VODKA
AMERICAN AS CHERRY PIE?

RTD COCKTAILS, COOLERS & SPIKED SELTZERS: READY-TO-EXPLODE

WAYS TO BE A BETTER RETAILER
FEATURES

18
VODKA: THE ALL-AMERICAN SPIRIT... OR ‘NYET’?
Last century’s Russian-European tilt has shifted back to the U.S.

26
READY TO ROLL
With hard seltzers crashing the party and cans red-hot, RTDs are poised to soar.

34
NON-ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
Six ways to optimize bricks-and-mortar retailing in the Digital Age.

DEPARTMENTS

02
PUB PAGE
Trade Wars & Tariffs

04
SPIRITSCOPE
Cheaters ... Chateau Mars? ... Pot Luck ... ... Deliverance ... Celebrate July!

08
SUMMER COCKTAIL ROUNDUP
Cool, light, breezy options

12
MARKET SHOTS
Events and Happenings in the Market

38
NEW PRODUCTS & PROMOTIONS

ON THE COVER: Photograph Courtesy of Samuel Bristow

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Over the past few months headlines repeatedly scream about an impending trade war between the U.S. and, depending on the week, just about everybody else. Among the debated questions – who really pays the higher tariffs? Of course, the media could never be helpful enough to explain that the ultimate consumer price/profit impact will vary with the product in question, strength of demand, availability of alternate products or sources, etc. Suffice it to say that adding costs is rarely a good thing, and that increased government revenue from tariffs will almost always be an expense shared in varying degree by buyers and sellers.

The beverage alcohol business is in the unenviable position of being a weapon/victim of both the U.S. and many trading partners. Alcohol beverages often seem to be selected for new tariffs that will get the attention of the other side. Even though trade disputes about unfair practices impacting free trade in alcohol beverages products are generally fairly minor, we keep getting drawn into the battles we initially played unrelated trade disputes. “We are gravely concerned that this escalation would compound the negative impact of the tariffs on a sector that is already feeling the damaging impact resulting from unrelated trade disputes.”

The joint comment was submitted by the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, American Craft Spirits Association, American Distilled Spirits Association, Kentucky Distillers’ Association, Wine Institute, WineAmerica, Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America, American Beverage Licensees and the National Association of Beverage Importers. (I want to thank Duncan Cameron of Cameron Communications for compiling and sharing the above information.)

**STEPHEN PATTEN**
PUBLISHER
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CHEAVERS...
We do a lot of head scratching as we read through the so-called news and research concerning drinks and drinkers each month. One of the scratchiest items was a survey of 2,000 Americans aged 18-24 which sought to determine if there is a difference between academic and romantic cheating by people who favor different sorts of alcohol. The study found that 81% of Tequila imbibers admit to cheating in a relationship while only 34% of whiskey drinkers say they have done the same. They also found that 48% of beer drinkers have cheated in a relationship but only 8% of wine drinkers say they did so.

When it came to academic life, 78% of respondents that drink whiskey admit to cheating in school. This compares with 63% of beer drinkers, 33% of tequila drinkers, and just 13% of wine drinkers who say they cheated in school. What does all this prove? Probably that wine drinkers are the biggest liars! But don’t bet on it!

CHATEAU MARS?...
Located at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Republic of Georgia is aiming high. Building on 8,000 years of experience, winemakers and scientists there are hoping to one day claim they were both the first nation to make wine on earth, AND the first nation to make wine on Mars! After America’s space agency, NASA, called for the public to contribute ideas for a “sustained human presence” on the Red Planet, a group of Georgian researchers and entrepreneurs got together to propel the country’s winemaking onto an interplanetary level.

Georgia has already achieved ‘breakthrough’ results in developing bacteria that can help make Martian soil fertile, says astrobiologist Marika Tarasashvili.

The idea is for the bacteria to transform the lifeless surface of Mars into fertile soil “on which future colonists will be able to cultivate plants”, she said.

“Plants will be subjected to sub-zero (Celsius) temperatures, high levels of radiation and carbon monoxide (and) high-altitude air pressure,” said Tbilisi’s Business and Technology University Dean Nino Enukidze.

“Martian dreams aside, our experiments are providing information that is vital as humanity confronts a multitude of environmental challenges,” said Enukidze.

“With the help of a child, 14.1 percent of the drivers with children onboard tested positive for THC, the psychoactive component in cannabis. In the daytime, 11.4 percent tested positive while driving, with that figure increasing to 16.5 percent at nighttime.

When asked about their attitudes towards the drug, 40.6 percent of drivers transporting children who tested positive for THC thought marijuana did not impair driving. Drivers with and without children in their cars were almost equally likely to test positive for THC, at 14.1 percent vs. 17.7 percent.

Dr. Angela Eichelberger, study co-author from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, told Newsweek: “This is a different pattern than we see with alcohol. Drivers transporting children were much less likely to test positive for any alcohol, compared with drivers not transporting children.

“Consumers need to know that cannabis products can be impairing. If someone is feeling the effects of cannabis, they should not drive.”

KLOBUCHAR PLAN …
The Associated Press reports that Democratic presidential hopeful Amy Klobuchar has released a plan to spend $100 billion over a decade to improve mental health care and fight substance abuse, an issue the Minnesota senator has faced firsthand as the daughter of an alcoholic who struggled with addiction for years before getting sober.

The wide-ranging plan includes funding for early intervention of mental health disorders and drug use, a national suicide prevention campaign, better access to opioid addiction and other types of treatment and recruitment of health care workers to underserved rural areas and cities with the highest need.

Klobuchar also says that as president she would prioritize mental health and substance abuse treatment over incarceration for non-violent offenders, noting she supported drug courts as an alternative to jail when she was
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the lead prosecutor of Minnesota’s largest county.

Part of the cost of her plan would be raised by a new fee of 2 cents per milligram of the active ingredient in a prescription pain pill, which she says would be paid by the manufacturer or the importer and provide a permanent revenue stream for her plan.

NORTH CAROLINA REFORM PLAN...

State Rep. Chuck McGrady (R-117, Henderson County) has filed House Bill 971, Modern Licensure Model for Alcohol Control, in another attempt to modernize North Carolina’s Alcoholic Beverage Control system.

Believing that North Carolina’s 80-year-old system for the distribution and sale of distilled spirits is outdated and inefficient, HB971 reforms the longstanding government management of the wholesale and retail sale of distilled spirits.

“North Carolina would benefit much more from a ‘licensure system’ modeled on the way we currently sell beer and wine,” McGrady, who co-chairs ABC Committee in the House, said in a news release. “This licensure model has been very successful in ensuring public safety and preserving local revenue streams - all while streamlining operations and enabling private sector investment.

“And a recent report by the nonpartisan Program Evaluation Division reveals that many ABC boards are not only inefficient but fail to produce the revenues one would expect from a monopoly - which is exactly what they are.”

North Carolina is the only state in the nation where local government boards have total control over retail liquor sales to consumers and businesses.

And whereas most states only have one liquor control authority, North Carolina has 170 different ABC boards. Varying in size from two to six members, they are appointed by local city councils and county boards - a patronage system fertile for corruption, the McGrady release states.

A scathing report by State Auditor Beth Wood revealed last year that state-run liquor stores were rife with problems, having wasted millions of taxpayer dollars through years of mismanagement.

“Nevitably, there will be scandals and shenanigans directly resulting from having state and local liquor monopolies,” McGrady said in the release. “It’s time for North Carolina to turn the page on this antiquated system - I believe that our citizens and our businesses are ready to be treated like we live in the 21st century.”

For more information or to contact legislators in support of HB971, visit www.FreethespiritsNC.com or text FIXABC to 52886 to receive updates about the bill and other ways to become involved.

DELIVERANCE ...

7-11 is joining the rush to bring alcohol directly to consumers (including some who may be too impaired to go get it) by launching a beer delivery service in 18 cities. 7-Eleven will deliver beer and cider products via its 7Now app (available in the Google Play and Apple App on-line stores) to customers in select markets nationwide. A section of the app called “The Beer Necessities” will offer “everything from traditional beers to craft beers and ciders,” according to a statement. “A few that are available for delivery include: Dos Equis, Modelo, Corona, Coors Light, Bud Light, Heineken, Budweiser, Angry Orchard, Stella Artois, Dogfish Head, New Belgium Fat Tire Amber Ale, Brooklyn Defender, Miller Light, Michelob Ultra, Kona Big Wave Golden Ale, Blue Moon New Belgium Voodoo Ranger and more.”

If the trial goes well, 7-11 could make a huge impact on the marketplace with their 8,500 U.S. stores. Of course, they will also be competing with thousands of supermarkets and other stores also getting more and more into the home delivery side of the business.

CELEBRATE JULY...

This July declare your independence from boring routine and start making excitement for your customers and extra profits for yourself! For the imaginative promoter, July offers a host of possibilities. It’s National Tennis, Ice Cream, Baked Bean, Hot Dog and Purposeful Parenting Month! Hopefully, you can find some inspiration from this list!}

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**MALIBU LIME MOJITO**

2 oz Malibu Lime  
⅔ oz fresh Lime Juice  
3 oz Soda Water  
10 Mint leaves

**Method:** Add mint leaves to a chilled highball glass and fill with ice cubes. Add Malibu Lime and fresh lime juice. Top up with soda water and garnish with a mint sprig.

---

**DIVISION BELL**

*Recipe created by Phil Ward*

⅔ oz fresh Lime Juice  
⅔ oz Maraschino Liqueur  
⅔ Aperol  
2 oz Mezcal

**Method:** Put all ingredients in a shaker, shake and pour over ice into a coupe glass.

---

**DISARONNO ITALIAN SPARKLER**

1 oz Disaronno Originale  
4 oz Prosecco/Sparkling Wine

**Method:** Combine in Champagne flute or wine glass.

---

**DUBONNET CUP**

2 oz Dubonnet  
1 slice Lemon  
1 slice Orange  
1 slice Cucumber  
1 oz Apple Juice  
1 oz Ginger Ale

**Method:** In a rocks glass add lemon, orange and cucumber slices. Gently muddle. Next add Dubonnet, apple juice and ice. Gently stir. Top cocktail with ginger ale and garnish with a cucumber slice and strawberry.
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TITO’S GRILLED PINEAPPLE SIZZLER

1¾ oz Tito’s Handmade Vodka
½ oz Simple Syrup
1 Grilled Pineapple Wheel, muddled
Half an Orange, juiced
3 oz Soda Water

Method: In a shaker with ice, combine Tito’s, muddled pineapple, simple syrup and fresh orange juice. Shake and strain into a glass over fresh ice and top with soda water. Garnish with pineapple wedge.

EL COLOR ROJO

By Jaime Salas, National Milagro Ambassador

1½ oz Milagro Reposado
1 oz fresh Lemon Juice
¼ oz Rosé Wine
½ oz Light Agave Nectar
½ oz Crème de Cassis

Method: Combine all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add ice, shake and strain over fresh ice into a red wine glass. Garnish with blackberries and raspberries.

RED, WHITE & BOOM!

1¾ parts Svedka Vodka
½ part Triple Sec Liqueur
¾ part Lemonade
1 part Cranberry Juice
1 part fresh Lime Juice

Method: Combine all ingredients in a pitcher with plenty of room for ice. To begin, add 5-6 cups of ice and stir. Garnish with strawberries and blueberries. As the party grows, keep adding ice and fruit.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Created by Jack Clark of Shore Raw Bar & Grill in Austin, TX

1½ oz Van Gogh Double Espresso Vodka
½ oz St. George Nola Coffee Liqueur
½ oz Velvet Falernum
1 oz Coffee (ideally nitro on draft)
¼ oz Gum Syrup
Egg White
3 Espresso Beans

Method: Add all ingredients to shaker except espresso beans; dry shake; add ice and wet shake. Strain into coupe then place the beans on the top.
COMING SOON

DC Fastest Bartender Contest

USA

MD Fastest Bartender Contest

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Evan Williams Bourbon

Contact the Commissioner: Billy Reilly @ 202.439.2001

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BACARDI USA FOUNDER’S SOCIETY AWARD
The SGWS Maryland / Washington, DC / MoCo teams were recently presented with the Bacardi USA Founder’s Society Award.

EARTH DAY CLEANUP WITH ILEGAL MEZCAL
Here are Liz Jankiewicz, Ouzo Bay/Ouzo Beach; Cortland Leggio, Illegal Mezcal; Brendan Dorr, Dutch Courage; and Argenis Calderon, Seven Reasons in DC.

KAGRO GOLF EVENT AT COMPASS POINT GOLF CLUB
SGWS recently participated in the Korean-American Grocers Association’s Annual Scholarship fund-raising golf Tournament.

CINCO DE MAYO AT MI VIDA
Mi Vida recently featured a Patrón Reposado and Citrónge Orange Cocktail in a Patrón bottle vessel created by Aaron Joseph.

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Thanks again!..... Kami M., Seller

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CHARM CITY CARS
Breakthru Beverage, Ketel One Botanicals and Don Julio have formed a partnership with Charm City Cars offering free rides to consumers to-and-from Federal Hill and Camden Yards during and after Baltimore Orioles’ home games.
CHARLES BIELER 20TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR

Twenty years ago, Charles Bieler bought a 1965 Cadillac DeVille convertible, painted it pink and drove it across the country to sell Rosé. Back in 1999, the only pink wine most Americans knew of was sweet and came from California. Things are different these days. Rosé is now one of the hottest wines in the U.S. thanks to pioneers like Charles.

Charles’ trek recently brought his Pink Caddy and Rosé wine to the area for a stop at RNDC in Jessup, MD and the Sagamore Pendry in Baltimore where he conducted a customer education seminar highlighting Bieler Wines.

Pictured at left are Tim Hinckley, Trinchero Family Estates; Chris Dabrowki, Ron Meehan, both with RNDC; Chris Nicks, Trinchero Family Estates; Wayne Degen, RNDC; and Charles Bieler.

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The 2019 Maryland Craft Beer Competition takes place this July. Hundreds of Maryland-made beers will be judged in 16 categories, representing dozens of recognized beer styles. The list of 2019 winners will be announced to the public in late-August at the 2019 REVIVE! Divine Food + Divine Beer event.

Maryland Distillers Guild

Maryland spirits have been raking in the awards from several national and international distilled spirits competitions. Medals have been earned at numerous competitions, including the New York International Spirits Competition, San Francisco World Spirits Competition, and the SIP Awards.

The Maryland Distillers Guild Maryland Cocktail Menu is live! Comprised of cocktail recipes built with Maryland-made spirits, non-alcoholic mixers, and produce, this menu is built around ingredients from the Free State. This growing cocktail menu is a great tool for Maryland cocktail bars, restaurants, and home mixologists!

Maryland Wineries Association

More than 130 wines were entered in the 2019 Maryland Comptroller’s Cup in late-May. Catoctin Breeze Vineyard in Frederick County earned Best in Show recognition for their 2017 Estate Cabernet Franc.

The International Wine Review recently reviewed dozens of Maryland wines and returned scores of 90, or higher, for Black Ankle, Boordy Vineyards, Catoctin Breeze Vineyard, Chateau Bu-De, Cool Ridge Vineyard, Crow Vineyard & Winery, Fiore Winery, Old Westminster Winery, Port of Leonardtown Winery, Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard, and the Vineyards at Dodon. This review concludes that Maryland is a producer of world-class wines.
NEW LOOK
SAME SMOOTH TASTE
THE ALL-AMERICAN SPIRIT... OR NYET?

BY JACK ROBERTIELLO

Is the renaissance of American whiskey alerting consumers that some pretty good clear spirits are made here? Perhaps it is social, or political, or even just a regional trend? Whatever is behind the boomlet, American vodka is suddenly considered something worth cheering about. Thirteen of the top 20 best-selling brands are American-made, as are many fast-emerging brands. Meanwhile, as the ultra- and super-premium tier of the vodka business sags, the price tiers below are filled with growing American brands.

All in all, a great time to be an American vodka.

“American-made vodka trends are the strongest they’ve ever been,” says Frank Polley, VP of Trade Marketing for Tito’s, now second only to Smirnoff in U.S. volume. “We’re also seeing the expansion of the American-made vodka segment with many new brand and line extension launches throughout the year. American-made vodka is definitely driving growth in the category.”

MADE IN USA = BUILT FOR COMPETITION

“American vodkas are in a good position as competition among higher-end brands leads to price slashing,” says Reid Hafer, Senior Brand Manager in charge of Burnett’s and Deep Eddy for Heaven Hill Brands, although she notes competitors in the $10-$15 and $15-$25 tier where most American vodkas sell are also cutting prices.

While the flavor craze churned vodka sales madly a decade ago, that tide has receded; unflavored vodka commands 85% of all vodka consumed in the U.S., points out Bernadette Knight, Senior Director of White Spirits for Skyy-owner Campari America: “American-made vodkas are in a strong position. Vodka remains the number one spirit consumed in the U.S. and the category has shown small but consistent year on year growth. Consumers are looking for authenticity, quality and provenance, three things that American-made vodkas, especially Skyy, have been able to deliver on.”

Brands that have focused on particular regional markets have shown that organic growth sometimes works best. For example, a majority of Seagram’s business is off-premise and in the West, predominantly California, says Katherine Foley, Seagram’s Brand Manager at Infinium Spirits. (By comparison, Infinium also sells Crystal Head, which sells globally.) Meanwhile, new legal-age consumers are up for grabs, says Foley: “The growth with American vodka is spurred by Millennials, and this consumer market communicates and purchases dominantly through digital platforms, particularly social media.”

THINKING LOCAL, GETTING CRAFTY

While talk of “terroir” is usually the turf of wine, not vodka, regionality still plays an important role in some vodkas, increasingly so with craftier producers. No discussion of regional vodka can get far
without mentioning “Our” Vodka—a group of distilleries (doubling as bars) in major global cities, each existing precisely to create a namesake vodka for their locale. American outposts include L.A., Detroit and New York, with Miami coming soon. The project attracted the attention and investment of Pernod Ricard.

One might infer that vodka is the new “oil” in Texas, where Tito’s Handmade, having emerged stronger than ever after a labeling controversy, is now surrounded by a bevy of Texas-made vodka brands. Deep Eddy has big plans, having just opened a brand new Tasting Room (replete with round-trip transportation available from downtown Austin). Western Son and Dripping Springs have added to the local lore, especially with respect to flavors (Western Son’s portfolio includes prickly pear; Dripping Springs makes one from hand-zested Texas oranges). Just launched, Frankly Organic, made in Austin, is certified organic, non-GMO and gluten-free—in five all-natural flavors.

Water quite naturally is a favorite point of distinction in vodka, as it comprises 60% of the finished liquid. Water is so central to Leaf Vodka that they produce two—one from Rocky Mountain mineral water, the other from Alaskan glaciers. Ocean Vodka boasts of the high mineral content of water drawn off the Hawaiian coast. American Harvest proudly taps water from “deep beneath the Snake River Plain.” Spring 44, located in Colorado’s Buckhorn Canyon, is literally named after its water source.

Ingredients are another area where small producers can stand apart from the big distillers. The top-rated American vodka at this year’s Ultimate Spirits Competition was Boyd & Blair, made from potatoes near Pittsburgh. BET (pronounced “beet”) is made in Minnesota from sugar beets (not red beets, so the vodka is still clear); Comb (Port Chester, NY) is made from honey; Clear Creek (Oregon) distills apples into vodka, while Core (Hudson Valley, NY) starts with apple cider. In Nevada, Bently Heritage distills Source One Vodka from 100% estate-grown oats.

Hangar 1 Vodka, launched in 2002 and made from a mix of grain and wine grapes, recently took it one step further to create Hangar 1 Rosé Vodka, which blends the straight vodka with a Northern California rosé wine.

Of course, let’s be realistic: authentic vodka can sprout up practically anywhere; and sometimes the image is as carefully crafted as the spirit. Consider “Blood x Sweat x Tears,” made in Oregon from Pacific Northwest winter wheat and pure Cascade water. But that’s not all—it’s made in a converted laundromat, “handcrafted with grit and fury,” and its matte black bottle is illustrated with Oregon landmarks.

TAKING IT NATIONAL

Some American vodkas have used the local platform to expand nationally. Maybe the best example from Texas is Deep Eddy, whose Ruby Red Grapefruit helped the brand break out. Idaho’s 44 North and Dry Fly Washington Wheat Vodka are two more in multiple states. The New York metro area has at least two brands that have thrived regionally: Recipe 21 and Voda.

Recipe 21 was created in 2012 by Roc House Brands’ owner LiDestri Foods as an on-premise-focused brand for local distributors to expand their market, says Joe Ragazzo, VP of Sales for Roc House. The 12-flavor brand now distributes in 11 states. “We have a favorable quality-price proposition, with good packaging and taste that over-delivers for the price. That got us into many on-premise accounts in the local platform to expand nationally.

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Flavored vodkas have seen better days. Heaven Hill Brands’ Reid Hafer says, “Overall, consumers have turned away from the whole flavor end of vodka but they do like all-natural flavors that are not overly sweet.” Burnett’s “totally rode” the flavor explosion, she says, and while the core flavors still sell, with 33 variants some are inevitably less appealing.

What’s behind the less-flavor shift? Chalk it up to Americans’ rising health consciousness, which has, ironically, prompted a distinct trend among imports, namely the launch of brands that are fresh-ingredient-driven and wellness-minded brands. To wit, just within the past two years, Stoli Crushed jumped out with “real fruit” Pineapple and Ruby Grapefruit expressions; Ketel One Botanical brought complex combos like Peach & Orange Blossom; Smirnoff Zero Sugar Infusions was just released in three variants: cucumber and lime, watermelon and mint and strawberry and rose; and Absolut is going the real-fruit route with their Strawberry and Apple versions of Absolut Juice.

At the same time, some unusual flavors—such as the fig-flavored Figenza—have gained solid footing among mixologists. Pinnacle’s round-shouldered blue bottles remain an American-made shelf staple. In California, Charbay distills bold displays the number of extraction days on the front label of their flavored vodkas.
Thank you for all your help getting us where we are today!

Tito's Lemonade
A refreshing summertime cocktail classic that's easy to make and easy to sip. Mix with fresh squeezed lemonade and garnish with mint if your customers are feelin' fancy, or keep it simple with your favorite store-bought brand.
well, and now we are moving off-premise, too,” notes Ragazzo.

Voda may sound imported but it’s all-American, says Charles Lynch, VP of Spirits Sales & Business Development for Royal Wine Company, which sells the brand in five states and the metropolitan NY area. “There is a consumer that is very price-sensitive who is looking for value and quality,” reasons Lynch. “You can say that vodka is six different categories, and while the super- and ultra-premium are taking price cuts and fighting for market share, that is good for those brands like Voda that are already aggressively priced.”

CLEAN & GREEN

With purity always a vodka signature, it should be no surprise that organic vodkas are proliferating. Nationally distributed organic vodkas include Ocean (Hawaii); Koval (Chicago), made from local rye, milled on-site; and Prairie Vodka, made from organic Minnesota corn, in cucumber as well as neutral. In Califor-

nia, Humboldt Distillery’s Organic Vodka is filtered through virgin activated-carbon made from coconut shells; and Crop Harvest Earth’s full line claims to be distilled so efficiently that it needs no filtering.

Allison Evanow, Founder and CEO of organic producer Square One notes that their brand has distinct appeal for consumers, “who prefer quality over marketing hype,” and bartenders. “Because of their knowledge of spirits, they know that this is a big commit-

ment for us as organic rye is not as readily available nor as easy to distill as organic wheat or corn yet it delivers a fantastic flavor profile. Bartenders have really embraced our multi-botanical approach to three of our spirits.”

For American vodkas overall, the ascent of organic offerings is just one of the numerous consumer trends that bode well for the future. As Tito’s Polley puts it: “Over the last ten years, American-made vodka has slowly built a reputation for producing some of the best-tasting vodkas in the world. The changes in the economic landscape across the world have led people to reevaluate their priorities and that’s impacting their choices.”

WHOSE FLAG IS IT, ANYWAY?

One might think that if any spirit these days were to become politically tinged, it might be vodka, with Russian roots part of the spirit’s lore. Interestingly, identity politics among vodka brands appears to be quite malleable—as when Russian-sounding Smirnoff rolled out a “Made in America” video campaign in 2017 featuring Ted Danson. On the other hand, the official vodka of the Kentucky Derby this year was… Finlandia? Russian Standard—a vodka truly made in Russia—appealed to good old fashioned American materialism with a weekly gold bar giveaway for their Russian Standard Gold Vodka expression. And heck, what vodka brand—American, European or other—has not tried to grab a slice of the Moscow Mule pie?

Perhaps because whiskey is not typical summer sipping, vodka—

and its neutral character—has become a natural driver of summer promotions in general and July 4th in particular. Nothing goes with red, white and blue like clear vodka, even when the vodka is imported. Witness Svedka, born and distilled in Sweden, is famous for the brand’s annual American Flag limited edition 1.75L bottles.

Tito’s promotions this summer cover multiple bases: a burlap red, white and blue bottle sack is available (while supplies last); meanwhile, POS materials are promoting simple but bold cocktails.

Perhaps there is a limit on how many ways vodka can be rejiggered, but we apparently aren’t there yet. It appears there is still ample room for the spirit to inspire. For instance, as part of their “Proudly American” campaign, Skyy Vodka recently hosted an evening of cocktails and conversation with actor and activist John Cena for trade media and industry elite. Cena explained that he wakes up every day with the intent to “earn the day” and reflect on all the opportunities he has that make him proud to be an American. Launched last summer, “Proudly American” celebrates the evolution of the traditional American values on which the country was founded, and what they mean to today’s optimistic citizens.

Belvedere has also pushed the vodka promotional envelope of late. They premiered “The Art of Brunch,” an initiative developed to elevate the at home brunch experience with cocktail-friendly recipes created by celebrated chef and wellness guru Candice Kumai. And as part of a partnership with musician, actor, and activist Janelle Monáe, Belvedere is debuting her “Beautiful Future” bottle, supported by online content and a series of summer launch events. Suppliers and re-sellers alike are certainly on board with the idea of a beautiful future for vodka in America.
Not all Masterpieces are Found Hanging in a Gallery.

Gogh Responsibly.

Imported by 375 Park Avenue Spirits, Louisville, Kentucky. Van Gogh Vodka 35% alc. by vol., 40% alc. by vol. Please enjoy responsibly.

#TheArtofVodka
Being notoriously neutral in character, vodka has always been ultra-pliable clay in the hands of marketers. Promotional hooks over time have shape-shifted considerably. Back in the 1950s, ads proclaimed Smirnoff “leaves you breathless.” Decades later, keeping vodka in your home freezer became au courant. And of course, who could forget the one-upsman-ship around number of times distilled, not to mention filtration methods. Here are some contemporary ways that the clear, theoretically odorless, tasteless spirits are being pitched.

**ROSE, YOU SAY?** Why not! Svedka, Effen and Three Olives have all put a pink spin on vodka. Svedka’s boasts the inclusion of real wine. Three Olives has been supporting theirs with an aggressive social media campaign—begun on April Fools Day—in which towns named Roosevelt compete to become “Rosévelt” (Photoshopping and all).

**TAKING PRIDE.** More so than any other spirit, vodka brands have embraced the LGBTQ+ community. Stoli does an annual art bottle; this year’s commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. Absolut has just made their hand-painted Rainbow bottles a permanent addition. Smirnoff and Effen both released limited editions in June.

**STAYIN’ OLD SCHOOL.** If imitation is the highest form of flattery, there is admiration for Russia evident among American value vodkas sporting names like Georgi, Popov, Romanoff and Ruble. Among the made-in-Russian vodka brands here: Beluga, Czar’s Original, Hammer & Sickle, Jewel of Russia, Legend of Kremlin, Ruskova and Russian Standard. And Poland continues to hold value as a source of authentic vodka, via the likes of Belvedere, Chopin, Kurant, Lussusowa, Lvov, Sobieski, Wodka, Wyborowa and Zu (Zubrowka, the ultra-authentic Polish vodka, with a blade of bison grass in the bottle).

**CLARIFYING THE MESSAGE.** Sensing that new campaigns each year were leading consumers to save Grey Goose for special occasions, the brand recently revamped their approach. “It was important to create an impactful, unified platform with a very long runway for consistency over time, that would translate across all of our markets globally,” notes Chief Marketing Officer Lee Applbaum. “Live Victoriously does just that—reminding consumers everywhere to celebrate life’s big and small moments.”

**STAND UP TO STAND OUT.** The embrace of craft spirits in general has opened the door for vodka producers to highlight their ingredients, methodology, even their inspiration. Broken Shed, from New Zealand, is made from whey, making it sugar-free, gluten-free and slightly viscous. French-made Cîroc has kept the brand’s flames stoked by releasing limited summer editions; this year’s Summer Watermelon also tapped a fresh fan base as Sean “Diddy” Combs collaborated with longtime friend DJ Khaled. Iceland’s Reyka has partnered with the National Audubon Society to help save the endangered puffin species. A display of Van Gogh bottles awaits guests of the brand’s Starry Night experience, pairing the artist’s inspiration with actual star-gazing (and cocktails). Belvedere’s “The Art of Brunch” initiative featured cocktail-friendly recipes created by chef and wellness guru Candice Kumai.

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WHISK YOUR PATRONS OFF TO NEW ZEALAND, SIP BY DELICIOUS SIP.

Transport your customers to the pristine fjords, lakes and springs of New Zealand where the world’s purest waters – from a 15,000 year old aquifer on the South Island and a bubbling spring on the North Island – are combined with the distilled natural protein whey to create a crisp, clean taste that will enhance any occasion. Take your customers to a whole new place. Take them there with Broken Shed Vodka.

NOW AVAILABLE IN A NEW LITER BOTTLE!

JUST CHILL AND SIP.

Broken Shed Vodka, 40% ABV, Distilled from Whey. Imported by Broken Shed Imports, Manhasset, NY. SIP RESPONSIBLY. © 2019 Broken Shed Limited
ready-to-Drink, aka RTD, is hardly a new concept. “When was there not an RTD cocktail?” asks Sly Cosmopolous, Corporate Mixologist for Republic National Distributing Company (RNDC) in Grand Prairie, Texas.

Heublein “Club Cocktails” in cans were going strong in the 1950s and ‘60s. Wine coolers appeared in the ‘70s and ruled the 1980s. As varietal wine swung back in favor, flavored malt-based RTDs—like Smirnoff Ice and Mike’s Hard Lemonade, both launched in 1999—followed. Not long after that, Skinnygirl made bottled margaritas the new ready-to-party star.

But while tastes and trends have long sent varied RTD ripples across the beverage alcohol market, the current surge has grabbed the attention of even seasoned watchers like Cosmopolous: “2019 is the launch of the RTD revolution,” she asserts.

The category has seen a tectonic shift both in product mix, with the sudden ascent of spritzes and hard seltzers, as well as a boost in visibility and convenience from cans.
ARE YOU LOSING MONEY?

RumChata is a top five selling cordial in the U.S., and we have the sizes to match any retailer. We’ve got a size for you! Ask your distributor!
MAKE NO DOUBT THAT BEING PERCEIVED AS ‘HEALTHY’ IS AT THE HEART OF MANY MODERN RTDs’ PITCH.

BLURRED LINES
On one level, it is useful to look at RTDs in terms of their alcohol base—wine, spirits or malt; after all, that is how beverage alcohol gets classified for taxation and distribution regulations. However, part of the reason the category has become so dynamic is the blurring of lines among types and flavors. RTDs stretch from coolers to cocktails (both classic and creative, full-strength and mild), coffee drinks to aperitifs, sangria to bubbles (whether dubbed spiked seltzer, hard seltzer, spritz or the like), and more. Meanwhile, most consumers are not even aware of the distinctions among base alcohols.

According to Nielsen, RTD spirits-based cocktail sales as of April 2019 were up 40.7% from one year prior, to nearly $62 million; and RTD wine-based cocktail sales were up 41.9% from 2018 to over $83 million. Popularity of the category is apparently quite broad, notes Caitlyn Battaglia, a client manager in Nielsen’s beverage alcohol practice: “Ready-to-drink products have done a good job of engaging consumers across beer, wine and spirits.”

FRESH START
In her 12 years at RNDC—and even longer in the spirits industry—Cosmopoulos has noticed that at-home cocktail habits tend to follow bar trends. “With trends, we convert our on-premise success into retail opportunities,” she says. “It’s an opportunity to convert the success we’ve seen with classic cocktails, fresh flavors and creative flavors.”

Specifically, the RTD cocktails fueling the category’s explosive sales are drier and often made from fresh ingredients. Austin Cocktails is one brand emphasizing all-natural ingredients and craft-cocktail character. “The RTD category historically has been dominated by mass-market, value-oriented products that have a sweeter taste profile and skew female,” say co-founder Kelly Gasink. “As consumers began to trade up for premium, quality brands, it became clear that demand for cocktails across demographics would change.” Austin Cocktails consumers are evenly split between men and women, aged 26 to 58.

While there has been a return to classic cocktails in RTD offerings, creative flavors are also important; 66% of respondents to a recent RNDC survey said that outside-the-box flavors were a reason for choosing RTD cocktails. (Guava is a flavor to watch for 2019, according to Cosmopoulos.) And suppliers are not shy about highlighting their complex combinations, such as in Austin Cocktails Peppered Maple Blood Orange Bourbon Cocktail.

Convenience has always been a strength of the RTD cocktail category, but today’s RTDs are also driven by premiumization. Both components are essential in modern culture. “You have busy households working 80-plus hours a week,” says Cosmopoulos, “and they want the premium component, but they want the convenience.” According to RNDC, 46% of survey respondents choose RTD because there is a wider premium choice available.

CAN-VENIENCE & MORE
While the Austin Cocktails line is sold in 750ml bottles—for easy entertaining at home—many start-ups in the field are rolling with cans. Andrew Rodbell, co-founder of Post Meridiem, a line of canned cocktails which launched in Georgia in May of this year, explains:
FUN STARTS WITH FLAVOR

SIP EASY. ENJOY MALIBU RESPONSIBLY.

©2019 Pernod Ricard USA, New York, NY
“First craft beer, then wine, and now spiked seltzers. It seems like a natural extension of that trend for consumers to embrace full-strength, authentic ingredient cocktails in cans too.”

Flexibility is the prime reason why cans are resonating with consumers. “We’re an on-the-go culture, a grab-and-go society,” says Cosmopoulos. Canned versions are now becoming popular at venues like pools, festivals and concerts, where glass is prohibited—one reason why sales spike in Q2 and Q3, during the summer months. And RTD convenience is not only about cans: RumChata’s iced-coffee spinoff, FrappaChata was first released in 1.75L jugs; sales foundered until they switched to 200ml bottles.

**FROM VINO TO BUBBLES**

Sangria, popular for decades, fits into the RTD picture because it is increasingly coming in varied formats, as opposed to mixed up at home Nielsen tracked RTD sangria sales up +8.4 % from one year prior, to over $220.5 million. Prominent brands with multi-state distribution include Eppa, Opici, Lolea, De La Costa, Reál, Riumite, Señor Sangria and Yellow Tail.

However, the biggest wine-based cocktail innovations are happening in the emergence of a new category: the wine spritz. “The RTD market has exploded!” says Jordan Salcito, veteran sommelier/beverage-director and creator of Ramona, a wine spritz made from organic Italian grapes in 200ml cans (now in lemon as well as original grapefruit). Compared with full-strength wine in cans, spritzes offer a sessionable, low-alcohol option—7% in Ramona’s case.

Archer Roose—which already offered four wines in a can—also launched two wine spritzes in 2019. “With Spritz, we are targeting sparkling wine drinkers who would typically reach for an alcoholic seltzer for a ‘lighter’ option,” says Marian Leitner-Waldman, co-founder and CEO of Archer Roose. “Wine drinkers are sometimes forced to settle for a just a beer because they want to drink something with lower alcohol, but they really don’t drink beer.”

**HERE COMES BUBBLE**

As innovative as canned wine spritzes are, the most action of all in RTDs is in the suddenly significant “spiked seltzer” category. Nielsen tracked sales of hard seltzer at $633 million as of April 2019, up 193% from one year prior. Perhaps more importantly, the can format itself is giving RTDs of all types/flavors/bases a fresh, attractive platform for attention and sales. Today’s “hard” seltzers fit right in.

Moreover, these canned RTDs as a group—alcohol-based spritzes, seltzers, coolers and cocktails and such—are primed for the challenge. Their packages are fresh and fruity, colorful and eye-catching. Plus they promise—often quite visibly—lower alcohol (typically 4.5%-6%), lower calories (90-120) and lower carbs, along with natural ingredients.

Make no doubt that being perceived as “healthy” is at the heart of many modern RTDs’ pitch. “The beverage landscape is evolving quickly and MillerCoors is committed to offering people what they want,” noted Sofia Colucci, VP of Innovation at MillerCoors, when launching their Cape Line Sparkling Cocktails in April. “Cape Line hits on a variety of consumer demands—bold taste that does not compromise on being a healthier option.”

Brewers are being tempted into the seltzer arena—often mindful of keeping it local, not unlike craft beer. Vive is the first hard seltzer created by a brewery in the Cincinnati area, Braxton Brewing, and uses “pure Kentucky water.” Malibu is testing their Strawberry Spritz in the UK this summer—where trends often take shape before coming over here.
Inspired to produce an even fruitier, sweeter Balvenie, Apprentice Malt Master Kelsey McKechnie had the bright idea to import Virgin Oak barrels from Kentucky. The barrels are twice toasted, once in Kentucky and once at The Balvenie Cooperage to drive the heat further into the wood and bring out as much flavour as possible. After this extra deep toast, they are filled with classic Balvenie and laid down to further mature. The result is a delectably complex whisky with notes of caramelized fruit, oak, coconut and delicate vanilla.


Other questions present themselves in the wake of today’s ready-to-boom RTD scene:

- If RTDs are within arm’s reach at convenience stores and supermarkets, are they going to lead people to skip a trip to the wine store?

- RTDs (especially the seltzers) come in many variations of pink; when 12-packs of spiked seltzers can cost less than a 750ml of Provence rosé, will party-friendly RTDs carve a chunk out of peak pink season?

- Could hard versions of agua fresca (puréed fruit, water and sugar over ice, popularized in Latin America) make a move on sangria and margaritas? (The Hard Frescos brand—made in Mexico City—just launched nationwide).

- What if hard seltzers as a base for full-blown cocktails becomes a thing?

- Or if frozen RTDs spin-off into a brand new sub-category? (There is already one brand, Chanmé, in multiple states).

Could we be facing a flood of too many RTDs? RNDC’s Cosmopoulos believes that the market will accept even more options as a new generation of consumers enter the beverage alcohol space. “The iGen will be more impactful than the Millennials,” she says, “as they are catching on to the convenience and quality with premiumization.”

Taste, value, convenience, portability—all will factor in. No doubt time will tell how consumer expectations and rewards from the varied RTD sub-categories shake out in terms of sales. This summer will be closely watched as more than a handful of big producers are now invested.

Gallo has two launches going: the revival of Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers and High Noon spiked seltzers, both in cans, both proudly declaring natural flavors. Polar Seltzer has entered the arena with Arctic Summer. Anheuser Busch acquired Bon & Viv in 2016; Boston Beer has Truly Spiked & Sparkling; Mark Anthony Group (Mike’s Hard) has White Claw; and Constellation spun off Svedka Spiked Premium Seltzer and invested in Austin Cocktails. MillerCoors just added Cape Line on top of Henry’s Hard Soda. BeatBox Beverages, already active in non-bubbly RTDs, is rolling out Brizzy Hard Seltzer Cocktails.

That should be enough bubbles to keep drinkers lubricated this summer. But will they be drinking less rosé and Prosecco as a result? Stay tuned.
RESPECT THE DRINK
A great cocktail demands superior ingredients. Cinzano has been at the heart of the world’s greatest drinks for more than 250 years.

NEW LOOK
THE SAME TIMELESS TASTE

NEGRONI
The iconic original recipe
Combine equal parts:
- Cinzano Rosso Vermouth
- Campari
- Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin
Pour over ice, garnish with orange slice.
remodeling in 2018 almost tripled the size of Regency Wine & Liquor in Winter Garden, FL. So, when the renovation was complete, says manager Keith Shatsoff, it was time to upgrade the store’s services to match the new space. Hence, a wine club—three price tiers ($40, $90, $150), two to three bottles a month, and choices among red, white, rosé and sparkling.

“You have got to offer more, be more than just another liquor store, to try to be more of something customers can’t get elsewhere,” says Shatsoff. “And the wine club is just one way for us to do that. It’s way to upscale for our customer base, so they can try new wines.”

In this, Regency’s management understood that smart retailing in the 21st century requires more than product selection and greeting customers at the door. The best retailers know they have to make extra effort to succeed at a time when supermarkets, chains and big boxes can threaten their business by doing nothing else than being located down the street.

“Competition has never been more intense, and especially for the independent retailer,” says Dallas’s Bill Rich, a retail consultant who has been an independent retailer, a broker and a wholesale marketing executive. “The most difficult thing I had to do when I ran a store was to remind myself that people wouldn’t come to work, and then what’s the point?”

In other words, what do great retailers do to be great? What best practices do the best retailers follow to achieve success? These six points offer insight into just that:

1. **Retain Employees**

   “It’s mostly about leadership skills,” says Harry Constantinescu, the General Manager of The Juice Box Fine Wine & Spirits in Atlanta. “The person who is in charge has to be knowledgeable about the inventory and the products, but also has to be a good leader. Otherwise, turnover will be high.”

   That means making their role more than a job where they count the hours until they go home, says Constantinescu. A good leader makes the job enjoyable, where each employee understands they’re essential to the company’s success, whether cashier or assistant manager. Otherwise, he says, “they don’t want to come to work, and then what’s the point?”

   “You’re looking at 50 percent turnover a lot of the time,” says Rich, “and most of that’s because of things you control, whether it’s low wages or not treating the employees as well as you should.”
LITTLE JAMES BASKET PRESS has a new, sophisticated look with a label update that connects these two wines to the Saint Cosme family brand. Now is the perfect time to reintroduce these high-quality, value wines to your customers!
**Premiumize Inventory**

If premiumization—where consumers are willing to trade up—has overtaken wine and spirits retailing, it hasn’t changed one thing, says John Dechant at Kahn’s Fine Wine & Spirits in Indianapolis: They still want value.

“Just because they’re spending $15 instead of $10, or $20 instead of $15, that doesn’t mean they don’t still want value,” he says. “They want something that’s worth what they pay for it. They’re just not buying $30 wine to buy $30 wine. So that’s what we focus on. That way, we can still have $10 wine for people who want that, and they’re willing to spend more if they can see the value.”

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**Get Involved With Community**

One of the most important—and most complicated—things about running a local business is figuring out how to be part of the community.

“The difficulty is helping people without alienating anyone,” says consultant and former retailer Wayne Belding, MS, of Boulder, CO. “You want to find apolitical things to do that benefit the community.”

His advice: lots of small, very local donations—things like gift cards, tastings, and wine for receptions for schools, community groups and the like. Multiple small events do a better job of getting the business in front of the community than one big event. Plus, keeping it local and apolitical means less chance of offending people. Regardless, says Belding, form a strict policy and stick to it: “That way, when someone asks for something, you have a reason for saying yes or no.”

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**Cultivate a Wine Club**

Wine clubs not only build customer loyalty, says Rich, but provide a steady income stream. Typically, customers join the club for minimum number of months, often three, and pay when they order. That means the retailer gets their money up front, which can be used to market the club.

Having said that, says Shatsoff, the club needs to offer value: “You just can’t put something in there just to have a wine club. Customize. Make it attractive enough so people see it as something worth the money.”

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**Use Loyalty Programs**

“When you open your store, you’re getting people who used to shop elsewhere,” says Constantinescu. “So you have to find a way to keep them from going to the next store that opens.”

To this end, The Juice Box’s 18-month-old loyalty program focuses on legitimate benefits, not just an occasional discount. It includes frequent purchase rewards, invitations to special events, special wine deals, free items, and the like.

“So far,” says Constantinescu, “it has done everything I have wanted it to do for customer loyalty.”

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**Hold In-Store Tastings**

It’s one thing to uncork a few bottles. It’s another to hold an in-store tasting so that it’s a plus for the business.

“You don’t want to hold a wine tasting just to hold a tasting,” says Dechant. Kahn’s, in fact, has established a reputation in the Indianapolis area for its tastings, whether it’s the annual sparkling wine event during the holidays or its yearly distributor event, where as many as 10 wholesalers pour their wines in one of the store’s most popular events.

Dechant’s point: The tasting needs to fit the retailer’s goals; it needs to be unique, and it needs to be supported with publicity and discounts. One example: An oaked/unoaked tasting this spring, to show the differences oak makes in wine production. “Our goal is educational,” he says. “It’s one thing to sell wine from a tasting, but it’s another to educate the customer so they’ll buy more wine down the line. That’s what we’re trying to do.”
1. **SAILOR JERRY ‘SAVAGE APPLE’**
The introduction of Savage Apple, a 70 proof apple-flavored spiced rum, marks the brand’s first new liquid introduction since the launch of the original Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum 19 years ago. Appearing initially in New York and Florida before rolling out across the country, Savage Apple is true to the traditional notes of vanilla and cinnamon in Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum, adding a bold snap of lively apple and cinnamon. Best served chilled.

**SRP: $15.99**
[sailorjerry.com](http://sailorjerry.com)

2. **LaLUCA PROSECCO SUPERIORE VALDOBBIADENE DOCG**
The upscaling of Prosecco continues apace as Opici Wines is bringing in LaLuca Prosecco Superiore Valdobbiadene DOCG. The 100% Glera grapes for this Prosecco come from a densely-planted, southeastern-facing sloped vineyard within the smaller, DOCG zone. The bright straw yellow wine with persistent bubbles includes elegant scents of wild roses and jasmine and fruity notes of golden apple and tropical fruits.

**SRP: $22.99**
[opiciwines.com](http://opiciwines.com)

3. **MÉNAGE À TROIS ‘BOURBON BARREL’ CABERNET SAUVIGNON**
Ménage à Trois, trend-setter of the California Red Blend category, is jumping on another hot trend, releasing a Bourbon Barrel Cabernet Sauvignon. The spirit barrel-aged wine category is now valued at $95 million and is growing even faster than rosé. Breaking into bourbon-barrel aged wine was logical for Ménage à Trois, fresh off success with spin-offs Decadence Cabernet Sauvignon, Luscious Pinot Noir and Lavish Merlot.

**SRP: $15**
[menageatroiswines.com](http://menageatroiswines.com)

4. **GEORGE DICKEL BOTTLED IN BOND TENNESSEE WHISKY**
The Bottled in Bond sub-category continues to grow with George Dickel entering at a competitive price point. By law, to be “bottled in bond,” a product must be from one distillation season by one distillery (in this case at Cascade Hollow Distillery, DSP-TN-2, during fall of 2005), unaltered and stored in oak barrels at a federally bonded warehouse and bottled at 100 proof. Enjoy neat, on the rocks or in cocktails.

**SRP: $35.99**
georgedickel.com

5. **COPPER & KINGS ‘A SONG FOR YOU’ AMERICAN BRANDY**
Louisville-based Copper & Kings is celebrating its fifth anniversary with “A Song For You,” a limited release American brandy matured in bourbon barrels for five years. Bottled at 100 proof, the youngest eau de vie in the blend is 8 years old, and the oldest is 18, with most being 12 and 13. The varietal blend is predominantly Muscat, Chenin Blanc and Colombard. At the time, the brandies were sourced from seven states.

**SRP: $50**
copperandkings.com

6. **BOTA BOX ‘NIGHTHAWK GOLD’ BUTTERY CHARDONNAY**
Bota Box’s “Nighthawk Gold” taps into the momentum of buttery Chardonnays, which are currently trending in the 750ml category, up +48%, and driving total growth for the variety. The new Chardonnay joins Nighthawk Black Red Blend and Nighthawk Black Cabernet, along with the complete Bota Box portfolio. Available in 3L & 1.5L bag-in-boxes, 500ml Tetra Pak.

**SRP: $22.99/3L**
delicato.com | botabox.com
Leverage your current wine and spirits infrastructure and unlock new opportunities in Cannabis

July 2019 in San Francisco will be the first time ever that the drinks industry will get to address this game-changing legislation.

A new conference and exhibition is being launched for the global drinks industry to better understand the challenges and potential opportunities arising from the legalization of cannabis in countries like Canada and an increasing number of states in the USA.

REGISTER at www.cannabisdrinksexpo.com
7. KORBEL ‘ALOHA’ LIMITED EDITION
Taking full advantage of modern bottle-wrap technology, Korbel continues to keep shelves colorful with limited editions. Their latest is “Aloha,” featuring a lively design of multi-colored palm leaves and the winery’s California Extra Dry Champagne. As with all of Korbel’s expressions, it’s made using the méthode champenoise; the bubbly is fruit-forward in style, with notes of citrus and vanilla. Just over 11,000 9L cases produced.

SRP: $13.99  korbel.com

8. CORIBANTE RED BLEND
Frederick Wildman & Sons has launched Coribante—“the perfect go-to wine when entertaining friends.” Coribante hails from Salice Salentino but is an unusual blend of Syrah (kept in stainless steel) and Malvasia (matured in barriques for 12 months), so it is technically Salento IGT. Its fruity aromas with hints of cherries, raspberries and elderflowers lead into more fruit on the palate with light mineral notes. Recommended with red meats, pastas and mature cheeses.

SRP: $14.99  frederickwildman.com

9. KNAPPOGUE CASTLE 12YO MARSALA CASK FINISH
Knappogue Castle Irish Whiskey is releasing the second of their Cask Finish Series, this one featuring Marsala casks. The whiskey first matured in bourbon barrels for a minimum of 12 years and then was finished in Marco De Bartoli Marsala casks from Sicily. With a nose of dried fruit, mocha and vanilla, the whiskey is light and fruity on the palate with a subtle finish that includes fruit and dry oak. 92 proof.

SRP: $80  knappoguewhiskey.com | castlebrandsinc.com

10. DON CICCIO & FIGLI ‘AMBROSIA’ APERITIVO
Don Ciccio & Figli, an Italian herbal liqueur producer based in Washington, DC, has launched Ambrosia, a bittersweet aperitivo. Distilled using a centuries-old family recipe, the liqueur is made with nine botanicals and will be supported with a campaign entitled “Old World, New Charm,” a nod to 135 years of family history that began in Italy. Ambrosia’s complex character offers notes of melon, turmeric, blood orange, carrots and more. Spritz-friendly at just 15% ABV (30 proof).

SRP: $30.99  donciccioefigli.com

11. CAMARENA AÑEJO TEQUILA
Camarena has their newest expression this month: Camarena Añejo Tequila. Best served neat rather than in cocktails, the Añejo offers notes of cooked sweet potato, toasted oak and vanilla. Camarena’s award-winning portfolio also includes Silver and Reposado, all harvested by hand from 100% blue weber agave in Jalisco’s Arandas Highlands and distilled through a proprietary method that blends traditional ovens and modern techniques. 80 proof.

SRP: $29.99  tequilacamarena.com

12. SMOKING LOON ROSÉ & 20TH ANNIVERSARY CABERNET
Celebrating the 20th vintage of their popular Smoking Loon brand, Don Sebastiani & Sons has released a commemorative Cabernet label as well as a new California Rosé. Always refusing to take itself too seriously, over two decades Smoking Loon has developed a cult-like fan base and expanded the portfolio from the original Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay to over a dozen bottlings—now including the 2018 “Steelbird” Rosé.

SRP: $6.99  smokingloon.com