

Beverage Journal

JUNE 2022

THE RTD REVOLUTION

READY-TO-DRINK COCKTAILS ARE EVERYWHERE. WHAT'S PROPELLING THIS BLOCKBUSTER CATEGORY?

NEW PLAYERS
IN GIN

THE MANY
SHADES OF
ORANGE WINE

DIVE INTO
CHIANTI
CLASSICO'S
UGAS



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WINEBOW'S
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COVER CREDIT:
Photograph by
Audrey Shtecinjo and
Yaroslav Danylenko
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**REDISTRICTING:
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS**

The Maryland General Assembly, under the Maryland Constitution, enacted new congressional districts based on the changes in population reported in the 2020 U.S. Census.

Maryland was apportioned eight seats in the U.S. House of Representatives after the 2020 census, the same number it received after the 2010 census. Hence, the number of districts remains unchanged. However, since the 2010 redistricting, Maryland's Congressional District make-up solidified Democrats with seven of the eight seats and Republicans with a single seat. The newly drawn lines for the eight Maryland Congressional Districts is being talked about as falling along the lines of Democrats holding strongly to five seats with one seat now only leaning in favor of Democrats. One seat is now being considered a toss-up, and Republicans still strongly holding a single seat.

Time will tell if Maryland's newly drawn Congressional Districts will have an effect on the Old Line State's federal representation.

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

Maryland adopted legislative maps on January 27, 2022, when the Maryland House of Delegates approved new legislative district boundaries that had been approved on January 20, 2022, by the Maryland State Senate. The vote in the state Senate was 32-14 and in the House of Delegates was 95-42, both strictly along party lines. Following legal challenges to the legislative districts, the Maryland Court of Appeals issued an order upholding the districts on Apr. 13, 2022.

This is a big election year, voters will

decide all 188 seats in the Maryland Legislature; statewide offices including governor, attorney general and comptroller; a U.S. Senate seat and all eight congressional seats will be on the ballot.

**MSLBA'S FINAL REPORT ON
THE 2022 GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SESSION**

Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) Lobbyist and Legal Counsel, J. Steven Wise, has released the final report on the 2022 General Assembly session. We have published the report in its entirety on page 50.

**POTENTIAL PROMOTIONAL
DAYS IN JUNE**

June is upon us and there are plenty of promotional opportunities to assist you in giving your customers a reason to spend more time in your business.

- 6/1 – World Milk Day, Olive Day
- 6/2 – Moonshine Day
- 6/3 – Cider Day
- 6/4 – Cognac Day, Bubbly Day
- 6/8 – World Gin Day
- 6/9 – Dark & Stormy Day
- 6/10 – Iced Tea Day
- 6/11 – Rosé Day
- 6/13 – World Gin Day (*again*)
- 6/14 – Bourbon / Old Fashioned Day
- 6/14 – Flag Day
- 6/19 – Father's Day / Martini Day
- 6/20 – National Vanilla Milkshake Day
- 6/21 – Lambrusco Day / Smoothie Day
- 6/25 – Bourdain Day ■

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TRES GENERACIONES®

FOR THE LIBRARY

Bushmills 28-year-old Single Malt Cognac Cask was the first in the brand's collectors' series, The Rare Casks. Now, the spotlight is on the newest edition, the limited-release (there are only 500 bottles) Bushmills 29-year-old Pedro Ximénez Cask Whiskey. The 106-proof Irish whiskey was triple distilled in 1992, then aged in bourbon barrels for over a decade before maturing for an additional 17 years in the sherry casks to elicit harmonious flavors of dried fruit, praline, orange peel, and malt vanilla.

SRP: \$749.99 per 750-ml bottle



BARLEY EXPLORATION

Colere Edition 2 American Single Malt Whiskey, the latest in the Outpost Range from Seattle's **Westland Distillery**, once again celebrates the Pacific Northwest through under-the-radar strains of barley. This 100-proof single malt is made with Talisman, a two-row winter barley that descends from the Maris Otter variety, and is matured solely in 42 percent second fill ISC Cooper's Reserve and 58 percent first fill ex-bourbon casks to minimize the presence of oak and focus on the grain and its notes of light brown sugar and dark chocolate orange.

SRP: \$149.99 per 750-ml bottle



NOSTALGIC INFLUENCE

The enticing scent of secondhand bookshops is what sparked the 89.2-proof **Vellichor**, the newest venture from Compass Box. Lead whisky maker James Saxon blended stocks aged in former sherry butts with mature malt whiskies from the Macallan, Highland Park, and Caol Ila distilleries for a whisky with leather aromatics that paves the way to tropical fruit and a through line of restrained peatiness.

SRP: \$450 per 750-ml bottle



EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

The **Macallan** whisky maker Polly Logan joined forces with Michelin-starred chefs the Roca Brothers of Spain's El Celler de Can Roca fame to create Distil Your World New York. A tribute to the dynamic metropolis, this 99-proof limited-edition single malt whisky elevates The Macallan's classic apple notes with the sweetness of peanut and chocolate and is packaged in a white box flaunting an engraved aerial map of the city. It's complemented by a 30-minute YouTube documentary that features New York personalities like Wynton Marsalis and graffiti artist Lady Pink.

SRP: \$4,200 per 700-ml bottle and \$4,500 per 750-ml bottle



SOLO PRACTICE

Denver distillery **Laws Whiskey House** has unveiled two 100-proof bottled in bond expressions: the eight-year-old Four Grain Straight Bourbon Whiskey Batch #6 and seven-year-old San Luis Valley Straight Rye Whiskey Batch #3. The former, one of the distillery's oldest bourbon releases, was distilled in 2013, with one batch from the spring and one from the fall, and exhibits notes of brown butter and dates. The latter, combining 23 barrels distilled in fall 2014, expresses hazelnut, green mango, and serrano pepper.

SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle



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FATHER'S DAY COCKTAILS



BLOOD MOON

1 ½ oz. Astral Tequila Blanco ½ oz. fresh lime juice
1 ½ oz. fresh blood orange juice 1 tsp. agave nectar

Method: Combine tequila, blood orange juice, lime juice, and agave nectar in a cocktail shaker. Add ice and shake. Strain into an ice-filled glass, and top with sparkling blood orange soda.



ROKU OUBAITORI

1 ½ oz. Roku Gin 3 dashes yuzu juice
½ oz. Dolin Blanc Vermouth 2 barspoons raspberry and apricot jam
¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
½ oz. agave simple syrup 3 raspberries

Method: Muddle three raspberries in a cocktail shaker. Add gin, vermouth, lemon juice, simple syrup, yuzu juice, and jam. Top with ice and shake vigorously. Strain into coupe glass.



ORANGE HIGHBALL

2 oz. Glenmorangie Original 2 oz. tonic water
Juice of half an orange 2 oz. soda water

Method: Juice half an orange. Fill a highball glass with ice cubes and thick wedges of orange. Pour Scotch whisky, orange juice, tonic water, and soda water over the ice.

STRAWBERRY CRUSH

1 ½ oz. Off Hours Bourbon
3 strawberries
¾ oz. organic unsweetened apple juice
½ oz. orgeat
¾ lemon juice
½ oz. yellow Chartreuse

Method: Muddle strawberries in a cocktail shaker and add in raw/unsweetened apple juice. Add orgeat, lemon juice, bourbon, and yellow Chartreuse. Add ice and shake vigorously. Strain over ice into a rocks glass and stir. Garnish with rosemary.



CUBA LIBRE ROYALE COCKTAIL

2 oz. Matusalem Gran Reserva
15 Years Rum
½ oz. Fabbri 1905 cola syrup
1 oz. sparkling water
2 oz. Brut Champagne
2 ice cubes

Method: Combine rum, cola syrup, and ice in a tall Champagne glass. Top off with sparkling water and Brut Champagne. Garnish with lime.

FROM ZERO TO
HAPPY HOUR IN 15 SECONDS



BATCH & BOTTLE

PREMIUM PRE-BATCHED COCKTAILS

EXPERTLY BATCHED TO BE RESPONSIBLY ENJOYED. BATCH & BOTTLE PRE-BATCHED COCKTAILS. ©2022 IMPORTED BY WILLIAM GRANT & SONS, INC. NEW YORK, NY



Despite Headwinds, Annapolis' **Boatyard Bar & Grill** Charts a Steady Course

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX

If you are going to do a series of articles on the top theme bars and restaurants in the state of Maryland, sooner or later that series must feature the Boatyard Bar & Grill in Annapolis. The Boatyard was founded in 2001 by Dick Franyo after he left his three-decade financial career with such firms as Alex. Brown & Sons and Deutsche Bank. As a little boy, Franyo grew up on the Chesapeake Bay. His vision for the Boatyard was to celebrate the Bay lifestyle and rank as the best sailor bar in Maryland.

Vision achieved, mission accomplished.

Located on Restaurant Row in the historic maritime district of Eastport, the Boatyard is just a brief stroll from the Annapolis City Docks. Photos of local sailors line its walls, and fish caught by local fishing pals are hung in the Boatyard's Pilar Bar (named after author Ernest Hemmingway's fishing boat).

"When we started," Franyo recalled, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, "we really wanted a place that speaks to sailing, fishing, the environment, and the Bay lifestyle. It started with the building we constructed, which looks like a Hinckley yacht with all the woods and treatments and beams. We then filled it full of incredible art and pictures. From ceiling to floor, there is artwork."

Indeed, there is an old wooden fishing skiff that was bought off a beach in Saint Barths. Another décor marvel is an original wooden sign from the Hogs Breath Bar in Key West. Everyone has their favorite pho-



to or décor item. Franyo's is the surfboard donated and signed by singer-songwriter Jack Johnson. General Manager Kevin Schendel's favorite is a photo of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara sitting on a boat, fishing for marlin, and smoking cigars. "Where else are you going to see that?" Schendel exclaimed during the same interview.

And the Boatyard Bar & Grill has de-

veloped a bit of a celebrity following. Then-First Lady Michelle Obama visited and was quoted as saying Boatyard's crab cakes were the best she'd ever had. "Having the First Lady come over from D.C. for crab cakes got us a lot of press," Franyo recalled. "She came here with something like 10 cars and 35 security people. And the word from friends of theirs is they still



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*"It's people who are the key ...
treat everyone with respect.
Your employees, your guests, your suppliers,
the people who take your garbage away.
Everyone."*

Dick Franyo
Founder
Boatyard Bar & Grill

order them! Jimmy Buffet comes when he is in town. I've sailed with him here in Annapolis. Kevin Bacon also comes here every time he is in town."

Boatyard's crab cakes have become local legend, even being named Best in the Region by *Baltimore Magazine*. They've proven so popular that Franyo and Co. ship them worldwide via Goldbelly.com. By Franyo's calculations, Boatyard sells approximately 90,000 crab cakes a year.

But it's the beverage menu that customers continue to return for. The wine selection is extensive and features a premium "Admiral's List." But the cocktails are where the real fun is at, with such nautical-named and local-themed delights as Boatyard's Bloody, the Eastport Mar-

garita, Maritime Tea, and Positively Fourth Street. According to Schendel, "We have the words 'Boat Drinks' printed right on our menu. So, we'll have drinks like a Dark and Stormy that are familiar to sailors. But we're also in Maryland, so we have half-crushes on the menu. The pint drinks offer good value, too. When people come off the water, they want a good, large drink."

Franyo concurred, adding, "Sailors and fishermen and people who love the water and the Bay lifestyle, they're really of an ilk that likes a REAL drink! Such big drinks really set you apart, and it ties into our theme and philosophy."

The Boatyard has been named by such publications as *Coastal Living*, *Sailing World*, and *Sail Magazine* as one of world's

top sailing/boating restaurants and bars. *Washingtonian Magazine* once called it "the nautical Cheers." Franyo and Schendel love and accept such accolades. But what they're most proud of is Boatyard's commitment to the environment.

For instance, the Boatyard is a member of One Percent For The Planet, a group of businesses that donate greater than 1 percent of their annual sales to the natural environment. In terms of accolades, the Boatyard received the Annapolis Environmental Stewardship Certification from Maryland's capital city. Even the restaurant's oyster shells are collected by the Oyster Recovery Program.

Franyo remarked, "So goes the Bay, so goes us. If the Bay isn't healthy, then peo-

"When the pandemic initially hit ... we made a really quick transition to make it easier for people to do business with us. But the key was being able to keep as many employees who wanted to stay on. Anybody who wanted to keep a job kept their job. We were able to keep our entire back-of-house team in place. So, when we could re-open, we were ready to go. That wasn't the case for many bars and restaurants."

Kevin Schendel
General Manager
Boatyard Bar & Grill





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ple aren't going to come here."

In addition, the Boatyard founded and sponsors four outdoor lifestyle charity events each year: Bands in the Sand for and at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation; The Boatyard Beach Bash for and at the Annapolis Maritime Museum; the Boatyard Opening Day Rockfish Catch & Release Tournament, which benefits the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Coastal Conservation Association MD, and the Annapolis Police Department Youth Fishing Camp; and, finally, The Boatyard Regatta to benefit C.R.A.B. (Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating), which gets those with disabilities on sailboats.

The rest of Boatyard's success can be

chalked up to good, sound business principles that Franyo and his team have put in place over the years and stuck to. "It's people who are the key," Franyo stated. "Treat everyone with respect. Your employees, your guests, your suppliers, the people who take your garbage away. Everyone."

Schendel agreed, relating to how this philosophy benefited the business during the early months of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular. "When the pandemic initially hit," he said, "restaurants were ordered to shut down and offer carry-out service only. We made a really quick transition to make it easier for people to do business with us. We had carry-out windows. But the key was being able to keep as many employ-

ees who wanted to stay on. Anybody who wanted to keep a job kept their job. We were able to keep our entire back-of-house team in place. So, when we could re-open, we were ready to go. That wasn't the case for many bars and restaurants."

Franyo concluded, "In this business, there are 1,000 opportunities to make a mistake every day. It takes a lot of work and training to bring that one thousand down to zero. We agonize over everything. Every detail. Our philosophy is to kick ourselves in the butt and not pat ourselves on the back. If you work hard and you do things the right way, I believe you create your own luck." ■

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AN AMERICAN, CRAFT, CANNED LEMONADE COCKTAIL

INSPIRED BY A HOMETOWN BAR'S SIGNATURE COCKTAIL, FISHERS ISLAND LEMONADE STANDS OUT FROM THE REST

W

hen Bronya Shillo founded Fishers Island Lemonade, ready-to-drink (RTD) cocktails were not yet the in-vogue category they are today. Her spiked lemonade was one of the first canned craft cocktails in the United States when it launched as a genre-defining brand in 2014.

Today, Fishers Island Lemonade is still ahead of the curve. It remains the only dual-spirit canned cocktail on the market, helping to set the vodka- and whiskey-based drink apart from other RTDs, which have been the fastest-growing segment of beverage alcohol for the past three years.

Fishers Island Lemonade was inspired by a hometown bar's signature cocktail of the same name, known locally as simply "FIL." Shillo's family served the drink for decades at their restaurant, The Pequot Inn on Fishers Island, New York. Shillo made her fair share of FILs while bartending at the family business before creating something new with the flavors of that beloved cocktail.

The Fishers Island Lemonade family of canned cocktails

now has five flavors and styles—four of which were introduced in 2021. The original Fishers Island Lemonade is made with premium vodka, barrel-aged whiskey, lemon, and honey. The classic taste that started it all, this is also the foundation for each variety in the Fishers Island Lemonade portfolio.

Fishers Island Pink Flamingo adds real cranberry to the original ingredients. Fishers Island Spiked Tea is similar to an Arnold Palmer: Half of the drink is the original spiked lemonade and the other half is fresh black

"Our mission is to create the best-tasting, highest-quality, canned cocktails in the United States," says founder Bronya Shillo.

tea. Both come in at 7% ABV, compared to the original's 9% ABV.

The other two options offer a slightly different experience. Fishers Island Fizz adds some sparkle and comes in at a light and refreshing 5% ABV, with a dash of club soda for effervescence. And as a delightful deviation from the brand's canned cocktails, Fishers Island Spirit Pops are spiked frozen treats that have all the great taste people love about Fishers Island Lemonade in a convenient and cooling ice pop.

And for those who can't decide on just one? Fishers Island Lemonade just released its first-ever variety pack in May 2022, allowing for flavor exploration. The eight-pack includes four cans of the Original, two Spiked Tea, and two Pink Flamingo.

Regardless of which Fishers Island Lemonade buyers choose, they can feel good about supporting a company that gives back through partnerships with local philanthropic organizations and environmental cleanup efforts.

Above all, Fishers Island Lemonade premium canned cocktails are the best way to get a taste of a Fishers Island classic—no matter where you are. ■



Bronya Shillo

Find your Island



AMERICA'S LEMONADE CANNED COCKTAIL

Our Story

Fishers Island Lemonade is recognized as America's Lemonade Canned Cocktail, winning dozens of awards for its one-of-a-kind taste profile and commitment to high quality ingredients. Launched in 2014 by Bronya Shillo, Fishers Island Lemonade is inspired by the signature house cocktail, the "FIL," served for decades at The Pequot Inn, which Bronya's family owned and operated on Fishers Island, NY. It was there, that while working as a bartender, Bronya had the visionary idea to package the Fishers Island Lemonade cocktail in a can, allowing fans to take the delicious and distinctly flavorful cocktail with them to best enjoy in their happy place. Now available, our award-winning portfolio in a Variety 8-Pack.

Find your Island.





IT'S A PARTY NOW

Summertime gatherings are simplified with ready-to-drink Western Son Spiked Lemonades (10% ABV) served in easy-to-pour-from plastic bottles. Anchored by a base of vodka produced at **Western Son Distillery** in Texas, the refreshing, seasonally appropriate flavors include original, strawberry, peach, and blueberry.

SRP: \$17.99 per 1.75-liter bottles



SWEET TOUCH

All cans of **Spirited Hive** ready-to-drink cocktails (7% ABV) are laced with 100 percent certified organic wildflower honey made in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Founded by Jack Espy, a graduate student at New York University who shifted professional gears during the pandemic, Spirited Hive spans three varieties: a six-times distilled corn vodka from St. Louis infused with cranberry and lime, a blanco tequila infused with lime and organic ginger juice, and a bourbon starring whiskey from Kentucky's Green River Distilling Co. infused with rosemary and lemon.

SRP: \$16.99 per four-pack of 355-ml cans



MEXICAN SOUL

Small-batch sotol newcomer **Cardenxe** makes its debut with Sotol De La Sierra and Sotol De Desierto, distilled from the indigenous Mexican plant dasylirion. From Madera, Mexico, the herbal Sotol De La Sierra showcases eucalyptus, moss, and nuts, while the vegetal Sotol De Desierto draws from the desert with undertones of minerality and cocoa.

SRP: \$90 per 750-ml bottle (Sotol De La Sierra) and \$60 per 750-ml bottle (Sotol De Desierto)



FRESH FROM THE FIELD

Ron Barceló, the rum brand founded in the Dominican Republic in 1930, continues to innovate with Barceló Organic. The blend of rums is distilled from the fresh juice of organic sugar cane grown wild on the Ron Barceló estate and then aged in previously unused American oak barrels. Packaged in a fittingly eco-friendly carton fashioned from leftover plant fibers and printed with 100 percent organic ink, Barceló Organic reflects the carbon neutral distillery's commitment to sustainability.

SRP: \$24.99 per 750-ml bottle

RURAL LIFE

Husband-and-wife actors and producers Hilarie Burton Morgan and Jeffrey Dean Morgan are so enamored with life in New York's Hudson Valley that the Mischief Farm owners decided to collaborate with The Vale Fox Distillery in Poughkeepsie on **MF Libations**, a line of small-batch spirits that pay homage to the region. Along with the 90-proof MF Bonfire Smoky Rye infused with Lapsang Souchong tea from China's Wuyi Mountains inspired by cozy evenings at Mischief Farm, there is the MF Blackberry Gin, in which fresh, locally sourced blackberries enliven the distillery's own Vixen's Dry Gin 1651.



SRP: \$47 per 750-ml bottle (rye) and \$39 per 750-ml bottle (gin)

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INSIDE THE EVOLUTION OF READY-TO-DRINK COCKTAILS

FIVE YEARS AFTER THE CATEGORY BEGAN MAKING HEADLINES,
PREMIUM, SPIRITS-BASED READY-TO-DRINK COCKTAILS
SHOW NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN

BY LAURA BURGESS



R

eady-to-drink (RTD) cocktails have become one of the beverage industry's biggest success stories in recent years, their foundation laid pre-pandemic when mainstream players, craft brands, and bartenders created premium RTD cocktails and put them in single-serve cans. The category took off by 2017 thanks to a combination of convenience, higher quality, and wider flavor variety—then, the pandemic pressure cooker catapulted the segment into overdrive.

According to Mintel data, total volume sales of spirits-based RTD cocktails increased 226 percent from 2016 to 2021, making the category one of the fastest-growing segments across beverage alcohol. In 2021, nearly 50 percent of adults over 22 years old reported drinking RTD cocktails, up from 40 percent in 2018.

Now, with consumers out from under restricted gatherings, the immediate need for attributes like portability and bar-level cocktail quality at home has diminished—yet consumers aren't abandoning their ready-to-drink darlings. Rather, even more new releases are hitting the market, capitalizing on wellness, packaging, and flavor trends. Consumers seem to have an endless appetite for RTD cocktail innovations—and it's likely to propel the category for years to come.

An Unexpected Trajectory

While news of the RTD cocktail's soaring success seems obvious now, it wasn't always that way. A Mintel report from December 2017 cited an expected growth rate of 24 percent for spirit-based RTD cocktails from 2017 to 2022—a number that the category far outpaced.

According to off-premise data from NielsenIQ—which measures malt-based RTD beverages like hard seltzer, spirits-based RTD options, and wine-based RTD products as one large ready-to-drink category—spirits-based, ready-to-drink

cocktails led growth across the \$9.6-billion ready-to-drink category in both 2020 and 2021. But it's not just the consumer demand for RTD cocktails that has changed—it's the market itself. Though the ready-to-drink cocktail category has existed for decades—in fact, ready-to-drink Club Cocktails by Heublein Spirits were sold before Prohibition—it's only in the past five to seven years that new brands emerged to spark the shift towards high-quality RTD cocktails.

The mid-2010s also marked the beginning of a shift towards single-serve, canned RTD cocktail formats, pioneered by brands like Cutwater Spirits, which became known for its wide range of canned cocktails and was acquired by Anheuser-Busch in 2019. Though RTD cocktails are sold in a spectrum of formats, from bag-in-box packaging to large- and small-format bottles alike, single-serve cans have since become the norm among new releases in the category.

"When we talk about alcohol, we talk about how consumers are looking to experience new flavors. They're also looking for convenience, a premium experience, and a wellness element," says Kayleigh Theriault, the beverage alcohol thought leadership manager for Nielsen

"Spirits-based RTDs have been experiencing exponential growth, and we could see the segment hitting 100 million cases per year by 2025."

- Natalie Accari, Pernod Ricard

IQ. "Ready-to-drink options really hit on all of these consumer drivers at once."

Then came the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns, when consumers had little choice but to either learn to make cocktails themselves or embrace RTD cocktail options. But even as restrictions have dissipated, demand for ready-to-drink cocktails has continued to expand.

"At Pernod Ricard ... convenience is king when it comes to ready-to-drink," says Natalie Accari, the vice president of RTDs and convenience for Pernod Ricard, who notes that the company's brands exclusively produce RTD cocktails in single-serve formats for exactly this reason. "Consumers are looking for more convenient options in everything that they're doing. As a result, we're really focused on continuing to drive availability so we can put as many cans in consumers' hands as possible across the country." Pernod Ricard recently launched ready-to-drink cocktails under the Absolut, Malibu, and Jameson brands—just a few of the many traditional spirits brands that have gotten into the RTD cocktail space.

Though there's no longer an intensified need for convenience, portability,

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Three of Absolut's RTD flavors // Smirnoff's vodka-based RTDs // Zuzu's agave-based RTD // Malibu's Cocktails in a Can



and the perceived “low-touch” safety of canned formats suited to individual consumption, the discoveries consumers made over the past two years have persisted—and have allowed RTD cocktails to become a solid alternative to canned mainstays. Where beer—and later, hard seltzer—cans once dominated coolers at sporting events, picnics, and parties, the modern RTD renaissance is now bringing cocktails into those spaces.

Finding Off-Premise Inroads

RTD cocktail sales have largely been geared towards retail, with consumers bringing RTD cocktail options home as an alternative to keeping their bar carts stocked. Interestingly, this is a reversal of traditional beverage alcohol sales trends. “A lot of the innovation that we see within beverage alcohol begins in the on-premise and then kind of flows into off-premise, but RTDs were a little bit different ... in that they launched really, really fast and heavily in the off-premise,” says Theriault. “Now, over the past couple of years we’ve seen them make their way into the on-premise.”

On-premise operators had already begun incorporating RTD cocktails into hospitality venues where staffing and stocking a full bar might not make sense, such as stadiums, theaters, hotels, and airplanes. Some bars launched their own

ready-to-drink options as revenue drivers and brand builders amidst pandemic closures and have continued to find value in extending their restaurants’ offerings through bottled or canned cocktails. But amidst today’s staffing shortages and budgetary constraints, even more restaurants and bars are embracing the advantages RTD cocktails can offer.

“It’s a quick pour-and-serve from beverage carts or poolside bars, beach bars, and patios,” says Bronya Shillo, the founder and CEO of Fishers Island Lemonade, who is a former bartender. “We’re not trying to take away drink orders, but to help speed up the process so then the bartender can go and take the time to make their handmade cocktails without being in the weeds.”

Driving Continued Success

Interestingly enough, as single-serve cans have become more mainstream within the RTD cocktail category, producers are now innovating outside of this format. RTD cocktails are now being released in pouches, bottles, ice pops, plastic balls, and beyond. Brooklyn spirits brand St. Agrestis launched a 1.75-liter, bag-in-box “Negroni Fountain” in 2020, which quickly took off.

The range of packaging formats—and product styles—allows the ready-to-drink category to appeal to a wide cross-section of drinkers. “The

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jameson’s Ginger & Lime canned cocktails // Zuzu cofounders Greta Caruso and Ali Schmidt

consumer who is buying a gallon of Jose Cuervo Margarita ready to drink is not usually the same consumer who’s buying craft canned cocktails,” says Alex Masanotti, the head buyer at Super Buy-Rite in Jersey City, New Jersey, which has seen triple-digit sales growth of RTD cocktails since 2019. “That said, you have all of these products coexisting and all doing well in a range of formats from cans to bag-in-box. It’s really exciting.”

Flavor innovations and exploration are also continuing to drive growth for RTD cocktails. Vodka and tequila continue to dominate new RTD cocktail releases, according to data collected between 2019 and the first half of 2021 by IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, driven by popular Margarita, vodka-soda, and hard seltzer-like flavors. But consumers are also branching out into other classic cocktail options, like Mai Tais, Mojitos, Old Fashioneds, and beyond. “The consumers that are traditionally drinking these products are looking for something new and different,” says Theriault.

If there’s a consensus to be had across producers, it’s to focus on premium ingredients and flavors. “In the beginning it was so challenging,” says Shillo, who has helmed Fishers Island since its founding in 2014. “We were selling a high-priced canned cocktail and there was no category at the time.”



CAN FANS

Vodka-based, single-serve, canned cocktails like Absolut’s Grapefruit Paloma are driving RTD cocktail sales.

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Modern RTD cocktails often have to fight preconceived notions that pre-mixed cocktails are low-quality, says Ali Schmidt, a cofounder of Zuzu, which launched in November 2020 and specializes in RTD cocktails made with simple ingredients like organic agave spirit, fruit juice, and sparkling water. “As we were doing R&D, the concept of the ‘RTD graveyard’ kept coming up,” she says. “People had been trying RTDs, but so many of them tasted artificial and fake that these consumers ended up having this RTD graveyard on the shelf of cans they wouldn’t drink.”



ALL ABOUT FLAVOR

Coppa Cocktails features flavor innovations from Strawberry Daiquiri to Espresso Martini.

Zuzu, which lists its ingredients on labels, is also an example of how RTD cocktail brands are appealing to an increasingly health-conscious consumer base through marketing and packaging. The recently launched Faux Pas line of canned cocktails, a partnership between millennial-targeted media company Betches and Spirit of Gallo, highlights its wellness aspects as well, including the use of “real vodka or real tequila” for its gluten-free products. “People really want something that’s healthy and better for them,” says Schmidt. “They want a real spirit that tastes good and uses fresh and whole ingredients. I think once people taste it, they realize ... that the category is here to stay.”

A Long Runway for Growth

With increasing competition in the RTD cocktail space and signs of plateauing interest among other recent blockbusters like hard seltzer, some have questioned whether ready-to-drink cocktails can really sustain the level of growth they’ve commanded in the past. But industry experts seem to believe that RTD cocktails are poised to continue expanding.

ABOVE: The recently debuted Faux Pas RTD // BELOW: Bronya Shillo, founder and CEO of Fishers Island Lemonade

“We’re not trying to take away drink orders, but to help speed up the process so then the bartender can go and take the time to make their handmade cocktails without being in the weeds.”

– Bronya Shillo, Fishers Island Lemonade



“Everything indicates that this category has a very long runway for growth, and we expect the RTD category to double in size by 2025,” says Pernod Ricard’s Accari. “Spirits-based RTDs have been experiencing exponential growth, and we could see the segment hitting 100 million cases per year by 2025.”

Though brands will increasingly vie for shelf space as more players enter the market, the proliferation of choice within RTD cocktails is likely to continue propelling the segment forward, especially because consumers are actively seeking variety in all beverage alcohol categories.

“The opportunities are really just beginning and somewhat endless,” says Shillo. Generational shifts are also poised to support the category: Gen Z, which is just beginning to age into beverage alcohol purchasing, is even more aligned with the convenience-driven, wellness-oriented trends driving RTD cocktail expansion, and nontraditional formats aren’t a barrier to entry. “Younger people in particular are the ones that are now adopting Zuzu,” says Schmidt.

“This is definitely a category that’s going to continue to expand,” says Theriault. “We’re continuing to see a lot of innovation across the brands in this space ... We may be approaching maturity in the category, but there is still a lot of room for growth.” ■

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COLLABORATION, EDUCATION, AND EXCELLENCE FUEL WINEBOW'S SPIRITS PORTFOLIO

WINEBOW FINE WINES + SPIRITS OFFERS A FORWARD-THINKING PORTFOLIO OF COMPELLING JAPANESE SPIRITS, AMERICAN WHISKEYS, AND ALL THINGS AGAVE

The word “wine” is enmeshed in the very name of Winebow, which has become known for its high-quality portfolio of the world’s best wines. After all, celebrating wine made sense in 1980 when the wholesaler began importing fine Italian wine to America, focusing on quality products from producers of great integrity.

But as a decade passed, Winebow’s portfolio carefully expanded to include spirits in 1992—in particular Mexican agave spirits and American whiskeys, spurring a 2019 rebrand. Now the company is known as Winebow Fine Wines + Spirits, better reflecting its dynamic portfolio led by Jessica Partington and Monique Huston. You can call them kindred spirits.

“It’s the most perfect work relationship that I’ve experienced,” says Partington, vice president of spirits sales for wholesale markets. She works with Huston, vice president of the spirits portfolio for wholesale markets, to bring smoky mezcal, small-lot American whiskey, and rarely tasted Japanese shochu, whis-

key, and rum, as well as mainstays from partners like Sazerac, St. George Spirits, Breckenridge, and Haus Alpenz, to bartenders and liquor stores across America.

A WORK PARTNERSHIP ROOTED IN THE BAR

Huston first embraced the spirits profession more than two decades ago in Omaha, Nebraska, at the Dundee Dell, where she oversaw the world’s largest collection of single-malt Scotch whisky. In time, the erudite whisky expert judged international spirits competitions and joined the exclusive Keepers of the Quaich, recognizing her commitment to Scotch whisky. This



Jessica Partington



Monique Huston

sparked a smoldering interest in Mexican agave spirits that speak loudly of terroir.

Growing up in Kentucky, Partington was steeped in bourbon and salesmanship, selling cars as a 16-year-old. In Lexington, she worked at the Horse & Barrel Pub, a now-defunct bar with more than 200 bourbons. Her grandma was a Heaven Hill Distillery tour guide and introduced her to Parker Beam, a scion of the famous distilling family. She moved to New York City and landed a job at Idle Hands, a bar focusing on craft beer and bourbon.

“Tuesday nights were ‘Bourbon With Jess,’ and I would lead an educational flight tasting,” says Partington. Following her grandma’s footsteps, she went to work for Heaven Hill and sold some of the best-known tequila and whiskey brands to bars across New York City.

“Our backgrounds are very different from any other vice presidents,” says Partington, emphasizing that their shared experiences help them better understand the needs of distillers, sales consultants, and customers alike. “Monique and I both

worked behind the bar, and I think that's probably why we respect each other." When you're working the bar with somebody, there's an art to anticipating when someone might need a specific bottle, handing it off to complete a job.

DIVIDING DUTIES

The vice presidents approach their partnership with a hospitality mindset. "She's more back of the house, and I'm front of the house," says Partington. "Those two areas have to work together."

Huston handles the behind-the-scenes heavy lifting. "I've got a fabulous team of people that makes sure that we have the right product mix in the right amounts, with the education, pricing, inventory and tools to support it," says Huston. "Just like a kitchen would, we take this beautiful finished product that is the portfolio and hand it to Jess and her team."

Consider it knowing your competencies. "I can geek out about [spirits], but I understand we're a sales and distribution company," Huston says. "I've learned more in the past two years from working alongside Jessica than at any other point."

Partington's team is composed of spirit specialists supporting sales consultants spread across the country. "We do not call them sales reps," she says of the consultant title. "They're consulting with what buyers need." The educated specialists, many hailing from bartending and retail backgrounds, and consultants work in tandem to smartly communicate a brand's bonafides and discuss what's trending. Try this tequila, and the next great cocktail might be an arm's length away.

"It's fine to have the portfolio, but if we can't sell it, track it, and push a team out there to tell the distillers stories, then who cares?" notes Huston.

INVESTING IN AGAVE EARLY

Winebow attaches its spirits portfolio to three main anchors: agave spirits, American whiskeys, and Japanese spirits.



The typical distributor allocates around 40 percent of its portfolio to vodka, Partington says. At Winebow, one third is allocated to agave, a reflection on Winebow's forward-looking approach to the category.

In the late 1990s, Winebow brought to New York City one of the first premium mezcals to be distributed in the market. "[Executive vice president of spirits] Richard Driscoll had a vision that a smoky, funky spirit would be the 'it thing,'" says Partington.

A quarter-century later, Winebow continues to nurture relationships with compelling independent agave producers. A select sampling includes the traceable, traditional, and terroir-rich tequilas and mezcals of Siembra Spirits, the company started by tequila advocate and Philadelphia restaurateur David Suro-Piñera. Another estimable brand is Tequila Fortaleza; fifth-generation owner Guillermo Erickson Sauza makes tequilas according to time-tested traditions including cooking agave in brick ovens and fermenting in wooden tanks. Winebow also offers agave spirits from Haas Brothers, the San Francisco marketer, merchant, and importer of Cimarrón Tequila.

"Every bartender should be pouring Cimarrón at their bar," Partington says of the bright blanco tequila.

UP-AND-COMING AMERICAN WHISKEYS

This is a golden age for American whiskey, and Winebow prides itself on selecting up-and-coming producers ideal for any list. "We're able to work with producers that are really in it for that passion and that drive," says Partington.

Standouts include Milam & Greene Whiskey, the women-run Blanco, Texas, distillery from entrepreneur Marsha Milam, whiskey savant Heather Greene, and master distiller Marlene Holmes. There's also J. Rieger & Co., a revived pre-Prohibition brand from Kansas City, Missouri, which manufactures some of the Midwest's most nuanced whiskey.

Huston and Partington are extremely proud of Field & Sound, a bottled-in-bond bourbon from seafaring Long Island Spirits, in collaboration with Winebow. "It has a beautiful salty, maritime quality," Huston says.

A NEW INTEREST IN JAPANESE SPIRITS

Some importers might take a winning bet on tequila and mezcal and coast on those accolades. "At Winebow, we have to stay ahead of the game," Partington says. "We have to think five years from now."

Winebow is casting an expectant eye to the spirits of Japan, looking beyond the country's corporate whiskey and seeking out smaller producers and overlooked fermentations. "Only one to two percent of shōchū is exported from Japan," Partington says of the spirit distilled from sweet potatoes, rice, buckwheat, and more.

To build knowledge of indigenous rum and gin, intriguing shōchū, and whiskey producers such as Fuji, Takamine, and Kaiyō, which ages whiskey in native mizunara oak, Winebow's team spent eight months writing its education program. "Our team was on weekly calls with Japan," Huston says, learning proper pronunciation and the inside-out of distilleries and their spirits. In 2021, Winebow premiered two luxury Japanese whisky brands to the U.S. market: Fuji and Takamine.

"Some of these distilleries have been around Japan for generations," says Partington. "But to be able to give them a home in the U.S. is so rewarding."

Building upon a long history of selling great spirits, the future for Winebow only looks more promising—and delicious. ■



NEW PLAYERS IN THE GIN GAME

Summer brings a spate of new and seasonal releases in this ever-dynamic category

BY ALIA AKKAM

The comeback of the Martini has given the steady gin category a new push. While overall growth may not be as explosive as that of other spirits categories, in 2021 distillers in the U.S. still earned some \$1 billion in revenue from gin, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, with value and high-end premium brands garnering the most sales. As refreshing highballs start to take center stage this summer, here is a look at some of the brands making a splash in the ever-crowded gin market.

● Neptunia

A limited-release offering from Hendrick's Gin, Neptunia (appropriately enveloped in a seafoam green-colored label) evokes the Scottish sea just beyond the brand's distillery in Girvan. A proprietary roster of botanicals from the Ayrshire coast defines the recipe, which culminates in a bright citrus finish that heightens sangria and fizzes alike.

● Barr Hill Gin

Wild, made-in-Vermont honey is the

backbone of Barr Hill Gin. Spearheaded by distiller Ryan Christiansen and beekeeper Todd Hardie, Barr Hill crafts two gin expressions at the Caledonia Spirits Distillery in Montpelier: Barr Hill Gin and the whiskey-like Bar Hill Reserve Tom Cat Gin, aged in new American oak barrels and spiked with raw honey.

● Brooklyn Gin

Sleek, 355-ml cans of Brooklyn Gin & Soda are an ideal fit for summer shindigs. Enlivened by sparkling water and a burst of fruit juice, the refreshing ready-to-

drink cocktails are available in flavors of lime, lavender-lemon, hibiscus-orange, and cucumber-lime.

● The Botanist Islay Dry Gin

Remote Islay's Bruichladdich Distillery is home to not only Scotch but The Botanist, a dry gin from head distiller Adam Hannet that is comprised of 22 sustainably foraged island botanicals such as apple mint, downy birch, heather, and red clover. The result is a complex mix of sweet, earthy, floral, and herbal notes that beautifully overlap in go-to cocktails like the Gibson.



● The Fords Gin Co. Sloe Gin

Building upon the bartender-beloved classic Fords London Dry Gin recipe is this equally cocktail-friendly sloe gin newcomer, which illuminates hand-picked sloe fruit from England and France. Made in collaboration with Charles Maxwell of Thames Distillers in London, the sloe gin flaunts a 29% ABV, higher than most brands, to ensure the Fords Gin botanical profile is on full display.



THE BOTANIST

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● Glendalough Wild Gin

Along with a rose petal gin, Glendalough Distillery turns out this earthy variety, starting wild plants foraged from Ireland's Wicklow Mountains. The fresh botanicals, added to the still mere hours after foraging, are slow-distilled in tiny batches. It works well paired with lemon juice and simple syrup in an herbaceous Tom Collins.



● Caorunn Highland Strength Gin

Designed expressly to elevate cocktails, Caorunn Highland Strength Gin makes its state-side debut. The bold spirit, marked by a 54% ABV, is produced at Balmenach Distillery in the Scottish Highlands and showcases the original gin's distinctly Celtic lineup of botanicals, including rowan berry, bog myrtle, heather, dandelion, and Coul Blush apple.



● St. George Spirits Botnivore Gin

California distillery St. George Spirits is synonymous with its Terroir and Dry Rye gins, but the Botnivore is a richly layered alternative made with 19 botanicals. First, juniper berries, bay laurel, and cilantro are melded together, then the other ingredients, such as angelica root, Seville orange peel, and dill seed, are steeped overnight in the pot of a 1,500-liter copper pot still.



● Gin Mare Capri

An homage to the balmy Italian island of Capri, Gin Mare, the Mediterranean gin, has launched Gin Mare Capri. Blending Calabrian bergamot and 12 month-mac-



erated lemons from Capri with Gin Mare's essential ingredients—Spanish Arbequina olives, Greek rosemary, Turkish thyme, and Italian sweet basil—the gin is sprung from a French barley base and is underpinned by citrus and florals.

● Brockmans Gin

To create Brockmans Gin, juniper grown wild in Italy is combined with Bulgarian coriander, Valencian orange peel, and a slew of other ingredients like blueberries, blackberries, and almonds. Slowly distilled in a 100-year-old copper pot still, this unconventional British gin is one to weave into a Negroni.



● Cutwater Barrel Rested Old Grove Gin

Cutwater Spirits, the San Diego distillery known for its extensive collection of canned cocktails, also produces a London Dry-style gin and this aged version that lends gin and tonics a burst of oak. Vapor-distilled with 11 different botanicals, Cutwater Barrel Rested Old Grove Gin matures in charred oak barrels for at least two months.



● EnGINe Gin

A passion for motorsports is the impetus behind Disaronno International's EnGINe Gin, cleverly packaged in a tin oil can. Creat-



ed by entrepreneur Paolo Dalla Mora, who has a love of classic cars, the organic gin is spun from all Italian ingredients spanning Ligurian sage, lemon, licorice root, and damask rose. Then, it is vacuum-distilled using a rotary evaporator to highlight nuanced flavors.

● Dorothy Parker Rose Petal Gin

Dorothy Parker Gin is a mainstay of the Brooklyn distillery New York Distilling Company, but for the summer season there's another variation to explore: Dorothy Parker Rose Petal Gin. An infusion of aromatic red and pink rose petals and crushed elderberries imbues the spirit with a soft blush hue, while ingredients like green cardamom, cinnamon bark, and lemon peel bolster the gin's floral notes.



● Puerto de Indias Strawberry Gin

Spanish gin Puerto de Indias puts fruit front and center in its summertime-perfect bottles, including one that captures the essence of blackberries as well as a pioneering pink gin spawned from distilled fresh strawberries grown in Huelva, in southern Spain. This salmon-tinted spirit shines in spritzes and mules.



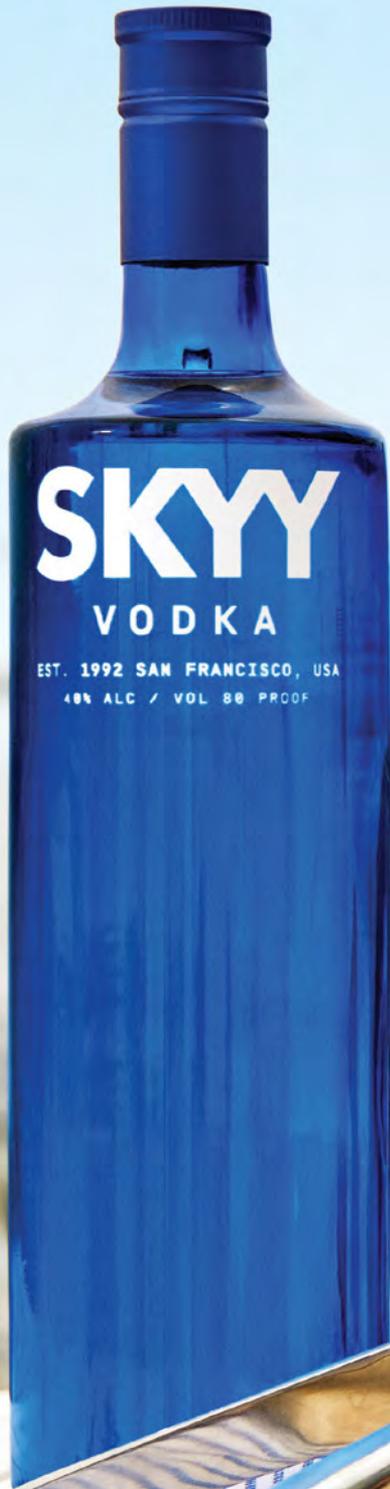
● Drumshanbo with Sardinian Citrus Gunpowder Irish Gin

Complementing the juniper-meets-citrus Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin produced in Leitrim is the Sardinian citrus edition that stands out with the presence of sa pompia, otherwise known as Citrus monstrosa, from the Sardinian village of Siniscola. Gunpowder tea on the nose paves the way to flavors of juniper and spice.



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THE MAGIC OF MONTEREY CHARDONNAY

SEE WHY SOMMELIERS SAY THESE J. LOHR CHARDONNAYS FROM THE ARROYO SECO ARE “COMPLEX WINES NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED”



Fifty years ago, Jerry Lohr and his team planted their first Chardonnay vines in what was to become Monterey’s Arroyo Seco appellation.

These plantings from J. Lohr are credited with kicking off a tradition that flourishes today, earning Arroyo Seco a reputation as one of the finest cool-climate addresses for growing one of the world’s most popular wine grapes.

The Arroyo Seco stage is set by the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west of the appellation, and beyond that, the cold waters of the Pacific Ocean. This windswept and rocky region has given J. Lohr’s 10 clones of sustainably farmed Chardonnay a terroir that delivers an unforgettable lineup of wines. The production illuminates the significant diversity of the Central Coast, Monterey, and Arroyo Seco designations, a near case-study in terroir nuance.

A ONE-OF-A-KIND AVA

Chardonnay cultivated in Arroyo Seco enjoys a long growing season. The day brings hot sun for sufficient ripening, but by the afternoon, a strong wind from the Monterey Bay blows in, cooling the grapes to lock in a high level of acidity and freshness. The bay is home to a submarine can-

yon of a size to rival the Grand Canyon; this is one of the most abundant spots of sea life in the Pacific Ocean thanks to the clear, cold water. This is also the source of the chilly ocean fog and breezes that air condition the Arroyo Seco.

“I recently drove through the Arroyo Seco AVA, and the landscape was breathtaking and varied throughout the drive,” says Katherine Wojcik, the director of beverage development for Kimpton Hotels. She says that due to its small size, Arroyo Seco sometimes gets lost

when compared to other Monterey County or California appellations. “But it’s so very diverse from some of the other AVAs in the area, and produces many layered, complex wines not to be overlooked.”

J. Lohr winemaker Kristen Barnhisel is the talent behind one of America’s most popular Chardonnay programs. With more than two decades of experience in the wine industry—including stints at international wineries and prestigious California establishments—Barnhisel is respected as a leader in the Monterey wine landscape.

From J. Lohr’s modern winery in the Arroyo Seco, she produces Riverstone, Arroyo Vista, and October Night Chardonnays. These bottles retail from \$14 to \$25 and have proven themselves valuable to wine programs and as retail selections across the country. Petra Polakovicova is the sommelier and beverage manager for Montage International and she’s poured J. Lohr Chardonnay for several restaurants throughout her career. “If any wine buyer is looking for a wine to add value, these are the wines to add to the list,” she says.

These three wines—while all Chardonnays from the same producer, same AVA, and same winemaker—extrapolate the di-

The barrel program at J. Lohr leads the industry, earning a reputation as one of the most respected New World Chardonnay programs today.



Kristen Barnhisel



versity of Arroyo Seco for a variety of dining and retail atmospheres. “These wines are a beautiful example of how Chardonnay can vary,” says Yvonne Coury, a sommelier at The Palm Steakhouse. “I loved them all for their different applications and pairings.”

Polakovicova has found that these wines over-deliver for their price. She says that if guests have a preference for California Chardonnay, they’ll savor J. Lohr wines from the Arroyo Seco, which she describes as a “classic California style.”

INSIDE THE WINES

J. LOHR ARROYO VISTA CHARDONNAY 2020

Wojcik notes that the multi-clonal Arroyo Vista is versatile, with a satisfying weight on the palate. “It was mouthwatering as a pre-dinner glass of wine, and the texture and flavors complemented and stood up to our dinner,” she says.

“This wine offers bright acidity and a round creamy texture with a lovely nod towards a fresh-filled cream puff, citrus notes, and ripe stone fruit,” adds Coury. This is textbook Monterey Char-



donnay, hand-harvested from J. Lohr’s pioneering vineyards. It’s aged in French oak from five different French cooperages, with 45 percent new wood. Overall, the sommeliers agree that Arroyo Vista is endlessly versatile, with food and on its own.

J. LOHR ESTATES RIVERSTONE CHARDONNAY 2020

A crowd-pleasing wine, Polakovicova notes the retail price of \$14, calling it a “killer Chardonnay” at that price point. Now in its 33rd vintage, this wine has earned the Certified California Sustainable seal from the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. Riverstone is also “amazing” for by-the-glass programs, according to Polakovicova.

This wine is barrel-fermented in American, Hungarian, and French oak. Coury notes that “baking spices give way to vanilla creme with chalky undertones met equally with light oak.” Oak is an essential element in Barnhisel’s wine-making philosophy. The barrel program at J. Lohr leads the industry, earning a reputation as one of the most consistent and respected New World Chardonnay programs today.



J. LOHR OCTOBER NIGHT CHARDONNAY 2020

Coury enjoys what she describes as October Night’s “orange creamsicle” aromatics alongside white and yellow floral notes, “specifically spring daffodils and tiny buttercups.” This wine is layered with ripe honeycrisp apples and “trace amounts of caramel buttered popcorn” with lemon and oak spice notes, according to Coury.



The aromatic quality of October Night truly shows the range of what Chardonnay from the Arroyo Seco can present. “The October Night threw me for a loop,” says Wojcik. She notes that the floral notes are more pronounced compared to Arroyo Vista and Riverstone. This is thanks to the Dijon or Musqué clone, which comprises the core of this Chardonnay, historically harvested in a single October night.

These wines are proven to satisfy high expectations of California Chardonnay with the added complexity of characteristic freshness from an esteemed terroir such as the Arroyo Seco. “When writing wine lists, I like to have a collection of Central Coast wines that are superior examples of typicity and terroir,” says Wojcik. “Having a Chardonnay from the Arroyo Seco is an excellent option to showcase the AVA.” ■





HOW TO NAVIGATE THE GROWING DIVERSITY OF ORANGE WINE

SKIN-MACERATED WHITE WINES HAVE BECOME AS DIVERSE A CATEGORY AS ANY. NOW, RESTAURANTS AND RETAILERS ARE HIGHLIGHTING THAT DIVERSITY TO GUIDE CONSUMERS THROUGH THE MANY SHADES OF ORANGE

BY RÉMY CHAREST



When it comes to orange wine, nowadays, expect anything. Orange wines can be made in light and crisp styles with only a hint of tannin, while others are full-bodied and aromatic, or deep and structured like a long-aged red. Some wines are barely more golden than a regular white, while others have a deep color that's more red than pink.

“Orange wines are made all over the world now,” explains Doreen Winkler, the founder of Orange Glou, a wine club-turned-wine store in New York City’s Lower Manhattan that exclusively

sells skin-contact whites. “Recently, we received a small allocation of Japanese orange wines—exciting stuff!” Winkler points out that orange wines are also made in sparkling styles from pét-nat and frizzante to traditional method.

At Red Hook Tavern in Brooklyn, New York, where awareness of orange wine tends to be fairly high, “we sell way more orange wine than rosé,” says general manager and beverage director Rebecca Flynn. “By the glass, I always have one that’s a little more funky and one that’s a little more restrained—it’s important to offer variety.”

Many of these orange wines are natural, as the recent history of skin-macerated wines from white grapes is closely tied to the natural wine movement. However, the number of wineries around

“Since orange wine is as broad a category as white, red, or rosé, it needs to be treated in the same way.”

– Simon Woolf, *Amber Revolution*

the world now making orange wine has reached into the thousands—and with higher consumer awareness and a wider range of products, the category is reaching well beyond that natural wine niche.

At Nice Matin on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, a restaurant known for a Grand Award-winning, book-thick, classic wine list featuring a wide range of Bordeaux and Burgundies, wine director Aviram Turge-man makes room for a handful of selections for customers who are curious to try orange wines. “[They are] listed regionally, with a note that they are skin-macerated,” says Turge-man. And the choices align with the general spirit of the list: “I personally list the classics like Gravner or Vodopivec because I always go about the benchmarks for my programs.”

“It is a new normal,” sums up Simon Woolf, the author of *Amber Revolution*, the first book dedicated to orange wines, published not even five years ago. “I’ve lost count of the number of times I sit down in a random wine bar, and the table next to me asks for orange wine. That literally never happened even a decade ago.”

As the orange wine category diversifies and consumer interest increases, sommeliers and wine buyers can benefit from stocking more of these unique wines—and from gaining a firm understanding of the new breadth of styles available in order to best present them to consumers.

Aromatic—or Not

One reliable guidepost for determining the style of an orange wine is whether it

is made from aromatic or non-aromatic grapes. With an orange wine made from a neutral grape like Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, or Aligoté, skin contact is more about texture and structure. Tannins and phenolic elements are pulled from the grape skins, but because these grapes have fewer elements like terpenes in the skin, the wine won’t gain much additional aromatic complexity.

With Muscat or Gewürztraminer, skin contact brings on a whole extra dimension. Elements reminiscent of nuts and dried fruit can often jump in, and the overall addition of deeper tones creates a great counterpoint to the exuberant, perfumed character of these varieties—something that also applies quite successfully to a number of North America’s hybrid white grapes like La Crescent or other Muscat-influenced varieties. In such cases, adding skin contact character becomes a bit like putting the bass in the orchestra to balance out the high-pitched notes of other instruments.

The Impact of Vinification

Beyond broad varietal differences, generalizations are difficult to come by. For instance, one might assume that a shorter maceration would generally create a lighter wine with fewer tannins compared to a wine that stayed on its skins for several months, but Woolf and Winkler both say that’s far from being the case. Some white grapes are highly tannic, and if the grapes are macerated aggressively, a few days might be enough to produce something grippy and astringent. At the other end of the spectrum, spending a long time on the skins after fermentation can lead to significant polymerization of tannins, resulting in a silky, refined mouthfeel.

Similar techniques can yield very different results depending on the grapes

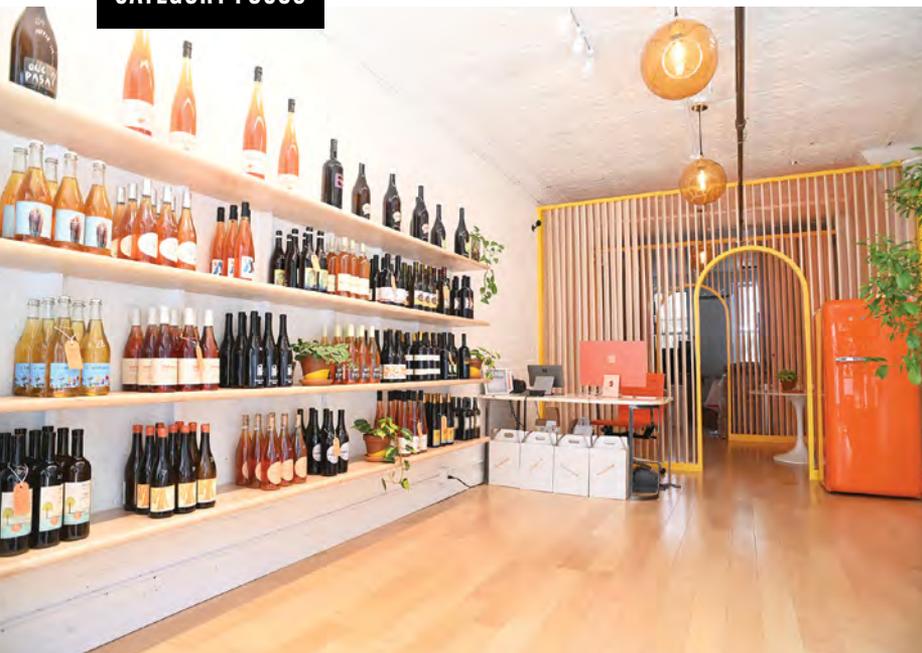


and how the winemaker works, as illustrated by two skin-macerated wines from Brianne Day, the founder, owner, and winemaker of Day Wines in Dundee, Oregon. Her *Vin de Days l’Orange*, a blend of Müller-Thurgau, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, and just seven percent Pinot Gris, “is made to drink younger, fresher, and more like a white,” she says. The *Tears of Vulcan*, a blend of Viognier, Muscat, and 35 percent Pinot Gris, is made with “more body, tannin, and heft.” The reason? “There’s about 30 to 40 percent Pinot Gris in the *Tears of Vulcan* blend, and the Gris behaves like a red wine when on skins,” she says.

Day also points out that grape ripeness levels need to be managed more like those in red wines than whites: since the juice is in contact with the skins, unripe skins (and seeds and stems) can create harshness, especially if the acid is high—just as in cool-climate reds. She also uses pumpovers, rather than punchdowns, to avoid the harsher side of skin contact.

Indeed, a number of things that will define the styles of red wines are also useful guidelines for orange wines. Whole-bunch and carbonic fermentations tend to yield lighter, easier-drinking wines with less tannic structure, just as they would in similarly vinified Beaujolais. And long barrel-aging after removing the wine from

OPPOSITE: A sampling of the spectrum of orange wines available on the U.S. market // ABOVE: Brianne Day crafts *Tears of Vulcan*, an orange wine with more body and heft.



the skins also tends to foster more elegant tannins in orange wines, just as in reds.

“Amphorae generally induce more delicacy out of any given situation,” adds Woolf. “The punchdown regimen also needs to be borne in mind. Radikon, for example, has drastically reduced the number of daily punchdowns in order to arrive at wines that are gentler and more elegant.”

Selling a Diversified Category

A barrel-aged Austrian Pinot Blanc and a deep, dark blend of Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer can both generally be classified as orange wines. But upon closer inspection, they are as different as a Barolo and a California Cabernet Sauvignon. For restaurants and retailers, it’s increasingly important to start showcasing those differences when presenting the wines to consumers, instead of lumping all orange wines together.

“Since orange wine is as broad a category as white, red, or rosé, it needs to be treated in the same way,” explains Woolf. “Look at the same variables that you’d normally invoke: country, grape variety, producer, price point, vintage and so on. You can apply all the same rules that you would to any other wine.”

In her store, Winkler has drawn up broad categories to help customers along

the way. “Our wines are sorted by sparkling, lighter-bodied, medium-bodied, and full-bodied, so that’s where I start,” she says. Red Hook Tavern’s Flynn takes a similar approach when categorizing orange wines on her menu, listing them from lighter-bodied to fuller-bodied.

TOP: Orange Glou organizes its orange wine selection by category // BELOW: Doreen Winkler, founder of Orange Glou.



Then comes a similar process as with selecting a white or a red: asking what customers have tasted and liked, what foods they might be pairing it with, or if they’re looking for “tropical, umami, salty, bold, etc.,” says Winkler.

“I try to set them up for guests by three things: flavors, tannin, and level of oxidation,” adds Brent Kroll, the proprietor of Maxwell Park in Washington, D.C., who tends to describe the wine’s adventurousness on a scale of one to ten. Temperature is important, too, especially for bolder, more structured styles: “Do not serve these too cold.”

An advantage of this broad orange wine spectrum? Sommeliers and buyers can find a style that works with almost any beverage program, from what Woolf calls the “take-no-prisoners approach” of traditional Georgian orange wines to the “extraordinarily elegant fruit-forward oranges coming out of Burgenland.”

With such stylistic diversity, lumping all orange wines together seems just as accurate as saying all Riesling is sweet. “Anyone still pushing the whole ‘orange wines don’t show terroir or variety’ argument in 2022 really needs to be taken out back and given a severe talking to,” says Woolf. “Honestly, whoever said this about macerated red grapes?” ■

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NEW PRODUCTS



1. FÓSFORO MEZCAL

CNBC personality Jim Cramer and his wife Lisa Detwiler are the visionaries behind Fósforo, a mezcal made with agave grown in the small village of Huehuetlán el Grande, outside of Puebla, by master mezcalero Aarón Alva Sánchez. The two inaugural varieties are an unaged crystalline Tobalá and a rare Tobalá Penca that combines a roasting session in underground pits with a double distillation and several months of aging in glass vessels with penca leaf.

\$ SRP: \$95 (Tobalá) and \$125 (Penca) per 750-ml bottle

🌐 fosforomezcal.com

2. FABLE & FOLLY 14

Rife with flavors of spiced rye and pepper, Fable & Folly Finest Quality Whiskey 14-year-old is the latest venture from Orphan Barrel Whiskey Distilling Co., the brand that successfully revives casks of long-lost American whiskey. This one showcases a proprietary blend spawned from the last remaining stocks of Kentucky-made Barterhouse, Forged Oak, and Rhetoric whiskeys.

\$ SRP: \$149.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 orphanbarrel.com

3. CHAMPAGNE BILLECART-SALMON LOUIS SALMON 2008

For the 2008 vintage of the Louis Salmon, Champagne Billecart-Salmon's 100 percent Chardonnay cuvée, grapes were sourced from the Grand Crus of the Côte des Blancs: Cramant, Chouilly, Avize, and Mesnil-sur-Oger. Partially aged in oak barrels, it balances notes of yellow fruit and citrus.

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

🌐 champagne-billecart.com

4. AVALINE CANS

Cameron Diaz and Katherine Power, founders of Avaline, are now showcasing their popular white and rosé wines in an alternative portable format. The wines, made with organic grapes and containing less than one gram of sugar per serving, are packaged in convenient cans that clearly highlight all ingredients.

\$ SRP: \$21.99 per four-pack of 250-ml cans

🌐 drinkavaline.com

5. ASTRAL TEQUILA

The classic tahona is instrumental to producing Diageo's 100 percent Blue Weber agave Astral Tequila. After the stone wheel crushes the agave fibers to extract juice, those same fibers are used in the fermentation process and are eventually upcycled into adobe bricks used to construct buildings in Mexican communities. Astral Tequila Blanco, the inaugural offering, is laden with notes of white pepper and clover honey.

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

🌐 astraltequila.com

6. JEFFERSON'S OCEAN AGED AT SEA RYE

Joining the Jefferson's Bourbon Ocean family is the non-chill filtered Ocean Aged at Sea Rye, a whiskey that was double barreled in new char and toasted casks and then placed on ships that navigated ports throughout the world as it matured. This distinctive finishing technique has resulted in layers of toffee and marshmallow bolstered by leather and tobacco.

\$ SRP: \$79.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 jeffersonbourbon.com



7. OLD ELK DISTILLERY MASTER'S BLEND SERIES

Old Elk Distillery in Fort Collins, Colorado, has plumped up master distiller Greg Metzke's Master's Blend series with two new expressions. The 1071-proof Old Elk Double Wheat Straight Whiskey melds two wheater whiskeys, Old Elk Straight Wheat Whiskey and Old Elk Wheated Bourbon, while the 105.9-proof Old Elk Four Grain Straight Bourbon Whiskey illuminates a mash bill of 51 percent corn, 22.5 percent wheat, 19 percent barley, and 7.5 percent rye.

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

oldelk.com

10. THOMAS ASHBOURNE CRAFT SPIRITS

Buoyed by a roster of founding celebrity partners including Sarah Jessica Parker, John Cena, Ashley Benson, Rosario Dawson, Vanessa Hudgens, and Playboi Carti, Thomas Ashbourne Craft Spirits is a range of high-proof, ready-to-drink cocktails made with all-natural ingredients. The Perfect Cosmo, The Classic Old Fashioned, The Margalicious Margarita, and Muscat Blanc-inspired The Hardscatto, are available in both bottled and canned forms.

\$ SRP: 15.99 per 750-ml bottle
and \$25.99 per four-pack of 200-ml cans

thomasashbourne.com

8. HESS SELECT PINOT GRIS 2021

Balancing pear and nectarine aromatics with subtle lemon zest notes and acidity, the Hess Select Pinot Gris 2021 is an ideal summer sipper. Like all Hess Select wines, the Pinot Gris embraces grapes from grower families throughout California.

\$ SRP: \$13 per 750-ml bottle

hesspersonestates.com

11. CALIROSA CINCO AÑOS EXTRA AÑEJO

Cinco Años Extra Añejo, the first-ever limited release from the sipping tequila brand Calirosa, is made with 100 percent Blue Weber agave and aged for five years in California red wine barrels, giving way to chocolate aromatics and hints of vanilla. Along with the Rosa Blanco, añejo, and extra añejo, the Cinco Años Extra Añejo is produced by the Real family in Amatitán, Jalisco.

\$ SRP: \$299 per 750-ml bottle

calirosatequila.com

9. MIJENTA AÑEJO GRAN RESERVA

Aged for 18 months in a quartet of hand-picked casks—American white oak, French oak, acacia, and cherry oak—the Mijenta Añejo Gran Reserva is the newest release from the sustainable tequila brand Mijenta. This small-batch spirit, produced in the Highlands of Jalisco by Ana Maria Romero Mena, follows the blanco and reposado expressions. Fragrant cacao, butterscotch, and tobacco notes morph into mace, anise, and saffron.

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

mijenta-tequila.com

12. PALADAR TEQUILA

Drifter Spirits has added Paladar Tequila to its portfolio. Produced by the Orendains, one of the last remaining independent founding families of tequila, Paladar's blanco (\$50), reposado (\$60), and Destillado de Agave (\$70) expressions are an ode to Mexico's volcanic soil. Flaunting a backbone of Blue Weber agave grown for seven years on family fields in the shadow of an inactive volcano, Paladar stands out for a custom pine-box fermentation process.

\$ SRP: \$50 to \$70 per 750-ml bottle

paladartequila.com



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHIANTI CLASSICO'S UGAS

Approved by Chianti Classico Consorzio members in June 2021, the 11 production zones offer more specificity of origin for Gran Selezione wines

BY COURTNEY SCHIESSL MAGRINI

Last June, Chianti Classico made headlines when the Consorzio's members voted to approve 11 *Unità Geografiche Aggiuntive* (UGA), or additional geographic units, which divide the classic Tuscan region into smaller, more terroir-specific production zones. The UGAs await approval by the Ministry of Agriculture—Giovanni Manetti, the president of Consorzio Vino Chianti Classico and the owner of Fontodi, notes that they hope this will come sometime this year, which would allow the 2020 vintage to carry UGA labeling—but already producers are preparing to use these new

monikers on their Gran Selezione bottlings.

Breaking regions down into more specific subzones is becoming increasingly common, both in Italy and around the world, and while Chianti Classico is often considered to be a smaller, more specific region of the broader Chianti denomination, this traditional heart of the region is set apart with its own DOCG. Many of Chianti Classico's producers believe that the UGAs will better communicate the wines' specificities of origin to the consumer.

"Chianti Classico is a very large area [about 70,000 hect-

ABOVE: Chianti Classico DOCG bottles, with the signature Gallo Nero, or Black Rooster, symbol.

ares] between Siena and Florence, so helping the consumer pinpoint better the location of the estates is an added value," says Antonio Michael Zaccheo, Jr., the owner and operator of Carpineto. Manetti estimates that 80 to 90 percent of the region's producers plan to label their wines with their corresponding UGAs.

Some of the UGA names correspond to existing communes—such as Radda, which corresponds to Radda in Chianti—while others are smaller



areas with more terroir specificity, and the Consorzio hasn't ruled out the possibility of adding more UGAs in the future. When the UGAs are approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, producers will only be permitted to use them on Chianti Classico Gran Selezione wines (the region's highest quality tier, which requires that wines are at least 90 percent Sangiovese and aged at least 30 months before release); Gran Selezione represents about five percent of Chianti Classico's total production, according to Manetti.

"We think this represents only a first step, since it is only applied to the Gran Selezione category," says Leonardo Bellacini, the enologist for San Felice. "It will be even more important and significant when it will be applied to Riserva and vintage, too." According to Manetti, the possibility of extending UGA labeling beyond Gran Selezione has been discussed, but no timeline is currently in the works.

While the approval and subsequent release of the first UGA-labeled Chianti Classicos will be the strongest indicator of these subzones' individual characteristics, here's what you need to know about Chianti Classico's new UGAs:

SAN CASCIANO

Located in the northwestern corner of Chianti Classico, San Casciano is home to slightly lower elevations—and therefore warmer temperatures—than UGAs to the east. Most of its vineyards are planted on ancient alluvial soils, and the area is crossed with long, north-south valleys.

GREVE

Greve is home to plenty of Chianti Classico's clay-schist *galestro* soil, and many of the UGA's vineyards are located on hilly slopes overlooking the Greve river, making them remarkably picturesque. Zaccheo notes that this area—particularly the area where Carpineto is located in Dudda, on the eastern slope of Greve in Chianti—

"Chianti Classico is a very large area [about 70,000 hectares] between Siena and Florence, so helping the consumer pinpoint better the location of the estate is an added value."

- Antonio Michael Zaccheo, Jr., Carpineto



has cooler average growing temperatures than the rest of Chianti Classico. "[This is] responsible for maintaining great freshness of flavors and good acidities in our wines—perfect for long aging," he says.

MONTEFIORALLE

The small Montefioralle UGA overlaps with Greve, tucked into its western edges, just north of Panzano; producers may either use the Montefioralle or Greve UGA for wines crafted here. Though it's fairly uniform, covered in both *pietraforte*

(sandstone) and *alberese* (clay-limestone) soils, there are geological variations from north to south and elevations can reach over 500 meters.

LAMOLE

The smallest of Chianti Classico's UGAs, Lamole also overlaps with Greve—specifically its southern reaches—and is often considered the easiest to characterize. Its vineyards are located on a single, mostly east-facing slope located at 500 meters in elevation and surrounded by woods, creating a cool microclimate. The soil, called *macigno toscano* or *macigno del Chianti*, is sandstone, which offers good drainage. "These characteristics allow the grapes to obtain optimum ripeness slowly and gradually and at the same time present elegance, freshness, and richness," says Andrea Daldin, the winemaker of Lamole di Lamole.

SAN DONATO IN POGGIO

San Donato in Poggio is located along the western side of Chianti Classico, south of San Casciano and the Pesa river. A larger area, San Donato in Poggio is variable throughout but tends to have stonier soils.





This UGA is a combination of the Barberino Tavarnelle and Poggibonsi communes.

PANZANO

To the southwest of Greve and to the east of San Donato in Poggio, Panzano is home to two main slopes. The eastern slope has a cooler microclimate, giving a combination of fruit and structure to the wines, while the western slope tends to create wines that are earthier and less fruity.

RADDA

South of Panzano and Lamole, Radda is centered upon a ridge and is home to



“These characteristics allow the grapes to obtain optimum ripeness slowly and gradually and at the same time present elegance, freshness, and richness.”

– Andrea Daldin, Lamole di Lamole

some of Chianti Classico’s highest vineyards. The presence of two rivers—the Arbia, which flows to the south, and the Pesa, which flows to the north and is more like a stream here—moderates these high elevations, giving Radda’s wines a characteristic elegance yet subtle power. However, the UGA is far from homogenous, and wines can vary throughout.

CASTELLINA

The town of Castellina itself is located at a high altitude, with plenty of wind exposure, but the UGA as a whole is much more varied than that; it’s actually considered one of the warmest of Chianti Classico’s UGAs. Vineyards can vary by 300 meters in elevation, and more elevat-

ed areas tend to have rockier soils, while lower areas have deeper soil with higher concentrations of clay.

GAIOLE

Located at the foot of the Monti del Chianti range, Gaiole is a milder area of Chianti Classico, with plenty of wild woodlands. Because it is so large and variable, many break Gaiole down into even smaller subregions. Generally, there is a high concentration of limestone here, especially on higher sites.

VAGLIAGLI

Southwest of Gaiole, Vagliagli is located in some of the most southerly reaches of Chianti Classico, where altitudes gradually decline but generally remain around 400 meters. This UGA is part of the larger Castelnuovo Berardenga commune.

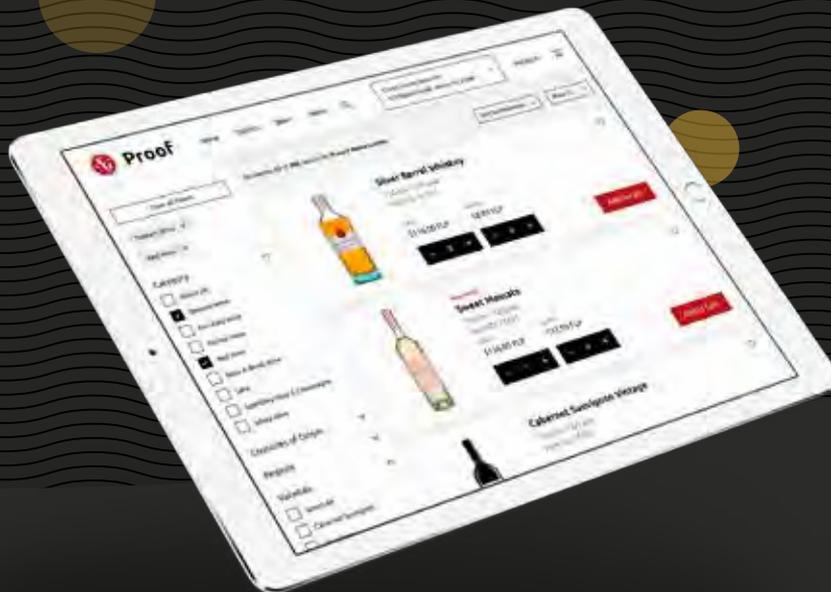
CASTELNUOVO BERARDENGA

The southernmost UGA of Chianti Classico, Castelnuovo Berardenga is located close to Siena. It is characterized by open valleys and plenty of alberese soil. “These elements give rise to wide and rich wines, suitable for long aging,” says San Felice’s Bellaccini. ■

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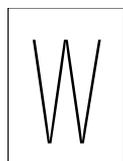
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HOW WINE AND SPIRITS COMPANIES ARE NAVIGATING THE SUPPLY CHAIN CHAOS

WITH NO END IN SIGHT TO ONGOING SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS, BEVERAGE COMPANIES ARE ADAPTING IN MYRIAD WAYS

BY ANDREW KAPLAN



When Dan DeHart founded Grandeur Rum eight years ago, importing a Panamanian rum to the United States seemed like a perfectly sound idea. Today, the supply chain disruptions that have plagued the industry have created enormous challenges for his operation.

“When I have products sitting in Panama fully bottled, ready to leave the country, and I’m waiting for months to get it on a ship, it’s like pulling your hair out,” he says. “You can only imagine how many ships are passing through the Panama Canal. Surely they have space for one container I can throw on there to get up to New Jersey?”

DeHart’s frustration is shared by many in the beverage alcohol industry these days. Over a year since the disrupt-

tions began, things that everyone took for granted just a few years ago—importing a wine, shipping a spirit across the United States, finding warehouse storage, getting enough glass bottles—all remain enormous, and often very costly, challenges.

“I would say that in the past year I’ve had more situations put in front of me where I am honestly saying, ‘Wow, I’ve never seen this before,’” says Serena Campbell, the operations director of USA Wine West in Sausalito, California. “It’s like the rule book kind of just got tossed out the window. And we’re just having to figure out a lot of stuff as we go.”

Over a year into the crisis, and with no end in sight, the industry is mobilizing in different ways. Some are taking small steps in an attempt to douse immediate, day-to-day supply chain fires; others are introducing new services designed to



Dan DeHart and Serena Campbell

mitigate supply chain impacts on their customers. And as they continue to copy, some industry members have begun to address fundamental flaws in the industry’s supply chain in the hopes of preventing such a shock to the system from ever occurring again.

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN JOHNSON

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Alison Leavitt and Steve Feldman

WHERE THINGS STAND TODAY

The big question at hand remains: when will these supply chain disruptions end? That forecast seems to be mixed, with some improvements reported, especially when it comes to out-of-stock items at the retail level. But most industry experts don't expect things to return to any sense of normalcy until 2023 at the earliest.

"[I'm] sorry to report that there is no relief in sight," says Alison Leavitt, the Portland, Maine-based managing director of the Wine and Spirits Shippers Association (WSSA). She says schedule disruption continues to be a major factor in virtually all areas, with port omissions, vessel bunching, and huge delays in transshipment ports continuing to cause significant delays. "Chaos is the new normal and we have adapted to reliable unreliability," she adds.

Leavitt says it is hard to provide an average for today's delays. Direct, port-to-port shipments that do not require transshipments (containers offloaded from one vessel onto another) can go perfectly, while other shipments get delayed by 30 to 90 days. "We have seen some shipments in transit for over 100 days on a route that used to average 24 to 26 days," she says. "While there was a slight lull in the first couple weeks of January, vessels in almost all wine and spirits production areas are again at or over capacity."

The disruptions are proving an enormous challenge for large distributors like Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC). "RNDC, our customers, and our suppliers, have all been impacted," says Steve Feldman, the executive vice presi-

"Chaos is the new normal and we have adapted to reliable unreliability."

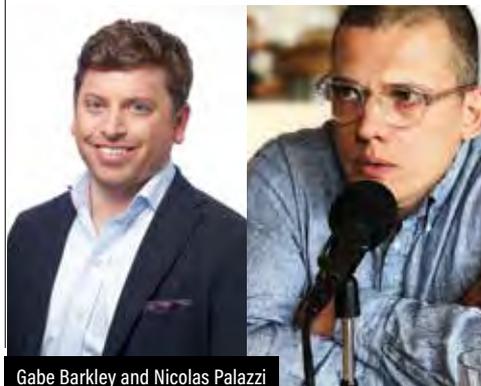
- Alison Leavitt, Wine and Spirits Shippers Association

dent, operations, for RNDC in Grand Prairie, Texas. Disruptions across the entire industry supply chain have created a snowball effect: Suppliers cannot get enough materials, causing product shortages for the distributor and its customers. At the same time, a shortage of trucks and drivers, poor rail service, and port congestion has resulted in delayed availability of the product that is made available from suppliers.

"This means delayed arrival of inventory and backorders to customers," adds Feldman. "The labor crisis has exacerbated, and to a great extent contributed, to the supply chain crisis we are faced with."

The same goes for industry service providers like the Manhasset, New York-based MHW. "The magnitude of the disruption really hasn't changed much," says Gabe Barkley, MHW's CEO. "The cost of transportation is still as much as 300 percent higher than what we would consider 'normal,' while booking containers takes weeks of additional advanced planning. And warehouse space—especially on the East and West Coasts of the U.S.—is difficult to secure."

While the disruptions have been taking a toll throughout the industry,



Gabe Barkley and Nicolas Palazzi



Cathy Plourde and Kara Larson

smaller companies have been especially hard-hit. Nicolas Palazzi, the owner of PM Spirits in Brooklyn, New York, has also been dealing with a laundry list of challenges, from demurrage costs (fees charged for containers that are not moved out of the port or terminal area within their allotted time frame), to lost product at warehouses. "It's incredibly painful, it's incredibly stressful, it's incredibly costly."

Difficulty obtaining a steady supply of glass bottles has been one of the largest strains on producers. For a while, the Rhode Island Spirits team, based in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, had a lack of bottles, forcing them to juggle whether to bottle their spirits immediately or store them in case an order for a more profitable item came in. In February, however, that problem then shifted to a case of "when it rains, it pours."

"I've had standing orders for bottles, and now they're all ready to be shipped now," laughs Cathy Plourde, Rhode Island Spirits' co-owner. "I don't want to put off the order because God knows when I'll run into this trouble again. And in the meantime, where the hell do I put all the bottles? And boy, this is expensive to have just sitting empty, taking up space."

If there is a glimmer of hope, it has been seen at the retail level. "[Since mid-February], product is starting to flow again," says Elizabeth Gregg, the general manager of Applejack Wine & Spirits in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. "We are getting some items from Europe that we have been out of for months. Fingers crossed this will continue."

CATHY PLOURDE AND KARA LARSON PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TREVOR HOLDEN

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Gary Fisch

From his stores in New Jersey and Napa Valley, Gary Fisch, the founder and CEO of Gary's Wine and Marketplace, has also noticed some improvement. "The supply chain disruptions have alleviated moderately, relative to last year," he says. "Suppliers seem to have a better handle on projecting out supply, but it is not always accurate."

Supply chain disruptions, along with the fits and starts of the economy, have also created choices for bars and restaurants that would have been unimaginable just a couple of years ago. At Gracia Restaurant in Seattle, bar manager Kyle Hestead says at one point their supply of tequila got so low that they were one bottle away from taking their house margarita off the menu.

Hestead took over the bar program in June 2021, just as Washington restaurants were permitted to operate at 100 percent capacity. "[This] led to a surge in demand that really exacerbated the strain we felt as a result of supply chain issues," he says. "We went from ordering three cases of well tequila a week to six. Fortunately, the general public is pretty aware of supply chain issues so our guests have been for the most part understanding when we can't keep certain spirits on our back bar."

MITIGATING THE IMPACT

In many cases, supply chain disruptions—along with factors like labor shortages—have forced prices to increase. But many of the industry's suppliers have also tried to mitigate the ongoing impacts of this crisis in other ways.

At sales and marketing company Hearts + Tales Beverage Co. in Vallejo,

California, owner Kate Palmer has plans to move to third-party logistics provider Elenteny Imports, attracted by its less-than-container-load shipping (LCL) service. The LCL service combines smaller shipments from multiple parties to generate cost efficiencies for its customers; resultantly, importers can ship smaller amounts of product without tying up funds for nonessential inventory.

"[Elenteny Imports] specializes more in customer service and services people like me, who want to bring in a couple of pallets of something new and cool to see how it does before committing to bringing in 2,000 cases of something," says Palmer, noting that outsourcing this also lets her focus on sales, marketing, and building her business. Self-managing the movement of just a few pallets through today's overwhelmed supply chain was demanding too much of her time and resources.

Others have built more time into schedules to cushion the shipping delays. For South African wine importer Giles Thomas, the founder of Baobab Wines, one sign of just how bad things had gotten was when he had to personally pay for a truck to travel 700 miles, pick up an empty container, and bring it back to Cape Town just to ship out his wine.

Incidents like that made him realize he had to greatly expand his lead times for shipping. "We used to factor in approximately a five-week lead time from when our wine was available to when we'd have it in our warehouse, ready to ship out the door," he says. "During COVID, we've increased that to 12 to 14 weeks. So, it's over double the time to actually get the container out of South Africa."

Baobab is also streamlining its portfolio, with the goal of cutting the approximately 100 wines they carry in half. "When you're trying to manage inventory and your supply chain, the more SKUs you have the harder it is," says Thomas. "This will allow us to focus down on the high-moving SKUs a little bit more and give those a little bit more of a push in the market."

Along with the difficulty of finding space on a shipping container, Grander Rum's DeHart has also been hit by skyrocketing costs of shipping and months-long delays in procuring dry goods, including barrels, closures, and labels. "The cost of freight in some cases has been double and I've seen it up to six [times as much]. As a smaller producer I don't have the buying power to negotiate my way out of this," he says.

And, like many, he also has been plagued by difficulties obtaining 750-milliliter glass bottles. He found some relief from the December 2020 ruling by the Alcohol and Tobacco Trade and Tax Bureau allowing 700-milliliter bottles to be used in the U.S., as he had an existing supply of 700-milliliter bottles for foreign customers. "The timing of introducing that law ... allowed me to proceed with this bottling while maintaining my price," he says.

For Palazzi, at PM Spirits, the supply chain disruptions have added an extra internal labor cost: a newly created position on the payroll just to put out all the supply chain fires that arise each day. "Because there are so many issues related to everything—shipping and trucking, warehousing and deliveries—I hired somebody just to deal with these issues," he says. "This person is in touch with everything along the supply chain."

Hotaling & Co., an importer-distiller in San Francisco, is exploring the possibility of setting up overseas, third-party warehouses to ensure it has product ready to ship direct to distributors as longer lead times continue. "This process can alleviate some



Kyle Hestead and Kate Palmer



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pressure during a time where increasing warehouse space is very competitive and holding excess inventory can be expensive to combat the increasing supply and transit lead times,” says Chloe Davidson, Hotaling’s supply chain manager.

Larger companies are also deploying new tools in an effort to combat the disruptions. “Our strong partnerships with key transportation companies have somewhat mitigated [product delays] and we have adjusted lead times and safety stock to reduce out-of-stocks and protect customers as best as we can,” says RND’s Feldman.

But the company is also going further, completing the rollout of new planning and procurement software. “Utilizing data analytics, state-of-the-art forecasting models, and advanced algorithms, we are improving our ability to ensure we have the products that support our customers’ needs,” says Feldman. “Looking at a 30- or 60-day forecast is no longer sufficient. The new technology allows us to optimize data and analytics to plan better.”

MHW is offering a Concept-to-Commercialization Program, which expands its service to earlier in the product development stage, including supply chain management and procurement of raw materials. “We actually started planning this before the pandemic,” says the company’s director of client development Chrissy Beaudette Tinelli. “I’d like to say we knew this was coming, but we had started to see tequila was already getting very popular and so was whiskey, so the market was feeling some liquid constraints. We had

“It’s that end-to-end visibility that’s the solution. And I think our industry has a long way to go in terms of meeting that visibility.”

– Alexi Cashen, Elenteny Imports

already built the infrastructure for it, and when the pandemic happened it made more brands feel the need for the service.”

FIXING A BROKEN SYSTEM

Some in the industry have begun identifying the long-term structural issues that left the supply chain so vulnerable to a crisis of this magnitude in the first place. One area some identify as needing attention is warehouse visibility. During this crisis, products have made it through all the shipping and port delays, only to disappear in warehouses for weeks— if not months.

It has left some, like Baobab’s Thomas, frustrated. “Your bread and butter is being a warehouse,” he says. “You can’t inbound stocks for six weeks? You should have that operation down.”

As of February, Elenteny Imports said inventory had swollen across its third-party warehouse system by 43 percent versus the year before due to the disruptions. “That volume continues to challenge all facets of the industry: trucking, warehousing, and shipping,” says Alexi Cashen, the company’s cofounder. “It just feels like operational systems that used to work are now broken.”

She believes more visibility is needed to track inventory across the system and says the industry needs an investment in technologies to allow for more seamless visibility of product as it traverses the system.

“Had we been able to rely on real-time information, that would have definitely

improved the situation,” adds Cashen. “It’s that end-to-end visibility that’s the solution. And I think our industry has a long way to go in terms of meeting that visibility.”

In the area of shipping, Leavitt says she is representing the interests of beverage alcohol shippers on the National Shipper Advisory Council formed in 2019 by Congress to advise the Federal Maritime Commission on supply chain issues. Among the issues the group will examine are what she calls “abusive” industry practices that arose during the crisis.

“The goal is to create more transparency and visibility for things like the storage charges and other [costs] importers and exporters are getting hit with that are completely out of their control,” she says.

Such action will no doubt be welcomed by importers like Baobab’s Thomas, who says, “I haven’t really seen much accountability from anyone in the supply chain when things have gone wrong. It’s just been kind of like, throw it back to the customer. Which I found a little bit surprising and disappointing.”

Leavitt says the recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act may help as well. “Eventually. There are significant dollars dedicated to ports, terminals, roads, bridges—but these improvements will take time,” she says.

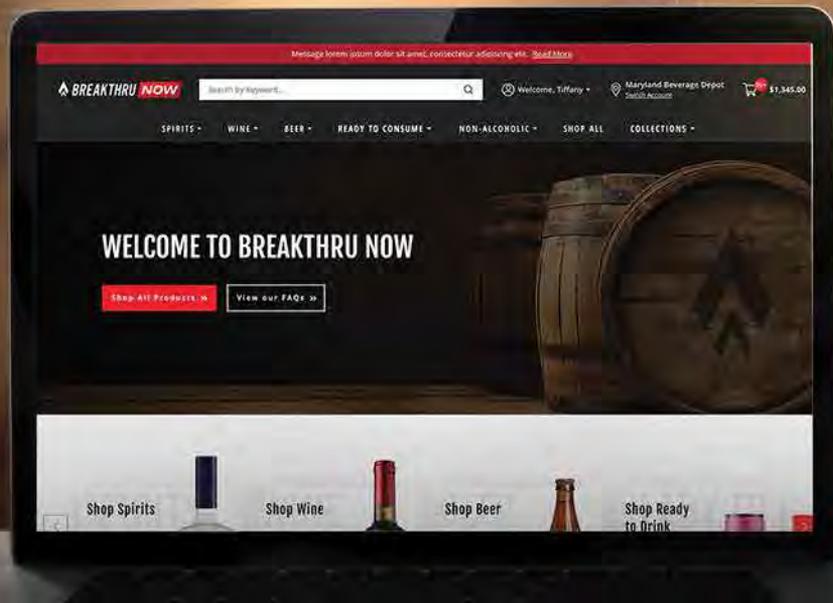
And yet, with the summer fast approaching followed by the busiest shipping season of the year—October, November, December—fast on its heels, time is also something in short supply. ■



Giles Thomas and Chloe Davidson



Chrissy Beaudette Tinello and Alexi Cashen



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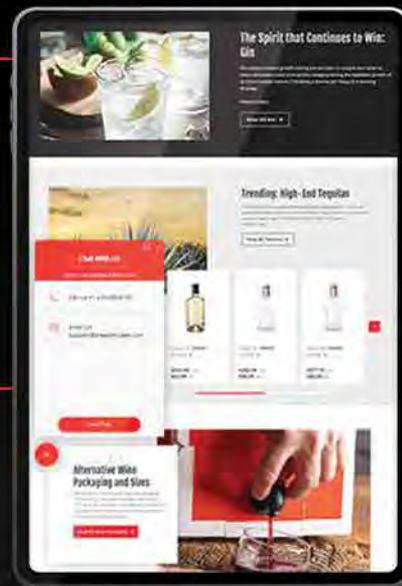
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BY J. STEVEN WISE, ESQ.
MSLBA Lobbyist and Legal Counsel

Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association *REPORT ON THE 2022 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION*

INTRODUCTION

The Maryland General Assembly recently wrapped up its annual 90-day Session, the last one of this four-year term, and the election season of 2022 has begun in earnest for all Delegates, Senators, and statewide office holders. In fact, one of the biggest issues of the Session was the drawing of district maps, both for State legislators and Members of Congress, a process that occurs every 10 years following the U.S. Census.

Even with redistricting in play, the Legislature acted on a number of high-profile issues. First, the only legislation required to pass each year is a Budget, and that job was made easier than ever this year with a surplus larger than the State has seen in its history, thanks to federal funds sent down through COVID relief legislation and federal infrastructure monies. The Assembly also passed legislation addressing climate change, abortion access, tax relief for retirees, and sent the legalization of marijuana to the ballot.

The beverage alcohol industry had its own high-profile issues, too, as set out below. Every reader should know that our outstanding results are the product of a solid team effort: Jack Milani and David

Marberger as our fearless Co-Legislative Chairs, all members of the Legislative Committee, those who testified on individual bills, and most importantly, our Executive Director Jane Springer who never fails to keep the trains running on time.

LICENSING ISSUES

HOUSE BILL 506/SENATE BILL 603 Constitutional Amendment - Beer and Wine Licenses - Retail Grocery Establishments (FAILED)

This legislation would have placed a question on the November 2022 ballot asking: "Do you favor the ability of retail grocery establishments in the State, such as grocery stores and supermarkets, to sell beer and wine to individuals who are at least 21 years of age?" If voters approved, the Maryland Constitution would be amended to allow "retail grocery establishments" to obtain beer and wine licenses. The General Assembly would then have to adopt a regulatory framework to implement the law and "prioritize the issuance of beer and wine licenses for retail grocery establishments that are located in

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geographic areas that have demonstrated lack of affordable healthy food options.” This is similar to legislation that was defeated in 2021 that would have allowed supermarkets to obtain licenses in “food deserts.” The House Bill was withdrawn, while the Senate bill was soundly defeated by the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee (EHEA) by a vote of 11-0.

MSLBA strongly opposed these bills, and we were joined in opposition by the public health community, specifically Kathy Hoke from the Maryland Public Health Association and Raimee Eck from the Legal Resource Center for Public Health Policy, who argued that putting beer and wine in supermarkets in food deserts creates one public health problem to solve another. We also were joined by Nick Manis of the Maryland Beer Wholesalers Association and member Dan Hoose from Bob Hall Distributors. MSLBA retailers who testified are listed below, all of whom provided excellent input on the effect this legislation would have on their businesses.

Jack Milani – Baltimore County

Jeryl Cole – Baltimore City

Tom Yates – Howard County

Kim Lawson – Anne Arundel County

David Marberger – Queen Anne’s County

Jimmy Spiropoulos – Prince George’s County

Blaise Miller – Prince George’s County

Ashok Kavi -- Charles County

Dave Dent – St. Mary’s County

HOUSE BILL 858 **Alcohol Beverages – Class A Licenses –** **Retail Grocery Establishments (FAILED)**

House Bill 858 also would have allowed “retail grocery establishments” to obtain beer and wine licenses, though it was even broader than the constitutional amendment legislation above, in that it included convenience store chains like Royal Farms as well. To be eligible, stores would have to offer certain food types and be 3,200 square feet or more. The bill would allow the chains to hold multiple licenses and relieve them from residency and other requirements imposed on other licensees.

Both the House and Senate Committees considered this legislation in tandem with House Bill 506/Senate Bill 603 (above) given the similar subject matter. The bill was defeated by the House Economic Matters Committee (ECM) by a vote of 19 against and 1 in favor.

SENATE BILL 618 **Baltimore City – Alcohol Beverages – Sales in** **Grocery Stores and Supermarkets – Referendum** **(FAILED)**

Senate Bill 618 would have submitted to Baltimore City voters the question of whether beer and wine should be made available in chain stores and supermarkets. This legislation had an added legislative



hurdle in that it was a local bill, which must first pass muster with the local delegation—in this case the Baltimore City Senate Delegation—before the Senate standing committee would consider it.

Thanks to the great testimony of MSLBA members Mike Fishman and Jeryl Cole before the Baltimore City Senate Delegation, this legislation did not garner the 4 votes needed to move out of the Delegation.

HOUSE BILL 356 **Prince George’s County – Alcohol Beverages –** **Licenses for Supermarkets (FAILED)**

This legislation would allow up to 3 supermarket licenses per Senate district to be issued for supermarkets located in food deserts, as certified by the Prince George’s County Council. While this legislation was voted out of the Prince George’s House Delegation by an overwhelming margin, the House Economic Matters Committee defeated the legislation by a vote of 17-3 because it was considered a bill of statewide impact.

HOUSE BILL 1406 **Alcohol Beverages – Issuance of Class A Licenses** **(FAILED)**

This is legislation that we have seen introduced on numerous occasions at the request of Total Wine, allowing for an entity to hold more than one Class A license. MSLBA has always opposed these efforts. House Bill 1406 was filed after the bill introduction deadline and was sent to the House Rules Committee, an additional procedural step imposed on late-filed bills. It never emerged from there, so no hearing was held.

MANUFACTURER-RELATED BILLS

SENATE BILL 476/HOUSE BILL 550 **Alcohol Beverages – Manufacturers Licenses and** **Off-Site Permits – Sunset Extension (PASSED)**

This legislation involves direct shipment by manufacturers and has its roots in the COVID pandemic, when Governor Hogan issued an Executive Order allowing alcohol delivery and direct shipment by Maryland manufacturers. In the 2021 Session, the Legislature passed a bill codifying this privilege, but sunset it in December of 2022. Predictably, the manufacturers returned seeking to extend the privilege ahead of the law’s expiration this summer. With the passage of this bill, the privilege will expire in June of 2023 without further action by



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the Legislature.

MSLBA objects to direct shipment for two main reasons: 1) there is no underage enforcement with direct-to-consumer deliveries like there is with brick-and-mortar sales, and 2) allowing direct shipment of alcohol by manufacturers in Maryland may require that out-of-state manufacturers be given the same privilege under the Supreme Court's decision in *Granholm v. Heald*, 544 U.S. 460 (2005).

Sales of Other Manufacturers' Products (FAILED)

We have seen a growing number of bills proposed in recent years giving manufacturers the right to sell on their own premises not just the products they manufacture, but the products of other manufacturers, too. This effort hit a crescendo this year, with five different bills proposed that contained this change.

In opposing these bills, MSLBA argued that manufacturers should not be bars under the three-tier system. Every year now for the better part of the last 15 years, the State's manufacturers have introduced bills that erode the three-tier system of alcohol distribution, under which manufacturers were prohibited from selling alcohol beverages to customers at all. The erosion began with the offering of small samples of their own products on guided tours but continued with efforts to sell larger and larger amounts. These efforts were presented as a way for the manufacturers to better market their own products. But the biggest change came several years ago when brewers obtained authority from the Legislature to operate tap rooms. MSLBA resisted this change because we knew what the next step was – manufacturers selling not just their own products but all alcohol beverages, just like a bar. These bills all represent the predicted next step. These efforts are no longer about marketing their own products, but about being a general retailer of all alcohol beverages.

Thankfully, the House and Senate both appreciated the need to put a stop to this trend, and these bills were all killed.

HOUSE BILL 867 Alcohol Beverage Tax – Ready-to-Drink Cocktails (FAILED)

This legislation would have altered the excise tax rate assessed on "ready to drink" cocktails (RTDs). Manufacturers of RTDs that are distilled spirits based brought this legislation, arguing that their RTDs should be taxed the same as malt-based RTDs. Currently, the distilled spirits based RTDs are taxed higher than the malt-based, just like all other alcohol products follow that scale. Oddly, the new tax rate under the bill would have been the same rate currently applied to wine products (.40 cents per gallon).

While the legislation had the potential to impact which retailers could sell RTDs, since a beer and wine licensee is not technically permitted to sell distilled spirits based RTDs, the bill died of its own weight. But this issue is bound to come back, as the Distilled Spirits



Council has a broader agenda at the national level of leveling all alcohol taxes.

LOTTERY

HOUSE BILL 1179 State Lottery – Sales of Lottery Tickets and Tickets from Instant Ticket Lottery Machines – Commissions (PASSED)

This legislation sought to increase the commissions paid to lottery agents from the current 5.5% to 6.0%. Going back to 2005, agents were paid a sales commission of 5.5%. That amount was reduced to 5.0% in 2009 when the State and many residents fell on more difficult times, and they remained at that level through 2013. The General Assembly then increased the commission to 6% effective upon the opening of the Horseshoe Casino in 2014, only to reduce it back to 5.5% before the higher rate ever really took effect.

The House passed this legislation by a margin of 130-1. The Senate, however, reduced the increase to 5.75% and sent the bill back to the House, which refused to accept the Senate amendment. With some further negotiation, the Senate accepted the 6% rate with little time to spare: House Bill 1179 was the LAST bill to be voted on before the Senate adjourned. The vote occurred at 11:59, with only one minute to spare on the final night of the Session!

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE

While not an issue that MSLBA focused on, legislation passed establishing family and medical leave requirements on Maryland businesses. Our firm prepared a summary of this legislation under separate cover for your reference.

CONCLUSION

As these results show, MSLBA had another outstanding Session. This would not happen without our members forming relationships with and contacting their local legislators on these important issues, something we talk about often but the importance of which cannot be overstated. ■

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TOMODACHI

A FRIENDLY JAPANESE-INSPIRED TAKE ON A CLASSIC COCKTAIL

BY MARLENA BLITZ

The newly opened GG Tokyo in New York City's Park South Hotel is putting a Japanese spin on the classics. Just as there are mother sauces in cooking, "I think there are 'mother' cocktails, too, like Daiquiris, Gimlets, Old Fashioneds, and Margaritas," says bar manager Ivan Papic. "We are just trying to put our twist on them, hoping that people will like what we do."

Papic's out-of-the-box riffs feature a variety of infused spirits, each serving its own purpose. For instance, Papic explains that with the Tomodachi cocktail, the bar's take on a Margarita, "our intent with the butterfly pea flower was to change the color of the spirit, while in our version of the Kamikaze, we are infusing Haku vodka with Gold Sen-cha tea, which not only changes the color of the vodka, but also gives the vodka a green tea flavor."

The Tomodachi utilizes UME Plum Liqueur for a "nice tartness with notes of green apple," says Papic. "I think it works perfectly in combination with the sweet notes you get from the agave and the vanilla in the Casamigos." To balance the cocktail, Papic also rims the glass with Shiso Fumi Furikake rice seasoning, "which offers some umami with each sip." ■

● THE TOMODACHI

Recipe courtesy of Ivan Papic, bar manager at GG Tokyo

Ingredients:

2 oz. butterfly pea flower-infused Casamigos Blanco Tequila*
 ½ oz. UME Plum Liqueur
 ¾ oz. agave nectar
 ¾ oz. lime juice

Method: Add tequila, agave nectar, lime juice, and plum liqueur to a cocktail shaker. Add ice and shake vigorously. Prepare a rocks glass by gently rubbing the rim with a lime wedge and dust with Shiso Fumi Furikake. Strain into the prepared rocks glass over a large ice cube.

*Pour the tequila into a vessel and add 1 ½ tbsp. of butterfly pea flower and stir. Let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer back into the original bottle.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GG TOKYO