99 to \$79.99 per 700-ml bottle
renegaderum.com



9



10

10. REAL SANGRIA

Peach Fuzz is Pantone's 2024 Color of the Year, and the soft hue continues to make a splash in the flavored wine category, too. For example, the newest addition to the red and white varieties of Cruz Garcia's Real Sangria from Spain stars the refreshing, aromatic fruit. This ready-to-drink, 8% ABV beverage, found on sangria and sweet wine shelves alike, also brightens such easy-to-make cocktails as the spritz.

\$ SRP: \$8.99 per 750-ml bottle
realsangriausa.com

9. MIONETTO

Prosecco producer Mionetto has expanded its Prestige collection with a low-calorie, low-sugar, alcohol-removed sparkling wine. By extracting the alcohol content from the finished product, the bubbly, which flaunts a less than 0.05% ABV, exhibits notes of peach and green apple that mimic the classic Prosecco Brut.

\$ SRP: \$15 per 750-ml bottle
usa.mionetto.com



12

11. LANG & REED NAPA VALLEY

The devastating impact of wildfires on the North Coast County AVA has forced Lang & Reed Napa Valley to look beyond its usual vineyard sources for the tart, juicy California Cabernet Franc 2022. Joining fruit from the trusty local Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard and T Bar T Ranch in the Alexander Valley, which were planted with the Entav 214 Cabernet Franc clone from the Loire Valley, are grapes grown in Cienega Valley, on the Central Coast, and from Sonoma's Rockpile AVA.

\$ SRP: \$29 per 750-ml bottle
langandreed.com

12. VICTORY BREWING COMPANY

Pennsylvania craft-beer pioneer Victory Brewing Company, an Artisanal Brewing Ventures brand, has partnered with Tastykake snack foods, another Keystone State success story, on Koffee Kake Ale. An ode to Tastykake's crumb-topped, cream-filled cupcakes, the sweet ale is redolent of cinnamon and pound cake.

\$ SRP: From \$10.99 per six-pack of 12-oz. bottles
victorybeer.com



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TOM HURST

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

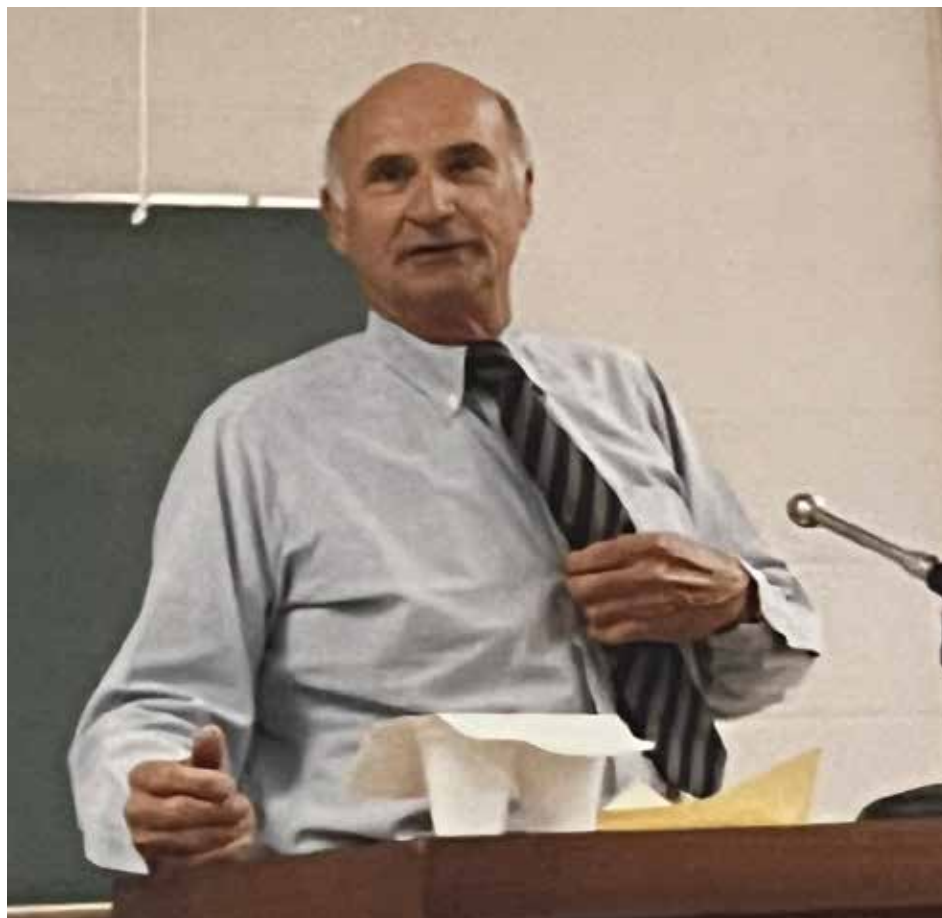
Tom Hurst was born on November 28, 1924, a member of “The Greatest Generation”

as coined by newsman Tom Brokaw to describe the age group that came of age during the Great Depression who fought in World War II and sired the Baby Boom. A native of Baltimore, Hurst indeed joined the U.S. Navy during WWII after attending City College. During the war, he served aboard a ship that was torpedoed and survived.

Hurst returned to civilian life and started a career in the local beverage business that became one of legend. He worked his way up from a warehouse and loading dock employee to President of The Kronheim Company before his retirement in 1990. Along the way, he gave many industry professionals their start and continued to inspire them throughout their careers.

Among them is Bruce Wills, former National Sales Director for Boordy Vineyards among other impressive titles. Wills in an interview described Hurst, who passed away on November 5, 2023 less than a month shy of his 99th birthday, as “larger than life. [He was] very insightful; would always ask meaningful questions, personally and professional; and would always leave you with not an answer, but a thought process to solve your own problem.”

Wills, who was hired by Hurst in 1979, continued, “The big takeaway for me that I have used in my life was the importance of ‘mastering the fundamentals.’ Master the fundamentals and success will follow. Take pride



in hard work and accomplishments and learn from experience. He was definitely a coach and a very important friend.”

Another former Kronheim staffer heavily influenced by Hurst was Jim Anderson, who described his former mentor as a “combination of Winston Churchill and Teddy Roosevelt. A man of character and intense drive.”

Anderson remembered one especially inspiring memory of a time when Hurst was recovering from a leg injury and required a

cane to help him walk. There was a particular “monthly book” meeting when he limped to the podium, surveyed his staff, threw his cane across the room, and exclaimed, “We have NO time for weakness! Let’s go!” Anderson recalled, “I think our numbers were down or something that quarter. Almost 40 years later, I still remember that moment.”

Pat Coleman was also given his start at Kronheim by Hurst. But it took patience and determination before he was officially

brought into the fold. "After about 10 phone conversations with him telling me The Kronheim Company had no openings, he agreed to see me," Coleman recalled. "I was ushered into his office where he looked at me, shook my hand, and said, 'Who are you, and why are you in my office?' A few weeks later, I was offered a temporary sales position covering for one of their senior reps who was going on leave for medical reasons. He told me, 'If you don't f*** this up, we may offer you a regular position.'" A Kronheim career ensued.

Like Wills, Coleman said that Hurst was a master not at coming up with solutions, but at giving his employees the tools to come up with answers on their own: "I don't remember Tom ever telling me or anyone specifically how to fix a problem or do something. He would ask probing questions, and you would leave with at least the beginnings of a solution."

Another Kronheim colleague, Fred Calleri, also expressed admiration for Hurst's ascen-

dancy from warehouse helper to the Presidency. But he particularly marveled at Hurst spearheading the acquisition of Jim Beam. It might have even been Hurst's greatest professional accomplishment during his time at the helm, "When Jim Beam Brands purchased National Distillers in the early 1980s, it was a major shock to the Maryland/Washington markets," Calleri said. Indeed, Kronheim had been a distributor of National's brands for decades and, at the time, was 40 percent of Kronheim's volume.

Calleri said, "Tom put some management people [on it] and directed them in a major presentation to Beam Brands in Chicago. The staggering task was to convince Beam Brands to bring their flagship brand – Jim Beam – to Kronheim, which later became our largest single brand. We grew the brand every year thereafter in sales volume and solidified Kronheim's relationship with Beam Brands for years."

Of course, it's hard to sum up a man, any

man, in just one tribute article working with a word limit. Just ask those journalists who recently wrote feature obituaries for people like actor Andre Braugher or former NASCAR champion Cale Yarborough. Bruce Wills was kind enough to provide me with some personal notes that Tom Hurst had written out around the time of his 94th birthday. He spoke of many things in those notes – his harsh upbringing, the years he considered "wasted" as an undergraduate at George Washington University, and his rise up the corporate ladder at Kronheim.

While I never met the man, I found these words of his personally inspiring and I close with them: "A large portion of the labor I did at Kronheim was to simply have an unbeatable passion to OUTWORK anyone that got in my way. Not necessarily working smarter, just willing to do things they wouldn't. . . . I became valuable and was needed. Why did that happen? I really think it was a combination of risk taking and that work ethic!" ■

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THE D'ANGELO WINE DYNASTY

PLEASING FANS IN MARYLAND, D.C., AND WORLDWIDE

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN



There are dynasties in sports, dynasties in politics, and certainly dynasties in wine. Erminia D'Angelo and her brother, Rocco, are the fourth-generation caretakers of Italy's great D'Angelo brand. Rocco is the winemaker and manages production and the vineyards. Erminia, together with her mother Franca, oversees the company's sales.

We sat down with Erminia recently to discuss the family business and what customers can expect when they buy a bottle of her family's wine. She was eager to tout her special heritage: "D'Angelo is one of the historic wineries in Basilicata, a small region located in the heart of the South of Italy. I and my brother, Rocco, [are] the fourth generation of this winery and have always been involved in the production of Aglianico del Vulture that was born in 1924. The founder was my great-grandfather."

She fondly recalled her early years when she and her brother grew up in the winery and played between barrels and barriques. Their childhood home is on the last floor of the winery. "My favorite memories are the

harvest time when all the family traditionally got together," she said. "It was a kind of celebration. After my father died in 2007, we started to manage the winery. We were very young when we decided to follow our passion for wine, inherited from our father, Lucio. We have 25 hectares of vineyards located at the feet of the Vulture, an extinct volcano."

The volcanic soil is rich in minerals like potassium that gives freshness, flavor, and minerality to D'Angelo's wines. "In the soil, there are layers of tufo [a type of terrain]," Erminia noted. "The porosity of the tufo that stores the water during the cold winters helps the vineyards during the warm summers."

Erminia believes the separation of duties

and responsibilities between her and Rocco are one of the current generation's greatest strengths: "My brother is the winemaker, and I am the export manager of the winery -- a perfect match to continue the tradition of this family winery. The best part of my job is the promotion of our wines around the world, with tastings and wine dinners. It is interesting to pair the Aglianico with local dishes. Often during my business trips, there are customers who gift me with an old bottle from my winery, and it is such an emotion to see how D'Angelo has a history in the United States."

She continued, "The fourth generation is a fusion of tradition and innovation. Vintage by vintage, we decided to keep the traditional making process that has always characterized our wines. A characteristic of the winery is the use of concrete tanks for the maceration and aging. Through research in the vineyard and in the cellar, the use of innovative techniques, and the direct control of all

production processes, we seek in our wines the elegance, exclusivity, and identity of our territory -- a fascinating challenge addressed through absolute quality!"

And since taking the reins, the siblings have seen some great successes. Their Aglianico del Vulture 2019, for instance, was ranked on the Top 100 Wine Spectator last year at No. 49. "It was a great honor to be among the 100 best wines in the world selected by Wine Spectator," Erminia said. "Only 20 Italian wines [made the list]. Aglianico del Vulture DOC is the more representative label of the winery."

But she was quick to point out that the full range of D'Angelo's 14 wines and two grappas are each special in their own way: "Every wine has a history, and it is an expression of our passion and of our beautiful land. I love the historical wines because they are the expression of the traditions which continue. A wine that is very close to me is our Canneto. The first vintage of Canneto was in 1985.

Since that year, we have never changed the aging process. It is the only pure wine aged in barriques for 18 months. The new wines are the expression of the innovation of the new generation. The last born of the winery is the Tecum, from the Latin 'with you,' in memory of our father -- a wine which comes from our oldest vines, 80 years old, aged in tonneaux [a type of cask or barrel] for one year."

D'Angelo has been in the U.S. market since 1975 and continues to grow in popularity in the Maryland-Washington, D.C., area. Looking ahead, Erminia expressed optimism over where the business is headed and the continued appeal of her family's wines here and abroad. "I am optimistic," she concluded. "We will continue with our business trips around the world to promote our winery and the Aglianico del Vulture, to conquer new markets, and consolidate existing ones. And we will, of course, continue to welcome international wine lovers to the Vulture and in the winery!" ■

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FIRESTONE'S CULINARY TAVERN

FIRESTONE'S GRAND OLD FREDERICK BUILDING
STILL FANS CUSTOMERS' FLAMES

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | IMAGES BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

The building that houses Firestone's Culinary Tavern in Frederick dates back to 1921. That was a noteworthy year both nationally and internationally. Adolf Hitler quietly became the Fuhrer of the Nazi Party in July. The Republic of Ireland won its independence in

December. Albert Einstein won the Nobel Prize for Physics. Notable births included Rodney Dangerfield, John Glenn, Alex Haley, Gene Roddenberry, Jane Russell, and Lana Turner. And the world first started eating Cheez-Its, Baby Ruth candy bars, and white Wonder Bread.

Keelin Mallory
General Manager
Firestone's Culinary Tavern

Firestone's didn't start out as an eating and drinking establishment. It was Shipley's Department Store, serving the good folks of Frederick all of their apparel and other retail needs. If you walk into the tavern today, you can see how this used to be a multi-level store at one point in its existence.

General Manager Keelin Mallory feels the interior is one of Firestone's best features. "I love the layout of the restaurant," she said during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal. "We go up four levels, and we still have the original tin ceilings. They're just gorgeous. There is a mezzanine level that holds our dining room. It looks down over our bar, and it makes for a gorgeous overall layout."

Mallory and her staff unfortunately can't use all four levels because of the building's historic standing that makes it not possible to support an elevator. "There is a LOT of red tape!" Mallory exclaims.

But what they can use and build off of is a reputation of offering great customer service and a fun and nostalgic atmosphere. Mallory stated. "We pride ourselves on being a neighborhood tavern that has good food and good, strong drinks! We are also welcoming



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"The Bourbon Bar is definitely a selling point among drinkers in Frederick County and upper Montgomery County. A bit more laid back, it is indeed an extension of the Culinary Tavern."

to everybody, not just our locals."

With regards to Firestone's beverage offerings, Mallory was quick to note the tavern is both liquor- and beer-focused. "About a year and a half ago, we started up our Bourbon Bar next door in our Sidecar Room. This is an attached building. For our beverage program itself, we open it up to any employee who is interested in creating cocktails. We like to get a lot of input from the staff themselves. Anybody who is interested in making a drink is welcome to do so. We'll workshop it with whoever's around at the moment. They get to name the drink. And, yes, a lot of times, they assign their name or nickname to it. We've often come away with something quite delicious."

The Bourbon Bar is definitely a selling point among drinkers in Frederick County and upper Montgomery County. A

bit more laid back, it is indeed an extension of the Culinary Tavern. Customers can enjoy full access to the tavern's menu in a more intimate setting than the full restaurant next door. A large selection of frequently unique bourbon whiskeys is on permanent display, providing a cool backdrop to the overall space.

While the drink selection is often cited as customers' favorite thing about Firestone's, Mallory says she agrees with those customers who most enjoy the friendly

and knowledgeable staff. "The favorite part of my job is having such a great staff," she added. "We have a long-time staff generally. Our hires tend to stick around for quite a while, so I get to watch people grow. Kids will start with us when they're 16, and you get to see them turn into people. It's really neat and something I've come to appreciate. Most move on, but they come back and visit."

Mallory herself started at Firestone's when she was a teenager and worked there until she was 21. She moved away to Maine for eight years, but came back and served again for a year before taking over as general manager.

During her tenure, she has faced her fair share of challenges. Chief among them, of course, has been the pandemic. "There are still a lot of things lingering from COVID that



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people didn't get over," she observed. "But I find it fun to still be so flexible with it all. QR menus are one of the changes that has stuck around. We generally print menus, as well. But we are able to change our drink lists immediately, especially if we run out of something. It gives us way more flexibility. There are still a few lingering distribution problems. So, if you can't get something, then you just change it online and it immediately goes into action."

Speaking of lingering problems, Firstone's is similar to other historic bars, restaurants, and taverns profiled in this column in that there has been rumored paranormal activity on site over the years. "Absolutely!" exclaimed Mallory. "Especially on those upper levels. A lot of our dry goods are up there. And going up there late at night can be a bit creepy. We don't really have names for any of our ghosts. But there have been a lot of flickering lights

and a LOT of bumps in the night!"

So, does Mallory have advice for anyone reading this who is currently managing an historic or prestige bar or restaurant or aspires to manage such a place one day? "Be flexible. Be willing to change and listen to your staff. They are the ones who talk to every guest who comes through the building. So, generally, they know more than you do!" ■





INSIDE A TRANSFORMED BEVERAGE WORKPLACE

BEVERAGE INDUSTRY LEADERS WEIGH IN ON DATA FROM PROVI AND SEVENFIFTY DAILY'S CAREER AND SALARY SURVEY

BY TINA CAPUTO

To say that the beverage alcohol landscape has changed significantly since 2019 would be a massive understatement. The global pandemic halted on-premise sales as restaurants and bars shut down across the country, while also sparking a boom in retail and direct-to-consumer sales.

The events of the last four years—including supply chain issues, energized movements toward racial and social justice, and the rise of a generation driven by purpose rather than profit—have not only impacted consumer behavior; they have had a profound and lasting effect on those working in the drinks industry. These shifts are reflected in the results of Provi and *SevenFifty Daily's* 2023 Beverage Industry Career & Salary Survey. Both Beverage Media and *SevenFifty Daily* are Provi publications.

As a follow-up to the previous study, conducted in 2019, *SevenFifty Daily* and Provi surveyed more than 1,800 beverage alcohol professionals to learn about their compensation levels

and seek their opinions on a variety of topics, from career growth opportunities to issues set to impact the industry. This year's results revealed dramatic changes in workplace attitudes and priorities. Here are four key takeaways from the 2023 Beverage Industry Career & Salary Survey Report, which span tier shakeups to shifting trends.

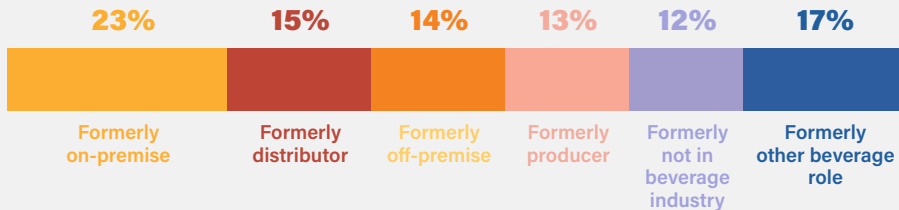
DRINKS PROS ARE SWITCHING TIERS

The last few years have brought a shakeup in industry tiers, with many employees switching sectors. Thirty-five percent of survey respondents reported changing jobs since 2020, with 14 percent changing industry tiers. While some workers made the change from retailer or producer to wholesaler, tier-jumpers most commonly left on-premise jobs to join the importer/distributor or off-premise sectors.

This did not come as a surprise to Neal Bodenheimer, the owner of Cure and Cane & Table in New Orleans, and a Tales of the Cocktail Foundation board member.

“Even in the worst of times, hospitality has always been a place where there were jobs to be had,” he says. “The pandemic was the first time in modern history that when times got tough, there were no jobs in restaurants for a long time.”

How Industry Tiers Have Shifted (among those who have changed trade tiers)



People who spent years building careers in the on-premise world suddenly found themselves without a means to work, he says, which made other sectors of the drinks industry seem more attractive.

"I'm also a bartender, so let's use that as an example," says Bodenheimer. "When I work, I make money. When I don't, I don't. Who wants to be tied to a career like that when times are bad? These are big, honking issues that have to be thought through and that we've got to start making progress on."

WORKERS ARE LESS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT CAREER GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

It wasn't only on-premise employees that expressed decreased confidence in their career prospects. Survey results also revealed declines in the importer/distributor and producer tiers. When asked how they would rate their opportunities for professional growth within their sector, only 41 percent of overall respondents described them as "very good to excellent," compared to 48 percent in the 2019 survey.

Bodenheimer sees this as another lingering impact of the pandemic, which put many people's career advancement plans on hold.

"There was a lot of growth and excitement before, and a lot of opportunity," he says. "People felt like they were really building careers, but then they went into survival mode. You're not thinking about the future; you're thinking about getting through the day."

Now that restrictions have been lifted, Bodenheimer adds, drinks professionals—including owners and operators—are

working to regain their pre-pandemic motivation and sense of purpose.

"We're all working on trying to do the things that get our teams and ourselves engaged and turned back on," he says. "What's been helping me the most is plugging back into the community."

While the survey shows that perceived career growth prospects declined among on-premise and wholesale employees between 2019 and 2023, optimism grew among those in the retail sector, from 34 percent to 37 percent.

Tom Wark, the executive director at the National Association of Wine Retailers in Sacramento, California, attributes the gain to the off-premise realm's educational opportunities.

"There's a lot of mentoring that happens on the retail side of the business," Wark notes. "Becoming a sommelier has been publicized a lot over the past decade, yet the retail side has sort of been ignored. But depending on the employer, retail offers an

opportunity to delve into every side of the business. You've got to deal with customers, you've got to deal with distributors, you deal with producers who are always coming by. It also offers tremendous access to advancing your palate."

To help employees in various aspects of the industry advance their careers, organizations such as the Tales of the Cocktail Foundation offer education and training, seminars with industry leaders, and direct mentorship.

Bart Watson, the chief economist at the Brewers Association in Boulder, Colorado, confirms that he is seeing more industry programs designed to foster career growth and development. "A lot of them are focused specifically around mentorship for under-represented groups in the industry," he says, "as opposed to broader-based efforts."

Each spring and fall, he notes, the Brewers Association runs a mentorship program with dedicated tracks for people just entering the industry, professionals looking to develop their careers or change paths, and those in underrepresented groups looking to open breweries. "It's been great to see people moving through the program and starting to take on new roles or open breweries," says Watson.

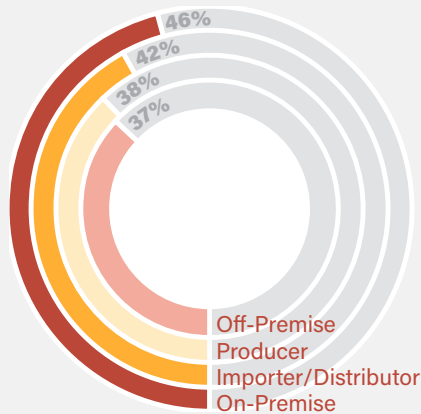
PAID TIME OFF AND HEALTHCARE ARE TOP PRIORITIES

When asked which workplace policies are important to them, 73 percent of those surveyed pointed to paid time off (PTO), including sick leave and vacation time, while 68 percent cited healthcare benefits as important.

The numbers skewed a bit differently for executives: Only 64 percent prioritized PTO and 62 percent cited healthcare as a top concern—perhaps because most workers in these positions already receive such benefits. Younger workers placed the greatest importance on all of the benefits listed, with 81 percent of respondents aged 22 to 40 prioritizing PTO.

"I think a lot of people are focused on their working conditions more holistically, other than just pay," says Watson. "Peo-

Positive Outlook for Professional Growth



ple want to have a job where they have the opportunity to work, but then [they want to] reset. Burnout is something that's just in the ether right now. People are talking about it a lot."

Wark observes that this issue is especially important to younger generations. "They have been convinced that they deserve not just a package of benefits and a decent salary, but they need to have self-care time," he says. "They're looking for a great deal more from their employers, including retailers, and employers have no choice but to provide it."

While offering benefits can be cost prohibitive for many small business owners, Bodenheimer says he sees more bar and restaurant owners—himself included—making an effort. Though he does not provide healthcare coverage for all employees at his New Orleans establishments, they cover 100 percent of premiums for managers and 50 percent for bar leads.

"To us, it's about making sure that people are getting real value when we offer a benefit, but we have to do this smartly," he says. "We can't make decisions that would cause us to go out of business."

Bodenheimer is also looking into OS Benefits, an online benefits marketplace for independent hospitality businesses. Employers pay a monthly fee for each worker, which allows team members to access affordably priced preventive care, crisis services, and wellness resources.

For those working on the on-premise side, he says, benefits may be the key to making positions such as bartending into truly sustainable careers. "That means you have a career where you can have children and still do it, and you can get older and

still do it," says Bodenheimer. "You have the kinds of benefits that someone who works in an office has."

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING AND CLIMATE CHANGE ARE GAINING IMPORTANCE

When asked which issues and areas of the industry will gain importance during the next year, a large majority of respondents—77 percent—cited sustainable packaging, while 76 percent called out climate change.

"We do see continued and increasing interest in earth-friendly packaging and adoption of sustainable business practices, and I expect that trend to continue," says Allison Jordan, the executive director of the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance and the vice president of environmental affairs at Wine Institute. "Many wineries are lightweighting bottles, which can help them reduce their greenhouse gas footprint, reduce shipping costs, and make bottles easier for employees to carry."

In the 2022 Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing Annual Report, she notes, 98 percent of wineries said they included environmental considerations in purchasing decisions and undertook research into alternative materials and products.

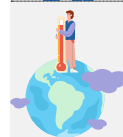
Sustainable practices can also make wineries more attractive to potential employees, she notes. "I have seen data and have certainly heard anecdotally that sustainability does help with employee attraction and retention," says Jordan, "especially among younger generations."

Michael Kaiser, the executive vice president and director of government affairs at WineAmerica in Washington, D.C.,

Which industry issues are most pressing?



77%
Sustainable packaging



76%
Climate change



75%
Technology for beverage management

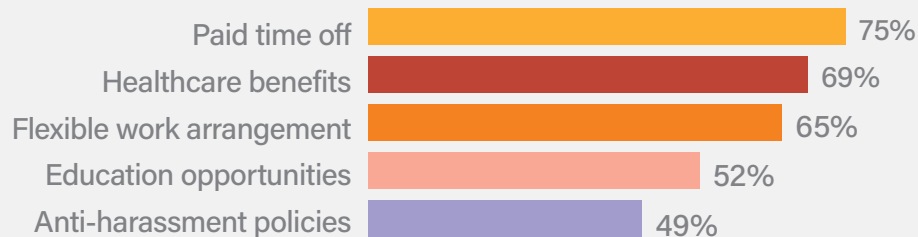
points to Tablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles, California, with its high-quality bag-in-box wine, as one of many wineries adopting sustainable packaging.

"We are also seeing wineries go with refillable growlers in their tasting rooms," he says. "Other trends are bottles no longer having capsules, and wineries shunning those heavy bottles. I think we will continue to see more and more companies start to look into being more sustainable."

Along with sustainably packaged products, low- and no-alcohol beverages are expected to gain importance in the coming year. In the 2023 survey, 65 percent said low-alcohol drinks "will grow in importance" compared to just 56 percent in 2019. Fifty-seven percent said the same for non-alcoholic beverages in 2023 versus only 44 percent in 2019.

"It's a growing segment, though it's still not huge. We're still talking less than one percent of the overall beer market," says Watson. Even so, he adds, 80 percent of those who buy non-alcoholic beer also consume alcoholic brews. "These are people who are looking to break up a session or have occasions that have now become non-alcoholic ones," he says. "We're definitely seeing brewers start to think about that and they're responding to it with different products." ■

Which workplace policies matter most?



To read more on what the beverage workplace looked like in 2023, download the full report.





THE STORY BEHIND CONECUH BRANDS' SMART GROWTH STRATEGY

AFTER ACQUIRING THE GLOBAL SALES AND MARKETING RIGHTS TO VAN GOGH VODKA, CONECUH IS POISED FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH IN 2024 AND BEYOND



Conecuh Brands is the little spirits company that could. Since its 2014 founding, the entrepreneurial New York firm has built a growing family of spirits brands that include Próspero Tequila, McConnell's Irish Whisky, and the Clyde May's whiskey line, home to Alabama's official state spirit.

"Our model is to incubate brands and scale them," says president and CEO Roy Danis. Conecuh's knack for compelling storytelling, high-quality packaging, and award-winning liquids has drawn interest from fellow spirits companies seeking sprinkles of Conecuh's 50-state route-to-market magic.

Roy Danis, CEO and president of Conecuh Brands.



"We get inundated with requests to represent brands," says Danis. He declines most inquiries; the agency route rarely includes full control over sales and marketing, handcuffing Conecuh's strengths. But when Van Gogh Vodka contacted Conecuh last year, any hesitancy melted away. The Dutch vodka brand is known for flavored expressions like Double Espresso that are sold in more than a dozen countries. The company's innovative streak and global reach, coupled with Van Gogh's willingness to offer an equity stake and full brand control, sealed the deal. Last October, Conecuh acquired the exclusive global sales and marketing rights to Van Gogh Vodka.

"They've trusted us to be the caretakers of their brand and we take it very seriously," Danis says. "It doubles our revenue and instantly makes us bigger."

The landmark acquisition, combined with the opening of Alabama's forthcoming Conecuh Ridge Distillery—to produce Clyde May's—and the opening of the McConnell's distillery and visitor center in Belfast, Ireland, mark a transformational moment of growth for Conecuh (pronounced "cuh-neck-uh"). Here's how the company set itself on the track to long-term success.

BUILDING A LEGACY OF TRANSFORMATION AND EXPANSION

The story of Conecuh Brands starts in Alabama in 1946. World War II veteran Clyde May began making moonshine of great renown—and illegality—to support a growing family that numbered eight kids. He died in 1990, but his children continued the family tradition.

In 2001, the May family began making Conecuh Ridge whiskey, named after the southern Alabama region where Clyde May distilled. However, the business faltered and the brand trademark fell into legal limbo. That is until an investment group acquired it in 2014, and approached Danis to come on board. At the time, he was the managing director for Campari America, so he initially rebuffed the interest. By late 2015, he decided to leave Campari to become the CEO of what became Conecuh Brands.

Anchored by the Clyde May's line, which includes the four-year-old flagship whiskey and straight bourbon and rye expressions, Danis began constructing a portfolio of purpose-built brands that fill overlooked niches.



Take Próspero Tequila. Stella Anguiano, among Mexico's preeminent distillers, designed the range of all-agave expressions, including a blanco, reposado, and añejo. Conecuh then brought on British pop star Rita Ora for the brand's 2019 stateside debut. Próspero's female leadership is front and center. "We focus on female consumers more than other brands because we know they're contributing a large part to the growth of tequila," says Danis.

To find a unique foothold in the competitive Irish whisky category, Conecuh identified McConnell's Irish Whisky, a venerable brand that dates to 1776 and enjoyed robust popularity in America from the late 19th century until Prohibition. The brand went dormant in 1958. In 2020, Conecuh revived McConnell's, settling on a recipe featuring a higher malt content and proof (84 versus the standard 80) that's aged in bourbon casks for five years. The brand is currently building a distillery inside the Victorian-era Crumlin Road Jail, helping the brand escape standard conventions of Irish whisky. "It's a great selling story," says Phil West, Conecuh's vice president of marketing.

In 2024, J&J McConnell Distillery will open in Belfast, which will provide new

points of connection for customers. This spring, Conecuh will also cut the ribbon on the Conecuh Ridge Distillery in Troy, Alabama, near where May once made moonshine. (In advance of the opening, Conecuh released the five-year-old Conecuh Ridge Bourbon.) "If you're a craft spirit, you really need a sense of place," says Danis of the destination distillery located en route to the Gulf Shores.

Originally, Conecuh sourced a custom MGP mash bill for Clyde May's. With the new facility, Conecuh will relocate aging Clyde May's whiskey to Alabama and start distilling and maturing its own spirits, perhaps closing the historic loop by making and selling a moonshine. "We're bringing the brand home," says Danis.

DRIVING NEW VOLUMES FOR ITS PORTFOLIO

For Conecuh, taking on Van Gogh Vodka has energized the staff to explore the brand's untapped potential. "There are always opportunities to add value and drive additional volume," says Danis.

Van Gogh Vodka is primarily known for its sophisticated expressions such as Dutch Chocolate, tropical Pineapple, and dark and bold Double Espresso. "Bartenders know that if you want to make the best Espresso Martini, you use Van Gogh's Double Espresso," says Danis.

The unflavored vodka, clean and crisp at 80 proof, is often overlooked. Danis senses an opportunity to champion the base vodka to drive continued growth.

Currently, about 65 percent of Van Gogh's business is on-premise, says Danis, while Conecuh's portfolio is largely sold at retail. Van Gogh's deep presence at

ABOVE: The new Conecuh Ridge Distillery in Troy, Alabama, is scheduled to open in spring 2024.

bars and restaurants like Morton's The Steakhouse and Ruth's Chris Steak House chains, plus several Disney properties, provide ripe opportunities to gain new placements for the rest of the Conecuh portfolio. If you like Van Gogh Vodka, you might love the Clyde May's whiskeys too.

One benefit of staffing a smaller company with seasoned leadership is the ability to make swift decisions unencumbered by bureaucracy. When the opportunity arose for Conecuh to make Clyde May's the official whiskey of the New York Islanders hockey team, Danis pulled off the deal after two meetings with USB Arena and a quick consult with colleagues.

"In any other company, we would have gone through so many management layers," says West. Danis adds, "Our distributor partners like working with us because we are agile and empower our local teams to make decisions."

Like making good whiskey, building a successful spirits company takes time and patience. "Frankly, that's why a lot of big companies don't really get involved in innovation," says Danis. "They'd rather have companies like us make all the mistakes, if there are any, and spend the money to develop the proof of concept and then acquire it."

Conecuh wasn't constructed to be sold off to the highest bidder, though. As Danis says, "We're trying to build a long-term business." ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Conecuh Brands.



Van Gogh Vodka Double Espresso



MAKING THE SHIFT TO A SALES REP JOB

SALES EXPERTS SHARE INSIGHTS ON HOW TO MAKE IT IN BEVERAGE WHOLESALE AFTER A LIFE OF RETAIL AND RESTAURANT JOBS

BY JANICE WILLIAMS

The journey to becoming a wholesale wine and spirits sales rep is common among those who have worked in retail and restaurants. For some folks, particularly those seeking better work-life balance or reconsidering their long-term career prospects, leaving their roles at wine shops and dining establishments for the world of distribution can feel like a natural progression. But the transition can come with challenges, even for those familiar with buying and selling beverage alcohol.

Each tier intertwines within the greater wine and spirits industry. And yet, the job function of a wholesale rep is still entirely different from that of on- and off-premise sales. Undoubtedly, having previous experience in retail or

restaurants gives a potential sales rep an edge. However, past experience doesn't necessarily guarantee success in the job.

"One thing people need to know is that being a good salesperson is pretty important if you're going to work in distribu-



Karen Wetzel, wine consultant

tion,” says Asher Chong, a former Jean-Georges sommelier who now works as a New York City metro sales representative at Wilson Daniels. “And you don’t have to come from restaurants or retail to have that fundamental skill.”

So, what do you need to know before switching from being a buyer to a sales rep? There’s a lot to consider, starting with understanding the primary function of the job you’re looking to take on. “The sales rep’s role is first to maintain current business in your assigned accounts,” says Karen Wetzel, a wine consultant and the former director of midwest on-premise sales for Constellation Brands. “You have to be able to work with those buyers, protect the business that the distributor is handing over to you.” Second, a sales rep must grow the business in their accounts and find new business. That can happen in various ways, but more often than not, a sales rep is going at it alone.

BE COMFORTABLE WORKING ALONE—AND ON THE GO

Although sales reps work for a company and are usually placed on a specific team, they typically manage their accounts alone. The rep’s job is to get their products in front of buyers and to seal the deal with placements on menus and store shelves. How that gets done, to some degree, is up to the rep.

“It’s not a great role for people who need a lot of supervision,” says Wetzel. “Occasionally, a manager may want to go out with you to see what you’re doing and give you advice and training. But wholesale is really a role for self-motivated people because you’ll be doing most of the job independently.”

“And be prepared to live in your car,” adds Wetzel. Unlike restaurants and retail shops, where employees spend most of their time in one place for the entirety of their shift, working as a sales rep requires a willingness to travel. Technology and

email have brought a significant change to how reps interact with their buyers. Nowadays, people can place an order without even speaking to sales reps. But at some point, Wetzel says, you have to get out of the office and go to where the buyers are. “If you’re not getting face time with your buyer, guess what? Your competition is,” she says.

A year ago, when John Shirk transitioned to sales at Jenny & Francois Selections after working in restaurants for more than 12 years, he realized that many reps weren’t going out in the field and meeting with clients on certain days of the week. So he made sure he was out on those days to get a head start.

“I’ve found going out when everybody

“One thing people need to know is that being a good salesperson is pretty important if you’re going to work in distribution.”

– Asher Chong, Wilson Daniels



John Shirk, Jenny & Francois Selections

else is in the office doing admin stuff very beneficial,” says Shirk. His restaurant experience helped him understand that buyers rarely work traditional hours. With that in mind, he leaves the emailing and scheduling to when he knows buyers are actually on their computers.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

At a restaurant, it’s all about catering to guests in the dining room. At a retail store, the focus is servicing the customer and helping them pick the right bottle. For wholesale, the exchange occurs between a rep and a buyer, which means the communication style may have to change.

“Now, the buyer is the customer,” says Charlotte Randolph, a sales representative for Revel Wine in San Diego. “So the way you talk about wine becomes very different from what it was in your day-to-day life at a restaurant or retail shop. You have to be more technical.”

Wetzel says there is no one-type-fits-all personality for being a sales rep—your ability to communicate the product and build relationships with the people you’re selling to is what matters. “You’re going to be juggling many different accounts. You have to know what you’re presenting and who you’re presenting it to.” A key part of this challenge is knowing the new res-

restaurants and shops opening in your area, staying up to date on news within the industry, going to tastings and events, and networking with others in the field.

Keeping an open mind and being flexible goes a long way toward maintaining solid relationships with buyers, too, says Chong. “It’s a new generation of buyers out there, and they operate entirely differently than some who have been in the industry for a long time. It even comes down to how you dress for an appointment,” he says.

While Chong will go as far as wearing a “double-breasted suit with a tie” to appointments at private clubs and some restaurants, he says that if he showed up like that at other places, they’d probably “laugh me right out of there. Some places just appreciate a T-shirt and jeans. And these little things really make a huge difference in how buyers interact with you. It’s all about knowing your customer.”

HIGHER PAY IS A DRAW—BUT IT’S VARIABLE

One of the reasons people leave their jobs in retail or restaurants is the chance for better pay and benefits. *SevenFifty Daily* and Provi’s 2023 Career & Salary Survey



Sales reps often learn by visiting producers.



“The way you talk about wine becomes very different from what it was in your day-to-day life at a restaurant or retail shop. You have to be more technical.”

– Charlotte Randolph, Revel Wine

found that the median salary for those working in import and distribution was higher than the median salaries of both on- and off-premise positions. Depending on the distributor—especially if it’s a larger company—reps have more room to negotiate salary, bonuses, and benefits.

However, while there’s a chance to make big bucks with commission-based pay, it can be unclear exactly how much money a rep will make in a given year.

“It can be hard to plan for the immediate future financially,” says Randolph. “There are no benefits for commission employees such as myself, but also, my pay range has much higher potential than it did when I was in restaurants.”

So what’s the payoff? “The work schedule,” says Randolph. “I would rather

take the risks of commission-based pay and have more freedom than be tied to the unconventional hours of a restaurant.”

SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY IS A BONUS

Lifestyle changes are often the biggest motivation for leaving retail and restaurants behind in exchange for wholesale. Whereas the working hours for on- and off-premise positions can be long and vary from week to week, one of the biggest perks of working distribution is that reps usually create their own hours.

“I can work as hard as I can during the day, and put everything into it, and then I get to come home, make dinner, and be there for my family,” says Shirk. “My personal life was the last thing I thought about when working in restaurants because all my energy went into the job.”

Chong agrees that having personal time to himself has been a major benefit. “The first few months of working in wholesale, I felt like I had a lot of time on my hands,” he says. “I didn’t know what to do with the freedom. But then I realized that most of the working population has off-hours, weekends, and holidays where they get to sit back and relax.”

That doesn’t mean Chong is any less busy. Some days, all his time is spent responding to emails, phone calls, and text messages, visiting with customers, or meeting with the brands and producers he represents. However, the workload isn’t as strenuous, and the hours are more regulated.

“It’s been a real shift in getting to know the product,” says Shirk. “I get to meet the people that make it, the farmers. I’ve been able to go to France and meet some of the growers. I’ve met winemakers that have come here for portfolio tastings and things. All that has pushed me to love the industry even more.” ■

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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW

CROSSOVER ACT

Following the 2023 release of The Undisputed Single Barrel Bourbon, Puncher's Chance—from Oregon's **Wolf Spirit**—has debuted The Unified Belt, a limited-edition 96-proof three-cask blend. First, a four-year-old high-rye Kentucky straight bourbon aged in barrels with a #4 alligator char is paired with four-year-old Irish whiskey matured in ones that formerly held bourbon. Then, to heighten the complexity, 14-year-old bourbon finished in first-fill Pedro Ximénez and oloroso sherry casks for up to 15 months was added to the mix.



SRP: \$149.99 per 750-ml bottle



CONVENIENCE SHOP

The newest ready-to-drink libation from **Tip Top Proper Cocktails** is the Boulevardier. Like the nine other classic concoctions in the portfolio, the recipe for the 29% ABV Boulevardier was developed by Atlanta bartender Miles Macquarrie of Kimball House and brings together whiskey, vermouth, and red bitters for flavors of baking spice, toasted orange peel, and dried cherry.

SRP: \$39.99 per eight-pack of 100-ml cans



THE COMEBACK

High West's Scottish-inspired High Country American Single Malt has returned to shelves in limited quantities. Made in copper pot stills in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah, the 88-proof spirit combines whiskeys distilled on the grain and matured in both freshly charred and second-use oak casks for between three and 10 years. Its notes of praline and dulce de leche culminate in a maple syrup finish.

SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle



HISTORICAL ROOTS

For the third installment in The Untold Story of Kentucky Whiskey, Chapter 3, the limited-edition series from **Castle & Key Distillery** and the Kentucky Black Bourbon Guild, the life of Brack Beverly, a former enslaved person who as a freedman worked at a distillery in the early 1900s, is in the limelight. All proceeds of the 108.6-proof two-barrel blend showcasing Hickory King corn, an heirloom varietal grown by Walnut Grove Farms, will be donated to scholarships championing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the distilling industry.

SRP: \$175 per 750-ml bottle



LESSONS FROM FRANCE

To further illuminate its mission of producing terroir-driven Irish single malts, **Waterford Whiskey** has unveiled its core range of cuvée concepts. Taking cues from the Grands Vins de Bordeaux and Champagne's Les Grandes Marques, the trio of 100-proof whiskeys made from barley is anchored by The Waterford Cuvée 'Koffi,' the flagship—and the distillery's oldest expression to date—featuring 24 of Waterford's individually distilled Single Farm Origins offerings and artwork by Nathanaël Koffi. It is rounded out by the organic Cuvée Gaia and the full-bodied, peated Cuvée Fumo.

SRP: \$89.99 (Koffi and Gaia) and \$99.99 (Fumo) per 750-ml bottle

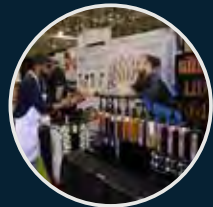


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BEEZ IN THE TRAP

*Created by Roxy Narvaez, beverage director,
The Chloe Hotel, New Orleans*

2 oz. Chivas Regal XV ½ oz. lavender honey syrup
¾ oz. lemon juice 6 dashes Fee Foam

Method: Pour ingredients into a shaker filled with ice. Shake and strain. Serve up in a Nick and Nora glass. Add a pinch of dried lavender for garnish.



THE GLENLIVET FESTIVE FIZZ

1 ½ oz. The Glenlivet 14 Year Old
1 ½ oz. cream of coconut
1 ½ oz. lime juice
2 oz. tamarind soda
Dash cardamom bitters to garnish

Method: Build ingredients in a shaking tin. Add ice and shake. Strain into a rocks glass with ice. Garnish with a dash of cardamom bitters.



MEET ME AT THE CLOCK

*Created by James Grant, director of mixology, Clockwork
Champagne and Cocktails at Fairmont Royal York, Toronto,
Canada*

1 oz. Hendrick's Gin 1 ½ oz. Veuve Clicquot
½ oz. lemon juice Spray of absinthe
½ oz. simple syrup 1 frozé ball (frozen rosé in a
5 dashes Peychaud bitters spherical mold)

Method: Combine the gin, lemon juice, and simple syrup in a shaker. Shake well and strain into a coupe glass with the frozé ball. Add Veuve Clicquot and a spray of absinthe to finish.



BERRY ROMANTIC SPRITZ

1 oz. Josh Cellars Pinot Grigio
5 oz. lemon juice
¾ oz. cranberry-spiced simple
syrup
Top with ginger beer

Method: Combine all ingredients, except the ginger beer in a shaker. Shake and strain into a rocks class or a tall glass with ice and top with ginger beer. Garnish with sugar covered cranberries.



SEEDLIP RANCH WATER

2 oz. Seedlip Notas de Agave
¼ oz. fresh Lime Juice
Club Soda

Method: Fill a glass with ice. Add Seedlip Notas de Agave and lime juice. Top with club soda. Garnish with a dehydrated lime disc.