

# Beverage Journal



MARCH 2024

## GRAPES TO KNOW

TWO UP-AND-COMING ITALIAN VARIETIES  
WORTH DISCOVERING NOW

THE APPEAL OF  
CAMPANIA'S FALANGHINA

PELAVERGA:  
PIEDMONT'S NICHE RED



OUR IRISH  
WHISKEY PICKS





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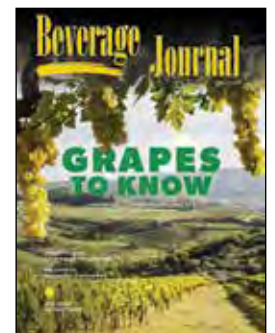
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CREATIVE PROMOTIONS  
FOR MARCH

As March approaches, I'm sure you are already gearing up to capitalize on various promotional opportunities. With St. Patrick's Day festivities, March Madness, and the onset of spring, there's ample room for innovative marketing strategies to attract customers and boost sales. Here are some potential promotions that you could consider:

**St. Patrick's Day Specials:**

Embrace the Irish spirit by offering themed drinks such as green beer, Irish whiskey cocktails, and Irish-brand-infused concoctions.

Host St. Patrick's Day parties with live music, Irish dancers, and traditional Irish fare like corned beef and cabbage.

Have a contest for customers wearing green attire or sporting shamrock accessories.

**March Madness Deals:**

Tap into the excitement of college basketball's biggest tournament by organizing viewing parties for games.

Offer beer bucket specials, wing platters, and other game-day snacks at discounted prices.

Run bracket prediction contests with prizes for customers who correctly predict the tournament's outcome.

**Spring Themed Events:**

Welcome the arrival of spring with seasonal drink menus featuring fresh ingredients like berries, herbs, and citrus.

Host outdoor patio parties or beer garden events to take advantage of milder weather and encourage socializing.

Collaborate with local breweries or wineries for tastings, tap takeovers, or brewery tours.

**Women's History Month Celebrations:**

Honor Women's History Month by featuring cocktails inspired by influential women in history or female-owned distilleries.

Host networking events or panel discussions featuring women in the beverage alcohol industry.

Donate a portion of proceeds from select sales to organizations supporting women's causes.

**National Cocktail Day:**

March 24th is National Cocktail Day, providing an opportunity to showcase signature cocktails or introduce new creations.

Offer cocktail-making classes or mixology workshops for customers interested in learning the art of crafting cocktails.

Partner with local mixologists or bartenders to create buzz-worthy cocktail recipes exclusive to your establishment.

**Social Media Campaigns:**

Engage customers through social media platforms by launching interactive campaigns such as photo contests, polls, or giveaways.

Utilize hashtags related to March events (#StPatricksDay, #MarchMadness, #SpringSips) to increase visibility and reach a broader audience.

Encourage user-generated content by inviting customers to share their experiences at your establishment for a chance to be featured.

With creativity, strategic planning, and a focus on customer engagement, March presents ample profitable opportunities. ■

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President / Publisher Stephen Patten  
steve@beveragejournalinc.com  
410.796.5455

Board of Directors Lee W. Murray  
Thomas W. Murray

Information Technology Director Peter Williams

**EDITORIAL**

Editor-in-Chief Kristen Bieler

Senior Editor Courtney Schiessl

Contributing Editors Alia Akkam, Arielle Albert,  
Keven Danow, Jim Clarke,  
Edward Durgin, Jeff Siegel

**ART & DESIGN**

Creative Director Larry Lee

Senior Designer Jeff Tsui

**TECHNOLOGY & WEB**

eCommerce Director Ian Griffith

Online Web Programming Vali Balescu

**PRINT & PRODUCTION**

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MD & DC Advertising Sales Stephen Patten

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## 1. RHUM BARBANCOURT

Born from pure sugarcane juice, Rhum Barbancourt's spirits—including the four-year-old, eight-year-old, and 15-year-old—are matured in French oak casks that benefit from the Haitian distillery's tropical climate. Haitian Proof 110, the newest expression, is a white rum with a decidedly Caribbean character marked by layers of eucalyptus, green sugarcane, and peppercorn that stand out in classics like the Daiquiri.

**\$** SRP: \$19.99 per 750-ml bottle

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

## 2. OPTIMIST DRINKS

Herbal, citrusy Cali Amaro, one of the four Los Angeles-inspired, alcohol-free spirits in the Optimist lineup, is the backbone of the effervescent Cali Spritz, the beverage company's first ready-to-drink offering. Best savored over ice with an orange slice, the mocktail is made with orange, pink grapefruit, mandarin, bay laurel, and wormwood, as well as botanicals boasting adaptogenic properties such as ashwagandha and schisandra.

**\$** SRP: \$24 per four-pack of 8-oz. cans

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

## 3. PLANTERAY RUM

Cut & Dry Coconut Rum is the first product to be launched by Planteray Rum, formerly known as Plantation Rum. A collaboration between Maison Ferrand and West Indies Rum Distillery, the Barbadian spirit is infused with the natural, white flesh of coconuts grown by local farmers sourced through the Caribbean Agriculture Research and Development Institute and the International Trade Centre's Alliances for Action program. Its banana and green ginger notes make it ripe for a Piña Colada.

**\$** SRP: \$35 per 700-ml bottle

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

## 4. ANTIQUE PELINKOVAC

Antique Pelinkovac, the Croatian herbal liqueur originally hatched in 1862 by distiller Franjo Pokorny, is ramping up its presence in the U.S. The mid-19th-century recipe, lost during World War II and found in the early 2000s, was then reformulated, bringing together more than 40 herbs, spices, and botanicals in a process currently overseen by an all-female distillation team. Dominated by anise, it's rounded out with flavors of sage and lemon balm that can elevate cocktails.

**\$** SRP: \$34.99 per 750-ml bottle

**🌐** [antiquepelinkovac.hr](http://antiquepelinkovac.hr)

## 5. LODESTAR WHISKEY

Anna Axster and Wendelin von Schroder, cousins who previously worked in California's entertainment industry, have banded together for another creative pursuit: Lodestar Whiskey. Backed by Pre-Accelerator, the funding and mentorship program from Diageo's Distill Ventures, the versatile 90-proof spirit is a blend of straight high-rye bourbon and American single malt that tastes of caramel, citrus, and baking spice.

**\$** SRP: \$45 per 750-ml bottle

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

## 6. IICHIKO

There are the food-friendly Silhouette and mixable Saiten expressions, and now there is iichiko Special, a barley shochu from Japan's Kyushu island. Aged in white oak casks that once held sherry for five years, it melds spicy vanilla and chocolate.

**\$** SRP: \$60 per 720-ml bottle

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

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## 7. OSKAR BLUES

Back in 2013, Colorado's Oskar Blues Brewery rolled out 19.2-ounce cans of Dale's Pale Ale, a bold move at the time. Hazy Blues IPA, which debuted nine years later, was available in the same size. Now the portfolio expands with large-format, single-serve versions of the fruity, bittersweet Dale's Double IPA and citrus-forward Imperial Hazy Blues IPA.

**\$** SRP: \$3.49 to \$3.99 per 19.2-oz. can

**📱** [oskarblues.com](http://oskarblues.com)

## 8. TOKKI SOJU

Taking cues from Speyside Scotch whisky, Tokki Soju founder and master distiller Brandon Hill has unveiled Garnet Label, a traditional made-in-South Korea rice soju finished in Pedro Ximénez casks after mellowing in new American char #4 oak barrels. The notes of walnut, caramel, and dried fruit it elicits are familiar to whiskey-drinking Americans, opening the under-the-radar soju category to a new demographic.

**\$** SRP: \$59.99 per 750-ml bottle

**📱** [tokkisoju.com](http://tokkisoju.com)

## 9. CATOCTIN CREEK

To celebrate Catoctin Creek's 15th anniversary, founders Becky and Scott Harris have introduced the 100-proof six-year-old Rabble Rouser. The Virginia distillery's oldest release yet, this earthy, limited-edition bottled-in-bond rye whiskey is culled from whiskeys aged in Catoctin Creek's inaugural set of 53-gallon charred, new oak barrels.

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

**📱** [catoctincreek.com](http://catoctincreek.com)

## 10. SEEDLIP

Seedlip's latest non-alcoholic innovation, zesty Notas de Agave, melds flavors of lime, prickly pear, and peppercorn. The bright, subtly fiery liquid—joining the portfolio's Garden, Grove, and Spice varieties—is ideal for zero-proof takes on the Margarita, Paloma, and Ranch Water.

**\$** SRP: \$32.99 per 700-ml bottle

**📱** [seedlipdrinks.com](http://seedlipdrinks.com)

## 11. CORAZÓN TEQUILA

The newest limited-edition Expresiones del Corazón collection comprises six tequilas distilled at Casa San Matías in Jalisco, Mexico. While four of them—the Artisanal Blanco and William Larue Weller, George T. Stagg, and Sazerac 18-year-old rye añejos—are making a return appearance, there are two new arrivals: añejos aged in French oak that previously held Old Charter bourbon and former 12-year-old Weller bourbon barrels.

**\$** SRP: \$59.99 to \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle

**📱** [tequilacorazon.com](http://tequilacorazon.com)

## 12. RON BARCELÓ

Joining Ron Barceló's Rare Blends collection of Dominican rums is the Imperial Porto Cask, a blend of reserve rums aged in oak barrels with differing toast levels that is then finished in 10-year-old Tawny Port casks. The complex spirit has a touch of sweetness that lends itself well to sipping neat or chilled alongside cheese plates or dark chocolate desserts.

**\$** SRP: \$59.99 per 750-ml bottle

**📱** [ronbarcelo.com](http://ronbarcelo.com)

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# WAY TO GO, WARGO'S!

BELOVED HARFORD COUNTY TAVERN  
ENTERS ITS 44th YEAR IN BUSINESS

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

*"Ours is the oldest liquor license owned by the same people in Harford County!"*

**S**o proclaims Andy Wargo, who has co-owned and operated Wargo's Restaurant and Tavern in Forest Hill, Maryland, since September 29, 1980 with his wife, Brenda. As such, Wargo's is the ideal establishment to launch this new series of articles on eating and drinking places in and around the state that bear the name of either the owner or the founding family.

September 29, 1980. Back then, the Colts still played in Baltimore, Jimmy Carter was President, and Cal Ripken Jr. was hitting home runs for Charlotte in the minor league. While many things have stayed the same at Wargo's over the years, some things have certainly changed. Brenda recalls, "Initially, it was called Andy Wargo's Restaurant and Tavern on the big marquee in the parking lot. When we decided to renovate the marquee, it turned into Wargo's Forest Hill Inn, which I loved! But people were calling and asking if we had availability in our hotel! So, much to my chagrin, we changed it to what it is currently and that's Wargo's Restaurant and Tavern. People commonly refer to us as 'Wargo's.' When we answer the phone,

**Brenda and Andy Wargo**  
*Owners & Operators*  
**Wargo's Restaurant and Tavern**

---

we simply say, 'Wargo's, how can I help you?'"

What has changed in nearly 44 years of being in business are the people themselves. "We are into our third generation with customers," Brenda noted. "The first generation would come in with their children. And now their children have children. They see me getting older. They see me aging. And do you know what I hear again and again? 'Don't ever retire!'" And to that, Brenda replies, "'You do know how old I am, right?' To them, I am ageless. To me? I'm 72. But they do keep me sharp."

And, of course, Andy and Brenda have had generations of their own. One daughter, Kimberly Wargo, is a manager. And their son-in-law, Marco Santilli, is a chef-manager who makes all of the menu's soups from scratch along with long-time cook, David. Brenda, meanwhile, draws raves for her crabcake recipe. And Wargo's bakes its own rolls, which makes the pit beef all the more tasty and tempting to order.

As for Wargo's bar scene? It's hopping and the menu has also evolved over the decades. Andy has only created one drink himself, and it was years ago. He called it "The Pennzoil Shooter" and served it during NASCAR races when Wargo's used to be open on Sundays. He mixed together a shot of vodka and a shot of root beer



Schnapps, "shaken and poured into a glass."

He stated, "I was 30 when we took over back in 1980, and Brenda was 28. A friend of mine told me early on that 'Brenda does what her job is and you do what your job is. Don't overlap each other!' That was a key piece of advice that I'll never forget."

Brenda added, "That is what we call 'the division of labor.' Andy is in charge of the bar. He rules the bar, and I rule and am in charge of the dining room. Fortunately or unfortunately, however you look

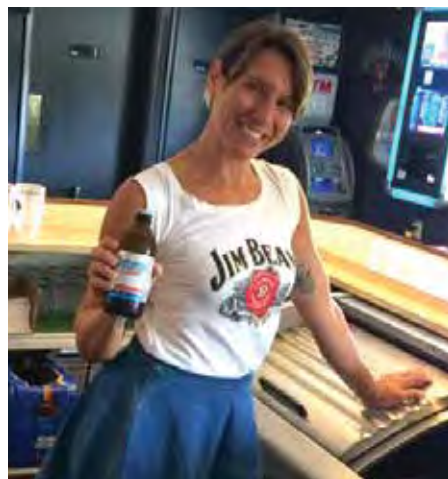


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## Kimberly Wargo Manager Wargo's Restaurant and Tavern

shift, they are allowed to have one drink on us ... on me and Andy."

So, after all this time, does running a bar and restaurant operation come easy to this couple? Most of the time, it does. But everyone knows that hospitality is one of the toughest businesses around, no matter how long you've been at it.

"Staffing is our biggest challenge," Brenda declared. "There is always somebody on vacation. Or, this time of year, somebody is always out sick. Trying to have enough employees to keep us up and running day after day . . . that is the hardest. Last week-end [this interview was conducted near the end of January], we had two cooks, a bartender, and a dishwasher out. This is our busy season. We're fast approaching our peak time. So, that was really hard! My

husband has to fill in whenever we have that many people out. He does a bang-up job."

But that all comes with the territory of owning a business that has one's name on it. When your identity is up there on a marquee, you can't help but feel a heightened responsibility for customer service and food and drink quality. Andy concluded, "In the past if something wasn't quite right, I have said in a constructive manner to an employee or to the staff, 'Hey, gang. That's my name on the building! Make sure we get it right.' I try and say it in a positive, learning way so that I am not criticizing. But, hey. And the end of the day, it's Wargo's! I don't want people beating up on the name because somebody didn't get something right."

Looking ahead, both Wargos are feeling positive about both the business's and their family's future prospects. "I have THE greatest partner in the world," Andy remarked. "We've been together for 56 years. She was my prom date. We have beautiful children and grandchildren, and she is the lady who made it all happen."

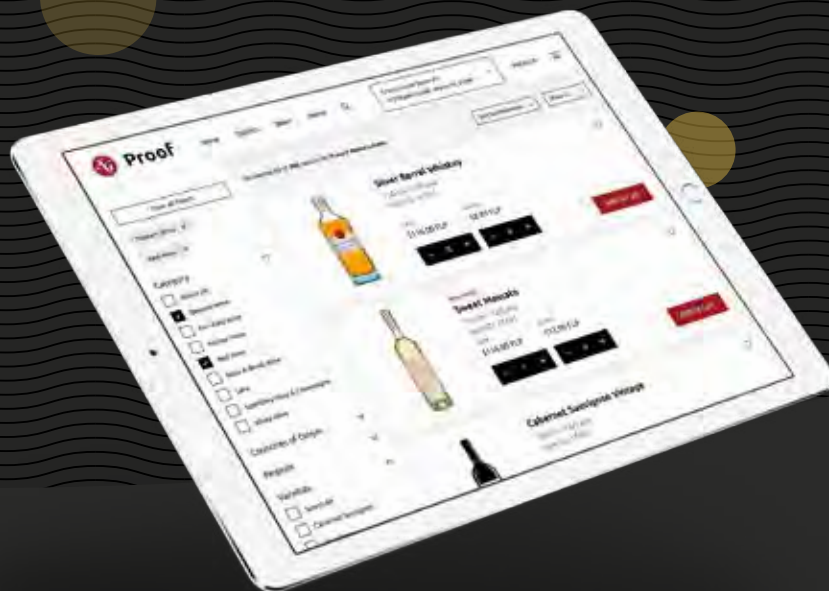
Added Brenda, "Oh, there's no stopping us now. We have our loyal clientele, and they are always bringing friends. It all keeps mushrooming. As long as we keep doing what we've been doing all of these years, I don't think we can go wrong." ■

at it and what day you're talking about, we share the rule of the kitchen. Forty-three-plus years ago when we took over, it was just martinis and Manhattans and whiskey sours. We had draft beers here and there, and we had National Bo, of course. Today? I can't even pronounce some of the names of the drinks, and they change every week! I don't try to keep up with them anymore. Luckily, my bartenders do. And they'll just tell us, 'Hey, we need to bring this into the stockroom' 'Or we need more of this.' Just the vodka flavors alone are overwhelming."

Through it all, though, the Wargos try and impart an overall beverage service philosophy to their staff. "Don't over pour," Brenda said. "And card people, card people, card people! In all the years we've been in business, we have only been cited once. You also have to know when to cut customers off, and know how to cut them off. Don't give away drinks. Don't drink on the job. Of course, that's a given. We do give shift drinks. When the employee gets off their



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# THE 8 BEST NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS, ACCORDING TO RETAILERS

**BEVERAGE MEDIA TURNED TO NON-ALCOHOLIC RETAILERS  
AROUND THE U.S. TO ASK WHAT ZERO-PROOF DRINKS  
THEY WERE EXCITED TO STOCK THIS YEAR**

BY CHRIS LOSH

**S**ales growth in the alcohol-free category has dwarfed that of its alcoholic peers over the last few years. According to beverage alcohol data and analysis firm IWSR, volumes have grown on average 20 percent a year in the U.S. since 2017. Alcohol-free drinks are now worth \$1.8 billion a year, and if there is one thing that's driving momentum, it's the shift towards year-round moderation on the part of consumers.

No longer is this a category that relies on the themed months of Dry Janu-

ary and Sober October for the majority of its sales. "Commercially speaking, the approach to Christmas has become even more important than Dry January," says Louie-Joe Findlater, the U.K. director of the French alcohol-free sparkler French Bloom.

That said, there's no doubt that the new year remains a time when many consumers experiment with moderation. And this represents a big opportunity for the growing number of alcohol-free bottle shops springing up across the U.S.

"It's the Super Bowl of our space," says Robert Theodorow, the owner and beverage curator of Generation NA in Lafayette, Indiana. "A great opportunity to gain new customers moving forward, not just for one month."

As Grace Vroom, the co-owner of Dear Dry Drinkery in Austin, Texas, puts it, "We are here all year round for whatever works best for you."

With new zero-proof drinks launching all the time, *Beverage Media* asked 10 retailers what they were most looking forward to getting in front of customers in 2024.

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- Star Liquors
- Cranberry Liquors
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- The Liquor Store
- Camelot Liquors
- Centreville Liquors
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### APLÓS CALME \$48 PER 575-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Arianna Laidley, retail manager, Boisson, Los Angeles

Boisson is the nearest thing the world has to a nationwide alcohol-free chain, with five stores in New York City, two in Los Angeles, and one in San Francisco. A ninth, was slated to open in Miami in January 2024.

Store manager Arianna Laidley says that her customers are mostly looking for alcohol-free switches of alcoholic drinks—zero-proof versions of classic cocktails or favorite wine styles. But functional beverages, such as the Aplós Calme, are popular too.

“It’s the perfect entry-level functional spirit,” she says. “The botanical ingredients are familiar individually, yet are a refreshing new take on verdant distillates with CBD.” Paired with tonic, she says it swiftly induces “palpable relaxation.”



### DOMAINE KAMAT NAPA VALLEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON \$68 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Alex Highsmith, general manager, Spirited Away, New York City

Opened in fall 2020, Spirited Away was one of the first alcohol-free stores in the U.S., with its focus on premium zero-proof drinks. They stock more than 100 brands, including this dealcoholized Napa Cabernet—the first of its kind—from Domaine Kamat.

“The owners take great care in making sure it tastes like a true varietal [wine],”



says Alex Highsmith, Spirited Away’s general manager. “It’s expensive but worth it.”

The current release is a 2020, making it unusually mature for an alcohol-free wine. It’s unashamedly a wine for special occasions. “Wine-lovers and teetotalers alike will appreciate the care and complexity of the liquid,” says Highsmith. “But always use stemware for your non-alcoholic beverages. The ritual and presentation is half the battle—I’ll die on that hill!”



### DRØMME AWAKE \$38 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Emily Maney, founder, Take Flight Bottle Shop, Colorado Springs, Colorado

Take Flight, which opened in downtown Colorado Springs in January 2023, spent its first year selling sparkling wines, pre-mixed cocktails, and CBD waters to a consumer base of mostly 20 to 40-year-old women.

“I love selling functional beverages,” says founder Emily Maney. “They give you the benefits of alcohol, such as an uplifted mood, without the ill effects.”

Drømme Awake is her current favorite drink—a pomegranate-coloured botanical spirit with flavors of tropical fruit and Szechuan pepper. “I love the flavor profile,” she says. “It’s distinctive and sophisticated with lots of vitamins and no added sugar. It gives me the same amount of energy I’d get from a cup of coffee but without the caffeine.” She recommends it as a brunch cocktail substitute or for a mid-morning boost.

### ROOTS DIVINO BIANCO \$40 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Kirstin Vracko, owner, Cheeky and Dry, Seattle

After a couple of pop-ups to test the water, Cheeky and Dry opened its doors in November 2023. Inclusivity is the watchword. “We have something for everyone, whether you’re sober, sober-curious, or someone who enjoys cocktails,” says owner

Kirstin Vracko of her store, just north of downtown Seattle. She plans to back up the lengthy tasting program with alcohol-free mixology classes.

Though there is a proud focus on local producers from the Pacific Northwest, Vracko has looked further afield for her star drink. She picked out a dealcoholized white vermouth from Greek liqueur company Roots. Multi-layered and herbal, the Roots Divino is produced on the Aegean island of Lesbos and is best drunk mixed with tonic or soda and a bar-spoon of brine.

“They’ve done a masterful job of combining complex and beautiful flavors,” says Vracko. “Almost every time I pour this product for a customer they walk out with a bottle.”



### WILDERTON EARTHEN \$40 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Jeff Gustin, general manager, Inmoxicated, Racine, Wisconsin

In the two years his dry bar and bottle shop has been open in downtown Racine, Jeff Gustin has been clear about his mission: “To normalize not drinking alcohol and to show that you can still enjoy a day or night without it,” he says.

Earthen, from the Hood River-based artisanal distiller Wilderton, encapsulates



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this philosophy. The botanical non-alcoholic spirit won a gold medal in the World Alcohol-Free Awards and the New Orleans Spirits Competition in 2023. “[It is] one of the most unique and versatile beverages out there,” says Gustin. Dry and exotically spicy, with notes of cinnamon, pine-smoked tea, and cardamom, it is front and centre in Inmoxicated’s best-selling cocktail, the Blackberry Sage Cooler, which pairs it with a blackberry sage syrup and blackberry hibiscus sparkling beverage.

“The fact that it does not attempt to replicate an existing alcohol beverage makes it suitable for everyone to enjoy,” says Gustin.



#### BLÅ, COPENHAGEN SPARKLING TEA \$40 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Grace Vroom, co-owner, Dear Dry Drinkery, Austin, Texas

Just four months after starting out selling non-alcoholic cocktails, bottles, and cans from a small trailer at a food court, Dear Dry Drinkery opened its doors, becoming Austin’s first alcohol-free bottle shop last August.

Co-owner Grace Vroom is proud of the fact that Dear Dry Drinkery is a queer-owned and Black-owned business, but also of the “highly curated” selection of bottles they have in the always tricky category of alcohol-free wine. Their wine range, she says, is focused on bottles that are “flavorful, exciting, and not too sweet.”



Blå by the Copenhagen Sparkling Tea Company is a recent discovery. Founded in 2017, the Nordic brand was developed by sommelier Jacob Kocemba, during his time at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Copenhagen. “At \$40 it’s our most expensive wine-like bottle,” she says. “I would definitely suggest purchasing for a special occasion or gift for someone who will cherish the perfectly balanced jasmine and Darjeeling flavors.”



#### SOVI SPARKLING ROSÉ \$30 PER FOUR-PACK OF 8.5-OZ. CANS

Selected by Kristin Patrick, co-owner, Loren’s Alcohol-Free Beverages, Carmel, Indiana

With two stores opening in less than a year, Loren’s Alcohol-Free Beverages is on a roll, pulling in a wide range of customers from across central Indiana.

Most are looking to cut back on their weeknight drinking rather than stop altogether, so wine is the biggest selling category, and for co-owner Kristin Patrick, the convenience of cans is a big plus. “They’re perfect for people who live alone, or whose partner isn’t interested in alcohol-free,” she says. “But parents also love them for boating, camping, and travelling.”

She’s a particular fan of Sovi wines, founded by husband-and-wife wine pro-

fessionals Julia Littauer, a certified sommelier, and Alex Littauer, a wine marketer. The alcohol-removed wines are variety and vintage specific, made with certified sustainably grown grapes sourced from a single estate in Clarksburg, California. “The Sovi Sparkling Rosé will continue to be a star of our store,” she says.

#### GOODVINES NA RIESLING \$20.99 PER 750-ML BOTTLE

Selected by Ed Carino, cofounder, Proof No More (online retailer)

Ed Carino and his Proof No More cofounders Lars Dahlhaus and Christian Blake first noticed the growth in the alcohol-free category when visiting European craft beer producers eight years ago. Their online store, which ships across the U.S., launched in 2021 and is one of the few retailers that sell single cans of beers or cocktails.

Most of their customers are “flex drinkers,” who are mixing alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, sometimes during the same occasion. “I’m really enthused about selling the Goodvines wine line from Germany,” says Carino. “Particularly the Riesling.”

Based in Heidelberg in the warmer southwest of the country, Goodvines makes only alcohol-free wines, and has made it their mission to avoid adding sweetness or artificial flavors. Riesling’s trademark bright acidity lends itself to sparkling wines, though Carino prefers the still version, describing it as “a good everyday sipper, [that] also works well with spicy foods.” The range will be available at Proof No More from the end of January onwards. ■





# WHY FALANGHINA IS WINNING OVER WINEMAKERS

CLIMATE CHANGE AND APPEALING ECONOMICS ARE PROPELLING THIS LITTLE-KNOWN, WHITE ITALIAN GRAPE INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

BY CAITLIN A. MILLER

Italy is home to hundreds of indigenous vine varieties—more than any other country in the world—which can make it difficult for lesser-known Italian grapes to stand out in the international market. But thanks to America's keen interest in Italian wines—in 2021, Italy had the highest volume share of U.S. wine imports—coupled with the growing interest in indigenous varieties, more native Italian grapes are getting their time in the spotlight.



One such grape rising from obscurity is Falanghina, a white variety indigenous to Italy's southern Campania region. Once thought of as a workhorse variety, developments in viticulture and winemaking have led to an increase in the quality of its wines, and more interest in the grape in both domestic and international markets.

This rise of Falanghina has also coincided with a growing movement to plant indigenous Italian grapes in other countries, particularly the U.S. What started with plantings of highly popular grapes like Nebbiolo and Sangiovese, has now trickled down to include lesser-known grapes, particularly heat-adapted white varieties like Falanghina. With both quality and international plantings on the rise, Ital-





ian and American wine professionals alike share what makes this grape uniquely suited to the wine market of today—both climatically and economically—and why it's time to give Falanghina its moment in the spotlight.

## GETTING TO KNOW FALANGHINA

The name Falanghina actually refers to two district grape varieties: Falanghina Beneventana and Falanghina Campi Flegrea. “When we talk about Falanghina, we are talking about the most widespread white grape variety in Campania, where two very different varieties are grown under this name,” says Pasquale Carlo, the director of Sannio Academy.

“The name derives from the Latin term *falanga*, the wooden pole that supported the vine,” explains Carlo. “It is a name used to indicate the [training] system, not the variety. The two varieties present evident differences, starting from the shape of the bunch, while DNA studies have highlighted that the two varieties differ in 34 ampelographic characters out of 40.”

Falanghina Beneventana is grown in the Benevento region, a hilly area northeast of Naples, and accounts for approximately 80 percent of all Falanghina production. Falanghina Campi Flegrea, which has far fewer plantings, is found in the coastal, volcanic Campi Flegrei region. The different varieties, along with dramatic soil differences in each region, result in very



distinct wine profiles. Beneventana, grown primarily on calcareous and clay-based soils, tends to produce richer, fuller-bodied wines, while Campi Flegrea, grown on volcanic soils, makes lighter, more aromatic wines. The two grape varieties, however, are never blended. Each region maintains distinct winemaking rules established by the DOCs, and more importantly, unique cultural traditions, explains Giovanni Morone, the winemaker for Cantina Morone, located in Benevento's Sannio region.

Nevertheless, all Falanghina is notable for its high acidity, making it well suited to a variety of wine styles—and an ideal grape to rely on in a warming climate. “It's a versatile grape that can be used to produce white wines, sparkling—both *charmat* and *metodo classico*—passito, young wines, or [long-aging] wines,” says Libero Rillo, the owner of Fontana Vecchia and the president of the Consorzio del Sannio.

## THE EVOLUTION OF ITALIAN FALANGHINA

The last few decades have brought significant changes to Falanghina. “Falanghina has changed a lot in terms of quality and organoleptic features,” says Luigi Foschini, the export manager for La Guardiense, a

cooperative based in Sannio and the largest producer in all of Campania. “Falanghina in the '70s made wines that were hard to drink because of the acidity, because of the pH, because of many characters.”

A key issue was getting Falanghina to fully ripen. “The grape 45 or 50 years ago was so acidic, so bitter, that if you bit into one it was like biting into a lemon,” says Foschini. “What has changed in the meantime? Viticulture. In order to produce a ripe product, you have to focus on viticulture. Focusing on reducing yields per hectare, different training systems, climate change, and hilly vineyards, has made Falanghina as a raw material very interesting.”

Today, Falanghina represents “the most important economic voice of the Campania wine sector, which ranks among the top 20 Italian wine [regions],” says Carlo. Despite lowering yields and restricting plantings to higher-quality, hilly sites, production of Falanghina is roughly six times higher than 10 or 15 years ago, according to Rillo. Previously, Falanghina often went to bulk wine production; now, given the increase in quality, the majority of the wine is bottled within one of the regional denominations.

“In the last decade, [Falanghina] has enjoyed great commercial success, but it still struggles to find an identical match in the judgment of critics and enthusiasts, especially in Italy,” says Carlo. “Abroad, the perception is different, in my opinion. Falanghina wins significant opinions from



ABOVE: Libero Rillo, the owner of Fontana Vecchia and the president of the Consorzio del Sannio.

LEFT: Elenora and Giovanni Morone, the winemakers for Cantina Morone.



experts and the most important magazines, especially in the United States.”

## FALANGHINA ARRIVES STATESIDE

Indeed, many Americans, particularly within the wine trade, are starting to know—and love—Falanghina. Today, the grape can be found planted up and down the California coast, with bottlings coming from many highly respected wineries, such as Ridge Vineyards.

When Duncan Meyers, the cofounder and winemaker for Sonoma-based Arnot-Roberts, first started working with Falanghina, the grapes had come to him by chance, but the quality and value were clear. “Falanghina is brilliant,” says Meyers. “It crops well, meaning you get three or four tons to the acre of really high-quality fruit. It ripens slowly, it’s a slow sugar accumulator, and it retains acidity like crazy.”

Further south, plantings of Falanghina in Paso Robles, which have been around for over a decade, are increasing. “I just put in an order this year for some Falanghina to be planted for us,” says Stephy Terrizzi, the cofounder and viticulturist for Giornata Wines, which focuses specifically on Italian grape varieties. “We use it in three different wines and it does really well with skin contact for us, and the acid is just off the charts.”

The late-ripening, high-acid grape does well in California’s warmer climates, and in Paso Robles particularly, it works

well in the pockets of clay and calcareous soils that are reminiscent of Benevento. “We’re really lucky in Paso to have the soil and the climate that is kind of perfect for treating these grapes with respect,” says Brian Terrizzi, who founded Giornata with Stephy and serves as the winemaker.

On the consumer side, however, Falanghina still faces an uphill battle. “It’s kind of a hidden gem,” says Mike Fifer, the wine, beer, and spirits team leader for Plum Market in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “It suffers because no one knows how to pronounce it and unless someone tells you what it is, you’re probably not going to pick it up. It’s a hand-sell for us.”

With direct-to-consumer winery sales, the story is similar. “The response from our mailing has been good and people look forward to it, but I don’t know whether that is based on the fact that it’s just cheap and easy to drink or whether they’re really fired up about Falanghina,” says Meyers. “I kind of think it’s the prior, not the latter.”

## THE FUTURE OF FALANGHINA

A major reason for the growing presence of Falanghina in California is climate change. “I think [Falanghina] shows a lot of po-

tential,” says Meyers. “Especially with the changing climate, these heat-adapted white varieties that crop well are fantastic. I love the idea that instead of pushing to the few remaining places that are cold enough to farm grapes, people look to the grapes that can handle the places that we already have vineyards and infrastructure in place. And Falanghina is a good candidate for that.”

The economics of Falanghina are another key reason why California winemakers are investing in the grape. “Having four, even five, tons to the acre is not unheard of and it still makes high-quality wine,” says Meyers. “We charge \$25 for our [Falanghina]. I want it to be a utilitarian white that people can drink at lunchtime and not put it on a pedestal. It’s hard to do that in California with high-quality farming. It’s hard to do that with other varieties that crop lower.”

As the grape gains favor at home and abroad, Falanghina’s biggest champions are hopeful, but they acknowledge that challenges remain. “The future [of Falanghina] is bright,” says Carlo. “The widespread diffusion of the vine ... is the result of its great adaptability to different soils and climates, a characteristic that gives this Campanian native grape an international charm. The challenge will be to differentiate, to be able to communicate the distinctive trait of [Falanghina] wines, making them truly unique in the complex production panorama of southern Italy.” ■

ABOVE LEFT: The Falanghina block at Las Cimas Vineyard above the Russian River Valley.

ABOVE RIGHT: Duncan Meyers, the cofounder and winemaker for Arnot-Roberts.





# EXPLORE GRAVES-SAUTERNES WITH THE VINTNERS WHO KNOW IT BEST

**VIGNERONS OF GRAVES, PESSAC-LÉOGNAN, SAUTERNES, AND BARSAC CULTIVATE DISTINCT WINES THAT DELIVER UNMATCHED VALUE FOR ANY WINE BUYER**

The four AOCs of Graves, Pessac-Léognan, Sauternes, and Barsac are the gateway to Bordeaux, offering exceptional red, white, and sweet wines. Shaped by an intricate blend of elements, including rivers, forests, and the Atlantic Ocean, the terroir of this region, known collectively as Graves-Sauternes, lends itself to a variety of wines with broad appeal and remarkable finesse.



A diversity of microclimates and soil types give each AOC a distinctive character, and in turn, distinctive wines. Through these wines, each appellation adds to the renown of the Left Bank, where more than 450 dedicated winegrowers, known for their small vineyards and big personalities, carry on a spirit of innovation and centuries-old family expertise. The châteaux of Graves-Sauternes range from small, intimate plots to some of the world's most historic and well-known estates, including the Grand Crus de Classés.

The vigneron of Graves-Sauternes demonstrate the living legacy of Grands Vins de Bordeaux. The best way to explore the intricacies of these appellations is through the voices of the vintners who know them best. Here, the women and men of Graves-Sauternes share how they blend terroir with winemaking know-how to craft unique and memorable wines in each of the region's four AOCs.

## GRAVES: PIERRE-EDOUARD CHATIN OF CHÂTEAU DE RESPIDE

Graves is the only appellation in France to be named after its soil, says Pierre-Edouard Chatin, the owner of Château de



Pierre-Edouard Chatin and family

Respide. The name Graves refers to the “rolled stones” deposited by the Garonne River from the Pyrenees mountains. Hiding a clay underlayer, this stony landscape shapes fruity and vibrant wines with abundant freshness and elegance. The red wines from these vineyards deliver complex aromatics and are elegant and long-lasting. The whites express lively notes of delicate flowers and citrus, showing ample purity and minerality, with a light salty touch on the finish. “In Graves AOC, in general and at Château de Respide especially, wine production has always been a family activity,” says Chatin.

Graves represents a page out of French winemaking history, the first place in Bor-

deaux where the Romans planted vines when they arrived in present-day France. Today, it enjoys an excellent reputation throughout western Europe, yet is still being discovered by many drinkers in North America. Graves wines are known to be one of the top value-for-money appellations in France, which can make them very appealing to U.S. wine buyers.

### PESSAC-LÉOGNAN: JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MAU OF CHÂTEAU BROWN



Jean-Christophe Mau

Jean-Christophe Mau credits the unique character of Pessac-Léognan, a communal appellation of the Graves region, for shaping the wines he produces at Château Brown. The deep gravel soils where he cultivates Cabernet Sauvignon provide the remarkable conditions that elicit silky, elegant tannins in these red wines. The white grapes, including Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, are located on a cooler clay vein, guaranteeing freshness during hot, dry summers. The climatic hazards of recent years have prompted Mau to review certain viticultural practices, such as delaying pruning and limiting leaf thinning, particularly on white grape vines.

Pessac-Léognan appeals to drinkers seeking elegant French wines of unflappable quality, yet this region is still waiting to be widely discovered internationally. However, the proximity to the city of Bordeaux makes Pessac-Léognan the only peri-urban appellation, cultivating a connection with its customers and visitors in Bordeaux. “We work day after day, year after year, to shape and sculpt our vines to

produce the very best grapes,” says Mau. “Our know-how is immense, and it’s up to us to share it with the world.”

### SAUTERNES: EMILIE BON OF CHÂTEAU VOIGNY



Pierre Antoine and Emilie Bon

Emilie Bon credits an alliance of nature and winegrower know-how for the success of Sauternes. This exceptional appellation is known for the specificity of its terroir, which produces wines with rich and diverse aromatics. In autumn, the berries are transformed by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, otherwise known as the noble rot, which concentrates sugars and aromas. Thanks to its precise geographical location, Sauternes appellation benefits from a microclimate that is essential to the development of botrytis.

Château Voigny and its neighbors are devoted to reflecting the wide-ranging aromas and diversity of these sweet wines, providing buyers and drinkers with an offering that can satisfy diverse tasting experiences. “The charm of Sauternes lies in its many facets,” says Bon. When enjoyed young, it is fresh and vibrant, but with some cellaring (up to 20 years or more), it evolves to offer more richness, indulgence, and candied fruit. These wines can grace casual apéro hours and traditional dinners, and complement sweet or savory food pairings. Enthusiastically received by both wine novices and aficionados, Sauternes wines, with their incredible complexity and unique versatility, are among some of the most renowned, coveted wines in the world.



The de Pontac sisters

### BARSAC: DE PONTAC SISTERS OF CHÂTEAU DE MYRAT

Slanie Ricard de Pontac and her sister, Elisabeth de Pontac, together manage Château Myrat in Barsac, one of the five villages within greater Sauternes. Barsac is a wine made from noble rot, and achieves its unique flavors starting on the vine. This artisanal product needs to be handled with exacting care. “Grape by grape, cluster by cluster, we pick the well-concentrated fruit to craft our sweet wine, which is made with all-natural sugars,” says Ricard de Pontac. The person who picks the grapes during this careful process—which can take up to four passes through the vineyard—is known as “the first winemaker” of Château de Myrat, an 1855 Cru Classé.

The specificity of the Barsac appellation is the limestone and clay soil on a fissured bedrock, which provides natural draining. The limestone gives Barsac wines finesse, minerality, and freshness. This balance appeals to connoisseurs of noble rot wines as well as those who are just becoming familiar with the category. “This is a wine for pleasure,” says Ricard de Pontac. It is enjoyed young or left to age for a more meditative experience. “It can be enjoyed at any time,” she adds.

The wines from Graves-Sauternes offer a world of unmatched value that is yet to be fully discovered. From the exquisite red and white wines of Graves and Pessac-Léognan to the remarkable sweet wines from Barsac and Sauternes, these appellations cater to every type of buyer and consumer, whether seasoned connoisseur or novice wine enthusiast. ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Graves-Sauternes.





# HOW PIEDMONT'S PELAVERGA BECAME AN INDUSTRY DARLING

OVER THE PAST DECADE, EVERY WINE PRO HAS COME TO KNOW AND LOVE PELAVERGA—BUT HOW DID THIS LITTLE-GROWN GRAPE SKYROCKET TO FAME?

BY LAUREN MOWERY

**P**iedmont, Italy, has long been a bastion of obscure liquid treasures. Within its fog-shrouded hills, many producers take the long view on a slow life, seeking to preserve traditions that would be crowded out by heavy financial hitters elsewhere. Though the value of Nebbiolo from Barolo and Barbaresco has risked edging out heritage varieties, a few quality-minded producers have saved grapes from the cold hand of capitalism. Pelaverga is one such variety.

“Pelaverga compares to Italy’s other great obscurities,” says Nicholas Schulman, the wine director for RPM Italian Restaurants in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Las Vegas. “Like Ruché or Schioppettino, Verduno Pelaverga offers exotic spice, ethereal complexity, highly aromatic floral notes, and a sense of freshness often missing from the better-known, classic Italian wines.”

Pelaverga flew under the radar of U.S. drinkers until a few years ago when im-

porters, buyers, and sommeliers, reading the shifting winds of consumer preference towards lighter, aromatic, chillable reds, started seeking it out. Today, Pelaverga has become a niche wine for insiders, with a reputation that continues to rise. Ironically, the demand that has helped to protect it is now proving a double-edged sword in sourcing it.

## A TALE OF TWO PELAVERGAS

Pelaverga grows in two areas in the Cuneo province: Verduno and in the hills of Saluzzo, or Colline Saluzzesi. Though the exact origins of the vines in each area are unclear, local producers long believed them to share a common origin. Research in the 1980s, however, revealed each village grew a separate cultivar: Pelaverga Grosso in Saluzzo, and Pelaverga Piccolo in Verduno.

Pelaverga Grosso, found in the Colline Saluzzesi DOC, produces a richer, more



ABOVE LEFT: The rolling hills of Piedmont.  
ABOVE RIGHT: Pelaverga Piccolo.

concentrated style. Created in 1996, this relatively unknown DOC focuses on red wines made from Nebbiolo, Barbera, and three other oddities playing accompaniment, including Pelaverga. Though seldom indulged, the rules allow producers to bottle a monovarietal Pelaverga.

Donato Scotti, originally from Bergamo and now the chef and owner of Donato Enoteca and Cru in Redwood City, California, has discovered a few Colline Saluzzesi wines that merit interest. High-toned with floral and pepper notes, Scotti found the Pelaverga Grosso from Cascina Melognis “beautiful,” leading him to include it in several wine club offers.

But it’s Pelaverga Piccolo that has garnered even greater attention in Verduno, where the village’s namesake DOC requires at least 85 percent of the variety. The wines run lighter, floral, and fra-



ABOVE LEFT: Donato Enoteca in Redwood City, California.  
ABOVE RIGHT: RPM Italian in Washington, D.C.

grant with a strawberry scent evocative of delicate Pinot Noir. Commercial interest has favored Piccolo, partly because of the quality-minded producers who have spearheaded its preservation, including G.B. Burlotto, Castello di Verduno, Fratelli Alessandria, and Olek Bondonio.

A diminutive area at just over 74 acres in total, Verduno Pelaverga DOC has little room for expansion. The DOC covers the village of Verduno and small sections in Roddi (9.7 acres) and La Morra (4 acres). Total production in 2022 reached 17,000 bottles.

The village of Verduno lies two miles from the northern edge of Barolo and the hilltop village of La Morra. Interest in the grape grew after Gabriella Burlotto of Castello di Verduno planted the first vineyard dedicated to the grape in her family's Massara vineyard in 1972. That decisive act relieved Pelaverga from its prior duties as a background blending grape and helped it become a monovarietal star.

## PELAVERGA'S RISE IN THE UNITED STATES

Nobody can pinpoint the exact moment when Pelaverga rose in popularity in the United States, but one could hazard a guess that it started around 10 to 15 years ago.

"I'd say around 2010, Pelaverga began to garner increasing recognition within the sommelier community and among restaurateurs," says Schulman. In 2006, Eric Asimov spotlighted Castello di Verdu-

no's Pelaverga as a pairing for Thanksgiving turkey in *The New York Times*, when the wine cost just \$13.

"This move echoed the paper's earlier influence in popularizing Beaujolais for the same occasion," says Schulman. Like cru Beaujolais, Jura, and even the under-the-radar Loire Valley Pineau d'Aunis, Pelaverga's ascent has been propelled by the "Jura effect," when consumers who have been priced out of wines like Burgundy and Barolo turn to flavorful, complex, terroir-driven alternatives.

Scotti first fell in love with Pelaverga at a Burlotto tasting with the winemaker. "At the time, 10 to 12 years ago, it was pretty unknown," he says. Scotti was there to taste and purchase Barolo, but decided to return with a few bottles of Pelaverga for the restaurant.

"We started featuring it by the glass and got a great response from customers," he says. As Burlotto earned higher and higher scores for its Barolo, the price "skyrocketed," forcing sommeliers to seek alternatives. "That's when Pelaverga started appearing on menus," says Scotti.

To that point, the cost-to-value ratio of Pelaverga remains alluring. The current Castello di Verduno 'Basadone' vintage fetches around \$25 to \$30 retail, while G.B. Burlotto Verduno Pelaverga ranges between \$30 and \$35.

"I remember celebrating a special occasion at a Michelin two star in 2019, and I had trouble finding a reputable, ready-to-drink Nebbiolo or Burgundy for less than \$300. I finally came across a '16 Pelaverga by Burlotto for under \$100, and it was perfect," says Schulman.

Along with its value proposition, sommeliers love Pelaverga for its stylistic versatility; it can make lighter or fuller reds, along with sparkling and even white wines. "Pelaverga is a Zelig of a variety," says Schulman.

## STRONG DEMAND FOR A NICHE GRAPE

Morgan Rich, the Italian portfolio manager at Polaner Selections, handles imports for Castello di Verduno. He sells to many of New York and New Jersey's top restaurants and retail shops, which eagerly anticipate their shipments. "Many of our customers know the wine and await its arrival. Nowadays, we can only secure enough to last us about half of the year," he says.

Skyrocketing demand and limited production of G.B. Burlotto's wines leave Scotti struggling to keep it in stock. "Due to its cult status, most bottles are spoken for. We are lucky to receive some yearly allocation," he says.

Schulman isn't surprised. "Without the hefty price tag of neighboring classics Barolo and Barbaresco, coupled with its light-bodied approachability, it's no coincidence that retailers and restaurants now have difficulty keeping Pelaverga in stock, especially considering its limited production," he says.

Though worldwide demand has helped producers inch prices higher, Marco Buttignol, the export director for Castello di Verduno, says they can only go so high in a region with strong competition from Langhe Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, and Barbera. "For sure, it's a golden moment for Pelaverga, and all of its producers are just trying to ride the wave." ■



# LUCK OF THE IRISH

THE EIGHT IRISH WHISKEYS TO HAVE YOUR EYE ON THIS YEAR

## ● Natterjack

A more recent entrant to the Irish whiskey space, Natterjack was created in 2019 by Aidan Mehigan, an Irishman with a love of bourbon. He married Irish and American whiskey-making techniques—and partnered with American master distiller Jordan Via—to create Natterjack, a triple-distilled blend of malted barley and corn. The whiskey is aged in ex-bourbon barrels and then finished in virgin American oak from Napa's Seguin Moreau Cooperage for one year. Natterjack makes two whiskey SKUs: Natterjack Irish Whiskey, which sits at 40% ABV, and Natterjack Cask Strength, which clocks in at 63% ABV.



## ● Waterford

Waterford Distillery—and Mark Reynier, Waterford's CEO—has become a leading proponent of identifying and highlighting terroir in Irish whiskey, working with more than 100 Irish barley growers to craft single-



## ● Powers

One of the oldest Irish whiskey distilleries still in operation, Powers is an icon of the category. The distillery was founded in 1791 on John's Lane in Dublin, quickly becoming Ireland's most beloved whiskey. Powers is known for its fine cut of whiskey distillate, always triple distilled in copper pot stills.

The Powers portfolio includes four SKUs available in the U.S.: Powers Gold Label, the foundational whiskey that ages the heart of the distillate in American oak; Powers Irish Rye, the first 100% Irish rye whiskey, launched last year; Powers 'John's Lane,' matured for 12 years in a tribute to the distillery's original home; and Powers 'Three Swallow,' a modern take on the original single pot still Powers Whiskey.

malt bottlings. These individual growers are highlighted in Waterford's Single Farm Origins bottles, while they come together in the producer's Cuvées. Waterford is also the world's largest producer of organic and

biodynamic whiskeys, with 25 percent of their growers farming according to these philosophies. The Arcadian Farm Origin line includes biodynamic, organic, peated, and heritage whiskeys.



# BYE, BYE, AMERICAN RYE.



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**IRISH WHISKEY**





## ● Fercullen

Crafted at Powerscourt Distillery in County Wicklow, Fercullen's Irish whiskeys include blends, single malts, single grains, and limited editions as well. Here, an underground lake is fed by the Wicklow Mountains, yielding naturally filtered water that creates characterful whiskeys. Whether someone is looking for a special-occasion bottle or a great option for cocktails, Fercullen has just the thing.

The core Fercullen Falls is a premium, 50/50 blend of malt and grain whiskeys, matured in ex-bourbon barrels (as well as some new, heavy-char oak casks for the grain whiskey). For a special experience, there's the 21-Year-Old Single Malt, which marries 21-year-old single malt matured in bourbon barrels with that finished in oloroso and Pedro Ximénez sherry casks.

## ● Tullamore

The Tullamore distillery was founded almost 200 years ago in the Irish town of the same name. At just 15 years old, Daniel Edmund Williams began working at the distillery as a stable boy and by age 25, he became the distillery manager. Today, he's known as one of Ireland's greatest distillers and every bottle of Tullamore bears his initials: D.E.W. Tullamore's original triple-distilled, triple-cask-finished, triple-blended Irish whiskey is a standout in the category, highlighting three types of grains in three different cask finishes.



## ● Teeling

Before the Teeling distillery opened in Dublin in 2015, there had been no new distilling facilities in the city for 125 years. The opening marked a turning point for the Teeling family, whose Irish whiskey roots date back to the 1700s. With a new facility, down the road from the original family distillery, the latest generation is putting a new spin on the category, with small-batch whiskeys matured in unconventional vessels. Take Teeling's Single Grain whiskey: The unusual mash bill of 95 percent corn and five percent malted barley is triple distilled and ma-



tured in ex-Cabernet Sauvignon French oak casks from California.

## ● Killowen

Killowen is part of the new guard of Irish whiskey distillers that are bringing a craft mindset to the category. For founder and distiller Brendan Carty, the goal is to bring back Irish whiskey's character and tradition by reviving forgotten styles of native distilling. It's through these historical distillation methods that Killowen achieves its unique, and distinctly Irish, flavors. In Killowen's Bonded Experimental series, for example, the whiskeys are bottled at cask strength to maximize flavor, and they undergo zero filtration with zero coloring and no water additions.



## ● Limavady

After discovering a family history steeped in whiskey, founder and master distiller Darryl McNally decided to leave his role at a big whiskey company and reclaim a piece of his lineage. As a descendant of the original 18th century Limavady distillers, McNally revived the Limavady name and began producing single barrel single malts that stayed true to his roots. Limavady's Single Barrel Irish Whiskey, of which only 846 bottles per barrel are produced, is made from 100 percent Irish barley that is aged in bourbon barrels and finished in Pedro Ximénez sherry casks. ■



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# AN INSIDE LOOK AT IRISH WHISKEY'S UNSTOPPABLE GROWTH



**VERSATILE, DIVERSE, AND A PROUD SYMBOL OF THE NATION'S HERITAGE, IRISH WHISKEY IS GROWING FAST—AND KEEPING THE FUTURE IN MIND WITH A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY**

Just when you thought the Irish whiskey sector couldn't grow any further, it does, as Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board, can attest. According to its "Export Performance and Prospects" report, 2022 was a landmark year for Irish drinks exports, the total value of which was estimated to approach €2 billion (\$2.1 billion). Whiskey accounted for 60 percent of value growth in Irish drinks exports, up 25 percent from 2021, demonstrating the category's ongoing resilience. And the United States continues to be the key market for Irish whiskey exports, representing 57 percent of the total export value.

Industry trends like premiumization have helped Irish whiskey to flourish. Recent data from Distilled Spirits Council of the United States shows the Irish whiskey category has benefited from drinkers' tendency to trade up, with a luxury tier developing that showcases rare and collectable Irish whiskeys. In fact, since 2003, high-end premium and super-premium Irish whiskey grew an astounding 1,053 percent and 2,769 percent, respectively.

*Beverage Media* checked in with Henry Horkan, the North America market manager for Bord Bia, for a deeper understanding of the category and its relentless success.

## **BEVERAGE MEDIA:**

**What differentiates Irish whiskey from other whiskey categories?**

**HENRY HORKAN:** Ireland's whiskey industry has a long and storied past, filled with centuries of commitment, innovation, and rebellion. We consider Ireland to be the original home of whiskey. After all, it was Irish monks who first discovered the art of distillation in or around the 12th century. For many Irish people, whiskey is tied to our national identity and sense of locality.

But what truly makes Irish whiskey unique is its production process. Unlike other whiskey-producing countries, Ireland doesn't have requirements around type or treatment of wood for aging or finishing. Distilleries are using amazingly distinctive woods, like Brazilian Amburana and Andean oak. This flexibility has

pushed the boundaries of experimentation and innovation.

**BM:** With more distilleries opening in both established and emerging whisky-making nations, how has Irish whiskey become the fastest growing whiskey category in the world?

**HH:** Irish whiskey's remarkable ascent can be attributed to the sheer diversity of product offerings, which has only grown over the past decade as the number of brands on the market increased from a few dozen to hundreds. The creation of new styles and expressions is a testament to the talent and ingenuity of Irish distilleries.

**BM:** What measures are distilleries in Ireland taking to make whiskey production a sustainable industry?

**HH:** Many Irish distillers are part of Bord Bia's Origin Green program, the world's only national food and drink sustainability program, which enables the industry

## BORD BIA IRISH FOOD BOARD

to set and achieve sustainability targets that respect the environment and serve local communities. Those measures have included installing a rainwater-harvesting system and implementing widespread energy optimization to make secondary packaging recyclable, reusable, compostable, or removed entirely by the end of 2025.

**BM:** How does the Irish whiskey industry play into Ireland's Food Vision 2030?

**HH:** Food Vision 2030 is a ten-year strategy that aims to see a 25 percent reduction in emissions from the agri-food sector by 2030, and aims to make Ireland a global leader of innovation for sustainable food and agriculture systems.

We are extremely proud of Irish whiskey's contribution to the Irish economy. However, we must also be conscious of our environmental and ecological impact, both in Ireland and in our export markets. With that in mind, distillers are taking or planning a target-focused approach to reducing carbon emissions in production and implementing sustainable sourcing, reuse, and recycling. Overall, this ensures support and funding for Irish farming communities.

**BM:** What are some of the steps that Bord Bia is taking to connect with U.S. trade customers?

**HH:** A key element of Bord Bia's trade engagement is our interactive Spirit of Ireland educational program. Launched last year, the program has taken place in more than 10 U.S. control states as well as New York, California, and Illinois. Rollout is continuing at a steady clip.



The Spirit of Ireland program aims to ensure the category is protected and strengthened. Attendees learn about history, heritage, renaissance, and the future of Irish whiskey. It encompasses a full-immersion sensory experience that transports attendees to Irish barley fields and barrel houses, and virtual reality tours of 20 fully operational Irish distilleries.

Partnering with control states and other customer accounts has allowed us to measure the commercial impact of Spirit of Ireland, which is fundamentally the key objective, and it has really delivered on this with new listings and significant increases in value for our trade partners.

**BM:** What are the most popular ways Irish whiskey is consumed in the U.S.?

**HH:** With over 40 Irish distilleries on the island of Ireland, four types of Irish whiskey—pot still, single malt, single grain, and blended, and many flavored variations—the ways to consume Irish whiskey are endless.

Purists might turn their nose, but the introduction to Irish whiskey for many

**Irish whiskey has seen monumental success with American consumers, and shows no signs of stopping.**

is their first pickleback at their local dive bar. But one thing that needs to be made clear is this: There is no right way or wrong way to enjoy Irish whiskey. It's about one's own personal preferences.

Irish whiskey is extremely versatile and highly regarded for its lighter style and unparalleled smoothness. As a result, most U.S. consumers drink Irish whiskey neat, or with a bit of water, which brings out the full flavor profile. Mixologists love it and regularly use it in classic cocktails, such as Old Fashioneds and Manhattan-style drinks, or they create new recipes. Its smoothness compliments both sweet and sour flavors. Of course, it also belongs in an Irish coffee. ■

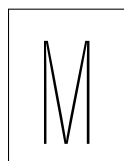
This content was produced in collaboration with our partner, Bord Bia, The Irish Food Board.





# HIGHLIGHTS FROM ACCESS LIVE 2024

**A RECAP OF THE THE BIGGEST BEVERAGE EVENT TO BRING TOGETHER ALL THREE TIERS OF THE INDUSTRY—PLUS AN INTERVIEW WITH WSWA PRESIDENT AND CEO FRANCIS CREIGHTON**



More than 2,500 members of the beverage industry, representing all three tiers, turned out in Las Vegas for the newly reimagined three-day Access LIVE. Held

in Caesars Forum in late January, the event was a resounding success, with attendees from 50 states, D.C., and around the globe, as well as representatives from the CBD community and industry hardware and software providers, coming together to network, discuss pressing industry issues, and celebrate new achievements.

On that note, the WSWA presented the Wholesaler Movers & Shakers Awards to five ambitious and driven leaders rising within the wholesaler tier. Honorees included: Cristina Desmond, the regional vice president (Central U.S.) for Breakthru

Beverage Group; Shani Gregory, the purchasing manager (shipping) at Classique Wines; Katie Sauer, Momentum Beverage Team's vice president and cofounder; Phil Sobel, the senior vice president of sales at Allied Beverage Group; and Kirk Wolthouse, Fedway's vice president.

Bert "Tito" Beveridge, the founder of Tito's Handmade Vodka, was also chosen by the selection committee as the recipient of the 2024 Ray Herrmann H.E.R.O. Award. And Doug Hertz, the chairman and CEO of United Distributors, received the 2024 Lifetime Leadership Award, recognizing his significant and lasting contribution to the industry.

While there was a packed roster of panels, lively discussions, and activations, a few moments stood out, such as the closing



keynote from WSWA president and CEO Francis Creighton, in which he sat down with FBI deputy director Paul Abbate to discuss organized retail crime and cyber security, two topics

faced by all three tiers of the beverage alcohol industry. Another highlight was the breakfast session with Danny Brager and Dale Stratton, analysts from SipSource (WSWA's tool for providing wholesaler wine and spirits depletion data), in which they reviewed key trends for wine and spirits sales moving into 2024.

During the event, David Wojnar, the SVP of industry affairs and social responsibility for Provi, *Beverage Media's* publisher, sat down with Creighton, and here we bring you highlights from their conversation.



WSWA president and CEO Francis Creighton.

**DAVID WOJNAR (DW):** How has the industry evolved during your one-year tenure at WSWA? What are you most proud of achieving?

**FRANCIS CREIGHTON (FC):** The number one thing is that we got Access LIVE up and running. When the pandemic happened, everyone said, "Hey, you know what? We

have other ways to do our meetings now." But what we found last year is that they still want to come together. If they can spend a couple of really focused days to meet with their suppliers and retailers, find some new brands, hang out, and have fun, then there's a market for that—and it's an important market. Of course, as



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wholesalers, we think that's great. We like to say we're the ones bringing the whole industry together.

**DW:** Is there anything further you want to add about wholesalers and the three-tier system?

**FC:** We are in the business of helping brands grow and develop. We are partners and we provide real value not only to the brands but also to the retailers. What you see when you're in a pub in London is that it's all one company's product; you go to a different bar, it's a different company's product. It's a tied house. We don't have that here. You walk into any bar, you're seeing products from the full range. And that's because of the three-tier system. So what does that mean? It means the consumers benefit and that's the most important thing.

**DW:** Can you explain the role of the relationship between the wholesaler and the supplier, its dynamic, and why it's important?

**FC:** Look, producers and suppliers are in the business of making great products. And as someone who enjoys their products a lot, I love learning about them. A lot of what I know is because the wholesalers have built the brands over time. So different producers, different suppliers,



different wholesalers have different relationships, but when it works well, it's a partnership where the supplier is doing supportive media, paid or earned, but the wholesaler is actually speaking to the retailer and helping the retailer choose the right product set for their market, putting the right POS materials out in the store. All of those things are ways that if it's an integrated effort and it's a good partnership, it's like a hand in a glove which just fits perfectly.

**DW:** Responsible access and consumption is really important to the overall industry. Can you highlight some of the WSWA initiatives on social responsibility?

**FC:** The first thing is just to think about the baseline, which is the way things have been going for a long time. You go to a liquor store, if you don't look like you're old, you get carded. That's the way it should be. We all know bartenders who have had to deal with stings from the local police department. That's good. Everyone has to know there is real responsibility there. We often work with our supplier partners to participate in Responsibility.org, getting those POS materials out there so that bartenders and shopkeepers can have solid collateral media around that says, "21 and over only."

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Creighton with Provi's David Wojnar and Andrew Levy, the chief corporate affairs officer.

**DW:** Here's a chance to brag about your staff. You have a great team. Anything you want to say to them and your members?

**FC:** The beverage alcohol industry is lucky to have this group of professionals working for it. Across the board, our 28 professionals at WSWA have a singular focus: How do we help our wholesale member companies be more successful in every way? We bring people together, helping them do leadership development for the next generation, SipSource, all of our advocacy work—it's really extraordinary. I don't think they have an understanding of just how hard these folks work for their benefit.

One of the things I like about this industry is that it is a family. In the market, the members will go after each other. But then we all come together and we all support each other, and our staff reflect that. We're all working together. That's what matters.

**DW:** Where will Access LIVE be in 2025?

**FC:** In 2025, we're going to be in Denver in late January, early February again. ■

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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# WHISKEY COCKTAILS



## TULLY LEMON & LIME

Created by Clodagh Mai O'Callaghan, Tullamore D.E.W. Irish Whiskey East Coast ambassador

- 1 ½ oz. Tullamore D.E.W. Irish Whiskey
- 3 oz. lemon and lime soft drink
- 2 lime wedges

**Method:** Add Tullamore to a highball glass. Add a handful of ice cubes. Add the lemon and lime soft drink. Squeeze in a lime wedge and garnish with the remaining wedge.



## BUSHMILLS APPLE CIDER TODDY

- 1 ½ oz. Bushmills Original
- 3 oz. apple cider
- 1 tsp honey
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp whole cloves
- Lemon wheel
- Cinnamon stick

**Method:** Combine the apple cider and spices in a pot. Heat over a stove until hot, but not boiling. Pour the Bushmills Original Irish whiskey into a glass and then strain in the heated apple cider mix. Garnish with an apple slice.



## RIVER BOYNE FIZZ

- 1 ½ oz. Slane Irish Whiskey
- 1 ½ oz. lemon juice
- 1 dash orange bitters
- 1 tbsp honey
- Tonic water

**Method:** Add the Slane Irish Whiskey to a highball glass. Add lemon juice and honey. Stir together until the honey is broken down. Add ice and top with tonic water. Garnish with a mint sprig and lemon wheel.

## THE IRISH BUILT MANHATTAN

- 2 oz. Powers Irish Rye
- 1 oz. Hotel Starlino Vermouth
- 1 tsp marasca syrup

**Method:** Add the whiskey, vermouth, and marasca syrup into a mixing glass with ice and stir until well chilled. Strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with Hotel Starlino Maraschino Cherries.



## FERCULLEN FALLS SOUR

- 1 ¾ oz. Fercullen Falls whiskey
- ¾ oz. simple syrup
- ¾ oz. lemon juice
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters
- ½ fresh egg white

**Method:** Shake all the ingredients well in a shaker with ice. Strain into a glass. Garnish with a slice of lemon.

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## FIRST STEPS

Low-intervention, small-production wines are the focus of LGBTQ-owned label **Voon**, founded in San Francisco by Evan Anderson. Its two inaugural releases, the 2022 Chardonnay and 2021 Pinot Noir, were crafted with organically grown grapes from the cool-climate Sta. Rita Hills AVA by Latina winemaker Jessica Gasca of the Los Olivos winery Story of Soil. A Grüner Veltliner, single-vineyard Grenache, and special-edition Pinot Noir are forthcoming in 2024.

SRP: From \$58 per 750-ml bottle



## UNCONVENTIONALLY REFRESHING

It took nearly 60 rounds of testing for winemaker Jess Smith and craft beverage developer Michael Colangelo to bring Blanc to life. The follow-up to **Surely's** non-alcoholic red blend, the dealcoholized white wine pairs a blend of Riesling, Symphony, and Gewurztraminer grapes from California with botanicals like rosemary, ginger, and elderflower that complement spicy dishes and resonate with gin fans, too.

SRP: \$26.99 per 750-ml bottle

## PRETTY IN PINK

For **Avaline's** extra brut sparkling rosé, the wine brand, founded by Cameron Diaz and Katherine Power, partnered with Castelo de Pedregosa, an organic, biodynamic, dry-farmed cava producer in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, Spain. Available only through 2024, the berry-laden bubbly was aged for more than 15 months and, like the rest of the Avaline collection, is free from added sugar and artificial concentrates and colors.

SRP: \$30 per 750-ml bottle



## ALL MONTH LONG

Mai Vu launched **Mai Vino**—a 2023 WSWA Brand Battle winner—to showcase organic wines fermented with indigenous yeasts that are housed in innovative, eco-friendly packaging. Portable pouches, complete with handy, airtight spouts, keep wines fresh for 30 days. Along with a Spanish rosé, there is a Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, and Amber, an orange wine, all made with Chilean grapes.

SRP: \$18 per 1.5-liter pouch

## ODE TO THE LAND

Newly redesigned labels now grace bottles of **Opaque Wines**, part of the Riboli Family Wines portfolio. Flaunting moody photography, they capture different elements of the Paso Robles terroirs from which the wines were born. The Darkness red blend, Petit Verdot, Zinfandel, and Malbec are now joined by an audacious, full-bodied Tannat sourced from choice, small lots on the estate vineyards.

SRP: \$40 per 750-ml bottle

