VODKA [RE]DEFINED
NEW CLASSIFICATION EMBRACES TASTE

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The Nielsen marketing research organization reports that most bars and restaurants plan to continue to offer alcohol beverages for take out/delivery, assuming local rules are adjusted to permit it.

Most of the operators said they could not sustain business solely on take out/delivery and that reduced fees from delivery services would be a big help in supporting a sustainable delivery option.

That said, 52% said they will continue offering take out/delivery once they are allowed to reopen, as it is expected that demand for these services will continue.

Many operators expect to reduce their menu offerings at least until the market stabilizes and they look to suppliers for evidence-based guidance to help make the right choices for limited food and drink offerings.

Chain Reaction… According to reports, Chain restaurants have permanently closed over 500 locations so far in 2020. While independent restaurants have been hit much harder than many chains, chains aren’t immune. Chains often rely on independent owner-operators to run restaurants, and these franchises often don’t have the same robust financial resources of the brands they represent.

Even though much of America is opening up, most locales have implemented social-distancing guidelines that make it impossible for restaurants to generate a profit even if they reopen dining rooms. And early data has indicated that reopening isn’t the fiscal cure-all that reopening wasn’t the fiscal cure-all.

The collapse is akin to a wartime depression, the champagne producers’ group CIVC told Reuters recently. Lost sales could total over $1.7 billion euros ($1.9 billion) in 2020, and the downturn could last for many years, it said.

Lost year champagne producers sold nearly 300 million bottles for a record 5 billion euros.

A rebound in sales to key export markets will not be instant, including the United States where a sharp rise in unemployment may change consumption patterns.

The price of some champagne could fall later this year if producers seek to sell their surplus in bargain sales.

In a bid to cut stocks, CIVC decided that some of this year’s grape harvest will not be allowed to be bottled until 2022.

Spain’s cava producers also expect to be severely hit by the crisis, but Italian prosecco makers have seen sales edge higher.

Re-Opening…Beverage Journal staff writer Teddy Durgin has a great piece exploring what (and how) restaurants in Maryland and the District of Columbia are doing to bring patrons’ back. Check out ‘Clearing the Air’ on page 4.

(Thank you Duncan Cameron of Cameron Communications for compiling and sharing portions of the above information.)

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nationwide, restaurants, taverns, and bars are gradually reopening in the pandemic era. And to ensure the return of nervous customers concerned with their health and exposure to a virus still active in the population, some are taking some pretty bold steps. In St. Louis County, Mo., chef-owner Robert Zanti has installed transparent, Plexiglas dividers between tables in his dining room to put guests at ease. Dan’s Place Restaurant in West Greenwich, R.I., has retrofitted its indoor HVAC system with an ultra violet light and metal catalyst that effectively kills viruses in the air.

Closer to home in Maryland and Washington, D.C., our intrepid owners and operators are being similarly aggressive. For example, several popular eateries have purchased ActivePure air purifiers from Vollara Health & Wellness. Dana and Alex Theodoropoulos, proprietors of the Black Forest Taphouse in Fallston, Md., are among them.

Said Dana, “We’ve purchased two air purification systems – one for the bar area and one for the [dining room]. Vollara’s ActivePure technology is the most powerful air and surface purification technology and is the same technology used by NASA for the space shuttles. It’s used to treat problems such as mold, mildew, viruses, bacteria, and allergens in the air. They use ultraviolet light with a fan system to pull in air and then push out the clean air up to 3,000 square feet.”
Local Vollara representative Wade Gowl notes that his company’s air purifiers were popular back in the days before smoking was prohibited in restaurants and bars. Fortunately, the technology has endured. "Everybody is going to be wary of eating out, maybe from now on," he stated. "They want to not only feel safe, but be safe. Coincidentally, we just happened to have the proper technology to take care of their concerns. You just plug it in and turn it on. There's sometimes a little adjustment that needs to be done. But it's nothing complicated. You don't have to talk to the landlord about putting it in either. It basically looks like a stereo speaker. It should be placed where most of the people are. The more wide open your interior is, and the more air flow there is, the better job it will do."

His colleague, Leia Ryan, added, "Indoor environmental conditioning is what we are doing. Restaurant owners’ No. 1 priority is keeping the customer safe. The nice thing about our technology is it's filter-less technology. You set it on a counter, and it will indeed take care of a 3,000-square-foot area and two to three levels."

Also proving popular is an anti-microbial fogging spray championed by Tony Anzelone, owner of Bianchi Fogging Services in Virginia. The historic Martin's Tavern (where John F. Kennedy proposed to Jackie in one of the booths) in D.C.'s Georgetown neighborhood contracted his service, and Anzelone is looking to expand his clientele into Maryland.

Anzelone typically comes in around closing time when everything is being shut down and fogs the entire restaurant with the anti-microbial spray. He focuses on hot spots like the entryway of the restaurant, the entry of the kitchen, behind the bar -- areas that get the most (continued on next page)

BELOW: Lenny Wohlforth, owner of Oliver's Old Towne Tavern in Laurel, MD, took steps to offer outdoor dining for the first time ever.
foot traffic.

"But I do hit every nook and cranny that I possibly can," he said. "And I also focus on hitting the ducts, the vents, and the air registers. It's a quick process. The average restaurant is around 4,000- to 5,000 square feet. From the time I set up to the time I leave, it's right around 45 minutes to an hour. You then come in as the proprietor the next morning and do your normal set-up, wiping down the countertops, the condiments, and so forth and that's basically it."

He added, "The good thing about fogging as opposed to just spraying with a bleach bottle is fogging gets every nook and cranny. These anti-microbial sprays are live bacteria. They stay alive and in that property effective for up to 90 days. So, if someone comes in with COVID-19 and they start touching things, all of your spraying goes right out the window. It's only good until somebody comes in who's infected. An anti-microbial spray has live bacteria that eats bad bacteria, that stays on the property for 90 days while you are open."

So far, Martin's Tavern owner Billy Martin is impressed. "Tony's service has given us a lot more peace of mind," he remarked. "We still do the day-to-day wiping of everything down. But it's the areas that you can't get to or can't see where the fogging is really good."

Martin and the Theodoropouloses aren't the only ones dealing with the "new normal." When the word came down in late May from Governor Hogan and the state government that Maryland restaurants could only start serving customers on site via outdoor seating, Lenny Wohlfarth, owner of Oliver's Old Towne Tavern in Laurel, Md., took steps to offer outdoor dining for the first time ever.

"We did a trial run and things went pretty well," he noted. "We have five tables, and we can fit four to a spot. We're taking reservations for Noon, 2 p.m., 4 p.m., and 6 p.m. We've been asking people to be patient with the situation and be able to have their tabs closed at 15 minutes 'til the next reservation. That gives us time to sanitize things properly."

"We have sanitizing spray available for the customers that the servers can bring over," he added, "sort of like our version of Olive Garden coming to the table with the grated parm! We also are using the front door only for carry-out. We let the outdoor diners know that they can use the restrooms. But they use the side entrance, and a mask has to be worn to come inside."

Alex Theodoropoulos is taking a page from some of the national fast-food and casual dining chains that have been open throughout the crisis with curbside pickup and delivery. "All employees will be temperature checked upon arrival during the reopening phases," he pointed out. "According to CDC guidelines, if we detect an employee’s temperature to be above 100.4, we should ask for you to leave and be tested. I am reducing the 100.4 guideline to 100.0 flat. You will be required to provide proof from a doctor with a return back-to-work date."

He and Dana are also encouraging customers to use their electronics to view the Taphouse’s menus. Billy Martin is also go-
ing the technology route: “Right now, we’re using one-time-use paper menus. But we’re looking at getting QR codes with our menus on them so that people can look everything up on their phones and order off of that. We’re working with a couple of companies to get a good price on that and should have up and running shortly, too.”

Chris Richards, owner of Greenmount Station in Hampstead, Md., is another proprietor who is looking forward to a full reopening. He also has installed Vollara’s air purifier in his restaurant’s interior. What are some other steps he’s taken? “We have a COVID-19 sanitizing training [program] that we will be doing for returning waitstaff. We’ll continue to keep an hourly log of wiping down door knobs and anything that gets touched on a regular basis. Every hour on the hour, we’ve been doing that. We’ll be wearing masks. We’ve increased our hand washing frequencies. We won’t have any communal condiments on the tables either. We’ll have things like single-serve packets of ketchup, salt, pepper, and so forth.”

Everyone interviewed for this article agreed that taking such measures means very little if customers aren’t aware of what they’ve done. Vollara’s Gowl and Ryan concur that signage is key. The latter remarked, “We offer 8.5-inch x 11-inch signage. It says to the customer that this area is being treated by ActivePure and that is a solution to problems like viruses, bacteria, allergies, asthma, smoke, VOCs, odors, mold, and mildew. We also have 18x24 window and door signage, so basically your clientele on the outside can tell, ‘Hey, they’re doing something different in there.”

Martin has been especially aggressive in getting the word out. “We have touted [the anti-microbial fogging] on social media. We have some signs up. And we’ve gotten some big ’Thumbs up!’ from people as a result, saying, ‘That’s great!’”

Anzelone concluded, “You want to take the steps to let everyone know they’re safe when they’re entering your restaurant. That means you have to get it out communication-wise. You have to let everybody know that you’ve taken the steps that need to be taken for your customers to come back and have a good experience. Nothing is 100 percent. But you have to do everything you possibly can to make sure people are taken care of.”

Tony Anzelone, Owner
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BIG BRANDS BREAK OUT THE ALUMINUM

What hath White Claw wrought? This looks like the summer some huge trade names get serious about hard seltzer. Like superstar athletes switching sports, they are making a splash at their new game. Meanwhile, natural flavors and ingredients are becoming important points of distinction.

■ The Jack Daniel’s Canned Cocktails series is all about Jack: Jack & Seltzer (5% ABV); Jack & Cola (7% ABV); and Jack, Honey & Lemonade (7% ABV); all 97 calories. Says brand director Lisa Hunter: “Each drink is perfectly balanced to highlight the flavors of our charcoal-mellowed whiskey in a convenient format. This is real Jack and it’s ready to go.” $12.99/four-pack of 12 oz. cans.

■ New from MolsonCoors, Vizzy is available in Pineapple Mango, Black Cherry Lime, Blueberry Pomegranate, and Strawberry Kiwi. The hook: it’s the first hard seltzer to feature vitamin-C-rich acerola cherry superfruit. Made with fermented cane sugar, gluten-free, 100 calories, 1 gram sugar, 5% ABV, 12 oz. cans.

■ The Anheuser-Busch innovation team believes they found a gap in the hard seltzer market, with consumer research showing that 83% of cocktail drinkers are interested in a complex and sophisticated beverage. Their answer to that: Social Club Seltzer; with 150 calories and 7% ABV per 12 oz can, in three classic cocktail-inspired flavors: Old Fashioned, Sidecar, and Citrus Gimlet.

■ Bacardi is off the sidelines with the launch of Bacardi Real Rum Cocktails. The line is made with natural flavors and real ingredients, but its most important attribute is the flagship rum base. Counting on its “Real Rum” character to to win fans, Bacardi is keeping things simple, with three variants in 12 oz (355 ml) slim cans: Lime & Soda, Limon & Lemonade, and Rum Punch. All are 5.9% ABV; SRP $12.99/four-pack.

SQUARE ONE KEEPIN’ IT REAL (& ORGANIC)

Another sign of seltzer’s serious side: organic entries. Last month, Prairie, this month Square One—who pioneered the concept of organic vodka and botanical spirits over a decade ago. Square One Organic Cocktails use all organic ingredients—vodka, juice, botanical extracts—and no artificial preservatives. The playful portfolio includes: Pear of Roses, Basil Berry Fizz, Mediterranean Pearl, and Cucumber Therapy. Square One Organic Cocktails are lightly carbonated, 7.5% ABV, SRP $19.99/four-pack (12 oz).

VETERAN CANNER CUTWATER TAPS INTO SOUTHWEST REGION FAVORITE

Cutwater Spirits has released a Tequila Soda, inspired by the popular southwestern call-drink known as Ranch Water. Simple yet refined, it features Cutwater Tequila, house-made soda water, and a hint of lime, at 7% ABV. This is the third tequila-based offering in Cutwater’s RTD portfolio, preceded by Margarita and Paloma; in all, it’s the 18th member of the canned cocktail line. No sugar, zero carbs, 130 calories, SRP $12.99/four-pack (12 oz).
SUMMER JUST GOT A LITTLE SWEETER

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There’s a high concentration of oil and protein in oats that can make it through 95 proof distillation, yielding a spirit with lots of fruity and floral aromas and a viscosity and structure unlike the hundreds of clean and crisp vodkas made from the usual suspects (potato, corn, wheat, rye...). “The 100% oat vodka is a challenge to the vodka category, and a bit intense for the neutral vodka drinker,” says Jeffery, which is why the distillery now makes both an oat vodka and a wheat-oat vodka mash-up under its Source One label.
Not long ago, the distillery might have been thought to be running afoul of the TTB’s “flavorless, odorless and colorless” rules about vodka. But since April, that definition is gone from the rules set by the government agency in charge of such things. Whether it’s because of progressive producers like Bently Heritage or changing American tastes, now there’s no excuse for neutrality and sameness in the category anymore.

Nothing changes immediately for the makers of vodka, which accounts for just under one-third of all spirit sales. In fact, many already have been emphasizing the organoleptic qualities of their spirits. But maybe this represents a philosophical shift for the category.

There have always been people proselytizing vodka as a spirit with a range of characters, flavors, and aromas, including Tony Abou-Ganim, partner in Libertine Social at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas and the author of Vodka Distilled. As early as the late 1990s, Abou-Ganim hosted seminars highlighting the differences among brands.

“The old definition was a detriment to the category,” he says. “When the wave of vodkas flooded the market in the late 1990s [to] early 2000s, it seemed the pitch was always, ’It’s pure as water,’ or ‘It’s smooth as water.’ But that’s not what vodka should be! In Europe, especially eastern Europe, vodka had character and was robust. For some reason as it moved west, it became a more neutral spirit.”

“Premium vodkas have always had taste and odor, despite the rule, and brands that make high-quality vodka are now going to be playing on a level playing field, being able to market the unique character and flavor profiles of their brands,” says Jeff Mahoney, CEO for the Austrian rye-based Neft Vodka.

As for the new definition, the TTB rule now reads: “Vodka is neutral spirits which may be treated with up to two grams per liter of sugar and up to one gram per liter of citric acid. Products to be labeled as vodka may not be aged or stored in wood barrels at any time except when stored in paraffin-lined wood barrels and labeled as bottled in bond... Vodka treated and filtered with not less than one ounce of activated carbon or activated charcoal per 100 wine gallons of spirits may be labeled as ‘charcoal filtered.’”

**Regional Terroir & Diversity**

Traditionally, European vodkas have been defined by region and ingredient—the clean, light Scandinavian style; the oily, rich Polish style; and the earthy, pungent Russian style. Source material is just as important, with wheat vodkas often subtly crisp, corn vodkas sweet, potato vodkas creamy and robust, and rye vodkas spicy with a peppery bite.

Distiller Ken Wyatt of Idaho’s 44 North makes both wheat and potato vodka. “There is a significant difference between them even though they are made in the same place and same still,” says Wyatt. “Our wheat vodka is smooth and a bit peppery, while the potato has more character, a creaminess and a different mouthfeel that makes it stand out.” Potato’s creamy and buttery texture makes it more suitable for vodka cocktails like Mules, while he favors the wheat in a Martini.

Notable among major brands showcasing character differences has been Polish distiller Belvedere, with its duo of estate-grown rye vodkas: Smogóry Forest and Lake Bartężek. “We have not only achieved something evolutionary for the brand but crucially for the category as well,” says global brand education and training manager Alice Farquhar. “It has enabled us to facilitate a new conversation around vodka, that in fact it is not just the anonymous spirit
in your drink and they absolutely do not all taste the same.”

Brand materials assert that the two unflavored vodkas made from the same strain of rye using the same production methods “taste completely different and showcase not only aromatic and tasting differences but texturally behave differently in the mouth.” Belvedere describes Smogóry as having notes of salted caramel, cereal, honey, toast, white pepper, and fudge while Lake is described as grainy, grassy, with flavors of almond, mint, and menthol.

Neft’s Mahoney notes that purity of ingredients and distillation processes have also become important with consumers and as a way to differentiate a spirit. He describes Neft as having a slightly sweet taste coming from four rye strains and non-demineralized water.

Growing Demand for Vodka with Personality

Broken Shed, a New Zealand import made from whey, features notes of butterscotch, vanilla and citrus according to producers. Like Neft, they accentuate local water as an important flavor component.

“Today’s consumer is more guided by his or her individual taste distinctions and product knowledge than any government definition,” says president Steve Bellini. “The odorless, colorless and tasteless designation for vodka has long faded away in everyone’s mind.”

Whether the changes will have any impact is debatable, though. As Reid Hafer, group product director for Heaven Hill Brands’ Texas-made corn vodka Deep Eddy, says, the identity of vodka itself is unlikely to change. “The new regulations provide both more definition to the category while also allowing for a more broad take on the spirit itself. However, this does allow more of a craft aspect to play a part in the category.”

Abou-Ganim notes that distillation methods and yeasts are acknowledged as important factors in other spirits and may gain awareness within vodka now as well. “We’re seeing some beautiful vodkas being made in the U.S. today,” he says.

Wyatt points out that flavors will still be stripped out of many brands as TTB rules require the spirit to achieve 95 percent alcohol by volume during distillation in order to be called vodka. “But over time, we’ll be seeing innovation as distillers look for opportunities,” says Wyatt. “The large consumer base will still want smooth vodkas but character will matter more, especially to the craft cocktail segment.”

Winning the IMAGE GAME

Because of the spirit’s erstwhile “neutral” character over the decades, vodka marketers have made up in personality for what their products lacked in flavor. Absolut was a trailblazer with its stylish ads dominating back covers of magazines in the 1990s. Places has long been a reliable vodka calling card; think Poland (Lwow, Wodka, Lukowskowa, Wyborowa, Sobieski); France (Grey Goose, Cîroc), Finland (Finlandia), Canada (Iceberg), Iceland (Reyka), the Netherlands (Ketel One), even Japan (Haku). Russia’s vodka symbolism is so strong that brands don’t make there still love to sound like they are (Stolichnaya, Smirnoff). Here in the U.S., Tito’s put Texas on the vodka map; Deep Eddy and Western Son joined the Texas brigade, both specializing in flavors.

Raw materials have also been points of distinction as vodka can be distilled from practically anything that contains sugar. To wit, there are vodkas made from beets (BÈT), quinoa (Fair), rice (Ao), milk (Black Cow), and spelt (Snow Leopard). And let’s not forget water; Leaf Vodka makes one vodka with Alaskan glacial water and one with Rocky Mountain mineral water.

Even more unique to vodka is its emphasis on pristine production—as in the case of Purity Vodka, distilled 34 times, and brands touting filters from charcoal to platinum to diamonds. And in keeping with the times, the category now has its share of organic vodkas, including Prairie, Crop, Ocean, American Harvest, Grainger’s, and Square One.
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DEEP EDDY VODKA

AUSTIN'S ORIGINAL

DISTILLED 10 TIMES

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PREMIUM INGREDIENTS

MADE IN SMALL BATCHES
LIQUIDATION SITUATION

PROS’ BEST ADVICE FOR STRATEGIZING HIGH-END WINE SALES DURING A DOWNTURN

BY BETSY ANDREWS

Wine directors have been weighing decisions like that as struggling restaurateurs look to their cellars for liquidity. Although moving $20 bottles with takeout food might be a no-brainer, the luxury end requires a much more strategic approach. For sommeliers and restaurant owners considering selling gems from their cellar to generate income, professionals shared their advice with SevenFifty Daily.

n mid-March, when California Governor Gavin Newsom asked restaurants to close their doors against COVID-19, Jim Rollston, wine director at San Francisco’s Manresa, acted quickly, offering to sell select cult bottles from his cellar. “I had one [Weingut] Keller G-Max and thought, ‘Somebody’s gonna want this,’” he says. “You feel okay about putting it into someone else’s cellar.”

Consulting sommelier Jon McDaniel of Chicago’s Second City Soil says protecting your restaurant’s identity is more important than getting quick cash: “Anything you would be heartbroken to sell or that defines who you are as a program, take those things off the list.”

A targeted sale, however, can reinforce a restaurant’s reputation. When Joe Campanale threw open the cellars at Brooklyn’s oenophilic destination Fausto, the half-off purge lasted one weekend, and lines around the block garnered press attention.

Others decide what to sell based on inventory and allocations. Rollston felt he was able to part with some big California reds, which were desirable wines a few years ago but are out of fashion today. For her two-day sale at Manhattan’s Racines, Pascaline Lepeltier listed wines she could recoup later: plentiful Bordeaux or things
for which she had a decent allocation. "We preserved what was rare because we won’t have much money to spend on wine when we reopen," she says.

At San Francisco’s The Morris, wine director Paul Einbund is offering pre-sales on yet-to-be-delivered allocations, a strategy that brings the liquidity to secure future vintages. "We might lose some of our 2017 Burgundy," he says, "but we will keep a few bottles, make some people happy, and keep our allocations for next year."

**DISCOUNT STRATEGICALLY**

How do you balance the discount that moves a wine with the margin that makes the sale worthwhile? Do your homework, says Rollston. He checks open-market pricing and availability on sites like Wine-Searcher. If there are only a couple of bottles on offer, the wine is rare enough that you can price it just below the market, and someone might buy it. Wines with longer-lived reputations—Burgundy’s Coche-Dury Corton-Charlemagne, for instance—can have many sellers. Those are difficult to offload without gutting the price, so you might want to hold onto them.

Brent Kroll has taken a more blanket approach. At Maxwell Park in Washington, D.C., he’s priced everything, from entry-level sparkling to DRC, at 30 percent off. That’s still higher than retail, so it protects his bottom line. "If you sell your wine at 50 to 60 percent off, you’re creating a ripple effect for when you reopen," he says. "If everyone’s dining with you on the cheap now, it will be hard to command viable pricing later."

Others price relative to their inventory. At Spago Beverly Hills, wine and spirits director Phillip Dunn kept a good amount of Krug Grande Cuvée 167ème Edition around for glass pours, so he’s now able to offer it at the bargain price of $130 a bottle to go with meal deliveries. And with a case in his cellar that he bought from a collector on the gray market, he could put a 2003 Château Mouton Rothschild on Spago’s steak-to-go "Cut Dinner" menu for $650.

Sean Beck, beverage director at Houston’s Htown Restaurant Group, is selling everything from $85 “starter” six-packs to a 2014 Domaine Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne for $350. Wine deliveries have brought in as much as $13,000 a weekend, plus tips for staff. Sales like that, he says, "help us keep going and bring in revenue that has, in turn, allowed us to bring [furloughed] employ-ees back on. We have a number of servers who have been delivery drivers for weeks. The sales also help keep producing shift meals for out-of-work staff, both our own and others. It’s not a cure, but it stops the bleeding.”

**TAP YOUR REGULARS**

“Avoid the scavengers,” says Beck. He learned his lesson with one bargain hunter. “I put a bottle of Continuum in a bag for him for $190, and he didn’t tip my staff, so what’s the incentive for me?” he says.

Nelson Daquip, beverage director at Seattle’s Canlis, is mostly selling wines below $50 to pair with food deliveries. But there are labels in a whole different category on Canlis’s list that Daquip has been willing to part with for trusted guests. "We’ve never sold Domaine de la Romanée-Conti out the back door," he says. “There were a few people I knew who drank it in the restaurant that I felt comfortable wouldn’t resell it, and that’s where I went. I was not going to discount it, and they felt comfortable with that.”

But, because Daquip has a relationship with his regulars, he can also direct them to bottles for which he’ll make a decent return but won’t deplete his entire stock of the most cultish wines. "If they say, ‘We’re really only interested in it if it’s going to be discounted,’ I say, ‘Why DRC? Save that for the next time you’re in the dining room having dinner and we can provide the experience it’s meant to be enjoyed with. Here’s something that’s $300. It’s a good start. And they’re like, ‘Okay, cool.’”
Regulars look to favorite restaurants for both entertainment and guidance. If you provide that, you can move pricier wines.

**PROVIDE MORE THAN JUST WINE**

Regulars look to restaurants for entertainment and guidance. If you provide it, you can move pricier wines. Daquip has added a “text a somm” number to Canlis’s website and a “raid the cellar” button to its Tock ordering page. Both allow potential wine buyers to reach him directly for bespoke advice on purchases.

Collin Moody of Chicago’s Income Tax Bar promoted “fun” bundles of allocated wines on Instagram, like a $99 “steak dinner” two-pack including a 2014 Duplessis Chablis Premier Cru and a Cathy Corison Napa Valley Cabernet. The strategy piqued interest, creating “a culture around people calling and emailing” for collectibles, he says. “It’s a best-case scenario for them. Like, ‘Hey, you know that Keller you’ve been looking at on the list for two years? Now it’s this price.’ With all the money they’re not spending going out, that bottle looks more reasonable.”

**WHEN TO CONSIDER AUCTION HOUSES OR CONSULTANTS**

To finance its employee relief fund, Union Square Hospitality Group (USHG) held an online auction with Zachys, where it offered 498 lots. For that much wine, using auctioneers make sense. Auction houses have stables of collectors to reach out to, and they put marketing power behind the sales. But in an auction, says McDaniel, “nothing is guaranteed.” Results are best with blue-chip bottles, like the Lafite or Margaux that USHG was selling. “If your wines are too obscure,” he says, “they won’t get bid on.”

Auctions also take time. Wines must be inventoried, catalogues printed, bids finalized. But online auctioneers are fast-tracking payouts now. Zachys waived its 10 percent commission (which is comparable to that at other houses, like Sotheby’s) and shared its buyer premium with USHG.

A quicker, surer tactic is to contact a consultant like Private Cellar Selections’ Tim Kopec. He hunts down wines for collector clients. “When you go to auction, it takes time, and it’s the open market. It can be good to you, and you can make more than you thought you would, or it can be very penal. A company like mine can make a cash offer,” he says. “People give us their list and say, ‘We need to raise $10,000.’ We negotiate from there. We provide liquidity at fair prices.”

Whichever route you choose, don’t wait too long to sell. “As we saw in 2008, prices can go down quickly,” says Kopec. “The earlier you do it, the greater control you have.”

**KEEP AN EYE ON THE FUTURE**

With the goal of refilling your dining room with wine drinkers one day, you can protect your list or plan on rebuilding it later. Joe Campanale chose the former tactic with his single-weekend sale. “We wanted to bring in funds early on, but we didn’t want to wipe out our inventory because we plan on reopening,” he says. Still, given the prolonged shutdown and the “need to get creative,” according to business partner Illyssa Satter, Campanale held another cellar sale at his natural wine bar in Brooklyn, LaLou, in May.

In Houston, Sean Beck took the opposite approach. “I’ve decimated two of my lists,” he says. “But there’s never been more great wine available, and once this is all done, sadly, there will be fewer people in my genre to buy it, so I will have options.”

In the end, says Pascaline Lepeltier, restaurants shouldn’t have to ravage their cellars to survive. “We are being forced to sell off our means of work because the state is not able to give back what we’ve contributed as businesses. We paid enough taxes. We need help from the government.”

But if loans don’t come through, she’ll sell more. “If tomorrow we have to start from scratch, we start from scratch,” Lepeltier says. “We have the talent in house to make a small, tight list and build back from that. There will always be wine. Some of the greatest wines come from tiny wineries without big names. You can really start again.”
Captured in Trentino, Italy.

There is a wine that transports you to Trentino with just one taste. It’s Mezzacorona Pinot Grigio. An elegant expression of our beautiful land.

AUTHENTIC. SUSTAINABLE. PURE. ITALIAN.
When people talk about wine, they routinely mention “French wine,” “Italian wine,” “Australian wine,” and so forth. But what about American wine? That particular phrase isn’t used as often, perhaps because California is such a dominant source. But the fact is, American wine is better than ever (thanks in large part to California), and a wine that draws attention to that contemporary truth makes perfect sense.

The Great American Wine Company (TGAWC) was created by Kent Rosenblum, a pioneering vintner aiming to expand with a nationally distributed brand. Rosenblum started in 1978, and from the beginning, his approach to winemaking was innovative: Eschewing the estate model, he sourced fruit from multiple Northern California regions, and he made the wine at an urban facility in Alameda—a place known for shipyards, not vineyards.


SEVERAL NEW TWISTS
In 2016, Bronco Wine Company acquired the label. Continuing the brand’s embrace of both tradition and innovation, TGAWC incorporated the novel Helix—a resealable, all-cork, twist-off stopper. Bronco also updated the line to fit American tastes and clearly communicate the brand message. “We aim to position The Great American Wine Company as the wine for the American table,” says marketing manager Rachel Kroneder. “Our brand embodies the pioneering spirit of America through its innovative packaging and Helix closure while still representing the tradition and practices of quality winemaking.”

The product rings true to its name. TGAWC’s seven wines not only represent America’s most important wine state, but they also reflect Americans’ most popular varietal wines of late. Line pricing (SRP $12.99) keeps the message simple, while red, cream, and blue labels present a vintage Americana feel.

SUMMER SPOTLIGHT
This year, Bronco is promoting a partnership with the National Park Foundation (NPF), the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service: $3.00 from each case of TGAWC sold will be donated to support the NPF’s mission to preserve and enrich America’s national treasures.

The new partnership is reinforced at the point of sale with graphic boxes and neck hangers. “The great aspect to this is the regional tie-in we can do with our POS,” Kroneder adds. “We are able to highlight local parks, landmarks, and monuments within markets to allow for local association. We strive to make this our top quarter even with the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Naturally, the brand is counting on a sales bump from America’s birthday on July 4th, but Kroneder also expects strong results all summer. “Summer is a time for American pastime traditions,” she says. “Consumers will be camping, BBQing, hiking, and spending time outdoors. Our product allows for easy convenience for all those occasions.”
The Great American Wine Company, by Rosenblum Cellars, is a tribute to the pioneering spirit of America. We proudly use the finest grapes from California vineyards to pay tribute to classic American varietals and winemaking techniques.
In addition to viruses, there are other exclusions, and many insurers nationwide are not compensating businesses that have incurred devastating losses due to civil authority shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. But business owners can use this time to review their existing policy and shop for coverage that can better protect against future crises as well as more ordinary risks.

Be Honest About Your Valuations

It can be tempting to let an agent “do you a favor” by undervaluing your sales or property values to save on premiums, says Rachel Grieder, vice president of the Alcohol/Brewery Insurance Division of CedarBrew Insurance Agency in Flemington, New Jersey. Not only is this illegal, she notes, but it also won’t give you what you need when you need it. “If a brewer filed a claim where they needed to submit sales figures to make them ‘whole’ and they submitted $250,000 in taproom sales but had originally applied for coverage under the guise

“I self-insured until last year, when [Hurricane] Irma came through.”

– Frank Chivas, owner of 10 restaurant-bars in Florida
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of just $100,000 in sales, what is that owner going to do? Be out $150,000?” she says.

Furthermore, says Brian Boak, a former brewery owner and current risk advisor for Boaks Advisors in Wayne, New Jersey, “Make sure your property limit and build-out coverage is equal to what it would cost to replace everything at full cost—not just what you paid.”

**Don’t Skimp on Accident Liability**

Insurance agents report they are shocked at how few businesses that serve alcohol have adequate liquor and/or accident liability policies. On-premise operators are overwhelmingly held responsible for any patron who gets in an accident after drinking at their bar, restaurant, or tasting room, even if that patron was intoxicated prior to entering. “Cut corners somewhere else,” advises Paul Hyatt, owner of Skunktown Distillery in Flemington, New Jersey. “You could lose a lot more.”

In the case of an accident—a trip-and-fall, for example—it pays to purchase coverage for yourself in addition to extending your coverage beyond your door. Hyatt recently bought accident insurance for a 1,000-foot radius around his distillery, though he doesn’t own the property.

**Get Spoilage/Recall Coverage**

After Tony Peck, owner of Tulsa, Oklahoma’s Dead Armadillo Craft Brewing discovered that a *diastaticus* contamination of yeast had caused some beer cans to explode, he learned that his insurance policy did, in fact, have a clause for contamination, but not after beer had left the brewery. “Once we turned in a claim we realized that in our policy there’s a difference between product that’s internal versus product that’s at the distributor versus product that’s at retail,” he says.

Peck brought beer back from his distributor and dumped four batches, then exhaustively scrubbed down the bre-whouse. Though the incident cost him $40,000 in sales ($50,000 if you include cleaning time and products, plus $1,200 worth of discarded yeast), he received just $21,000 from his carrier.

**Broaden ‘Loss of Business’**

Whether or not any entrepreneur ever sees insurance benefits from coronavirus closures, the pandemic is raising awareness that loss of business coverage can (under other circumstances) prove beneficial.

If one day you have to temporarily shut down because of, say, a lightning strike to your building, you can collect disbursements for payroll and other expenses, and insurance companies offer a lot of options here. As business owners in California have learned from successive wildfires and planned power outages, it’s possible to purchase riders that insure financial loss from damage to property you don’t own—such as falling electrical lines on your street—as well as universal government orders to halt operations.

Though your primary insurance company may not cover fires in California or hurricanes in Florida, you might want to protect yourself from these natural or man-made disasters by purchasing additional insurance policies from other carriers.

In 2017, Frank Chivas, who owns 10 restaurant-bars in and around Clearwater, Florida, instructed his broker to find him what’s colloquially called a “wind package” to supplement his primary insurance, which did not cover wind damage because of his hurricane-prone locations. It brings Chivas priceless peace of mind, despite costing three times as much as a similar package for a restaurant in a non-wind-prone or coastal location.

“I self-insured until last year, when [Hurricane] Irma came through,” he says. “Even though it changed course and missed me, people said I needed to buy wind insurance,” so he did.

Another potential problem to consider: Covering your company in the event that one of your primary suppliers or manufacturers goes out of business and you can’t meet ordinary revenue projections.

**Coverage Behind the Wheel**

It’s critical to purchase auto coverage for any sales or delivery staff who customarily uses their own car to perform job duties, yet a surprising number of businesses do without.

Brian Boak stressed the importance of this at his weekly Brewers Roundtable educational forum recently, noting that coverage needs to include employees who may occasionally drive their own vehicle, or rent one, in the course of performing a one-off work task. During shelter-in-place orders, that applies to in-house employees who began delivering alcohol or food.

When purchasing this kind of coverage, Boak says, don’t forget to include yourself in the policy, in the event you crash your own car—or a rental—driving to an event or making a delivery.
1. **SEAGRAM’S WATERMELON TWISTED GIN**

This new flavored gin starts with the original Seagram’s Extra Dry Gin and is infused with juicy watermelon flavors that balance the botanical essences of the hero expression. Inspired by consumer demand, this new expression is one of the first watermelon flavored gins widely distributed within the U.S. Seagram’s Watermelon Twisted Gin can be enjoyed on the rocks, with soda water or tonic, or with a favorite juice or mixer.

| SRP: $10.99 |
| seagramsgin.com |

2. **VERDI & SPARKLETINI IN CANS**

One of America’s favorite Italian bubblies is now available in four-packs of sleek 250ml cans. The available flavors are: Verdi Spumante, Raspberry Sparkletini, and Watermelon Sparkletini. Verdi’s signature light and fruity sparkling flavor has been enjoyed for over 25 years and is expected to appeal to consumers of both canned wine and canned RTD cocktails. The affordable cans also are perfect for consumers looking for a chilled alternative to a full-size bottle.

| SRP: $7.99/four-pack (250ml) |
| chibrands.com |

3. **FRATELLI 2017 RED BLEND**

Kreps-family-owned Quintessential is launching an Italian-inspired Napa Valley red wine under the Fratelli label—with the bold declaration that it is an “American Super Tuscan Blend.” The rich, aromatic combination of Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon was made by Napa Valley winemaker Robert Pepi, who was among the first to grow Sangiovese in California in the 1980s. He believes the Sangiovese adds brightness and a roundness, softening the “big tannins” of the Cabernet.

| SRP: $29.99 |
| quintessentialwines.com |

4. **PURE ‘ZERO SUGAR’ WINES**

Positioned innovatively as “a blend of time-honored winemaking tradition and modern thinking,” the new line of Pure Wines boasts zero sugar and only 10.5% ABV on the front of the bottles. The Pure line comprises: a light floral and fruity White made from Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc; a Red blend of Barbera and Merlot, highlighted by cherry notes; and a Sparkling White and Sparkling Rosé, each made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

| rivieraimports.com | purethewinery.com |

5. **VANDERPUMP VARIETAL WINES**

The Vanderpump family and Palm Bay International are adding two Sonoma County wines to the red-hot Vanderpump Côtes de Provence Rosé, which launched in 2017. Vanderpump Chardonnay is a 100% estate grown wine from Sonoma Coast; the Bordeaux-inspired Cabernet Sauvignon uses grapes from the Sonoma Valley and Alexander Valley AVAs. Packaging features the family crest with its rose detail and the Vanderpump signature in raised-gold print.

| palmbay.com |

6. **CAMP CRUSH WINE IN CANS**

The ultimate camping wine just got even handier, in new 250ml cans. Topographic-map lines and a hand-drawn campsite scene set the tone for outdoor fun; the lightweight recyclable aluminum cans go practically anywhere and chill super fast. Three Camp Crush expressions are: Pink, with ripe stone fruit and honeysuckle; Red, with dark cherry, plum and vanilla notes; and White, highlight by melon and gentle sweetness. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.

| SRP: $15.99 |
| broncowine.com |
7. **SALCOMBE GINS**
The UK’s Salcombe Gin is launching in the U.S. with two critically acclaimed signature gins: “Start Point” and Salcombe Gin “Rosé Sainte Marie”—both recent Double Gold winners at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. Start Point (88 proof) is a classic citrus-led London Dry Gin; and Rosé Sainte Marie (82.8 proof) is an all-natural pink gin with notes of fresh strawberries, lemon thyme, and orange blossom, and contains no added sugar or artificial colors.

SRP: $39.99  
salcombedistilling.com

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8. **LA CATRINA WINE COCKTAILS**
The success of La Catrina bottled wine cocktails led the way for these canned spin-offs, available in best-selling Margarita, Mojito, Paloma, and Strawberry Margarita. Made with agave wine and natural flavors, La Catrina blends heritage with a contemporary approach in an authentic wine cocktail taste. Inspired by Mexico City and its culture of reinvention, the RTD cocktails are made with real juice, real sugar, and real agave. 250ml; 13.9% ABV. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.

SRP: $15.99/four-pack (250ml)  
broncowine.com

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9. **ARD Beg ‘WEE BEASTIE’ SINGLE MALT SCOTCH**
From elusive sea creatures to eerie half-breeds, the Ardbeg Distillery has a history of exploring odd legends in their bottlings. The latest permanent expression to join the core range—Ardbeg Wee Beastie, at just five years old—is an intensely powerful smoky whisky that will fit right in with the famously smoky portfolio. Matured in ex-bourbon and Oloroso sherry casks, Wee Beastie is described as a "monster of a dram," with a formidable bite.

SRP: $46.99  
ardbeg.com

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10. **‘EVOLUTION’ BAG-IN-BOX WINES**
Sokol Blosser Winery, one of the Willamette Valley’s pioneering wineries founded nearly 50 years ago, is leading again—with the creation of Evolution boxed wines. Evolution 2019 Oregon Pinot Noir and Evolution 2019 Lucky No. 9 White Blend will be packaged in 1.5L boxes that also feature a new look. Sokol Blosser turned to a partner in California for packaging, so while both wines include fruit from the Willamette Valley, neither can legally include that AVA name.

SRP: $25 Pinot Noir  |  $18 White Blend  
evolutionwine.com  |  sokolblosser.com

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11. **WILD TURKEY ‘MASTER’S KEEP’ BOTTLED IN BOND**
Wild Turkey has released the latest (fifth) in the brand’s Master’s Keep series: Master’s Keep Bottled in Bond. This 17-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey recalls the brand’s American Spirit release of 2007, one of the first Bottled in Bond whiskeys by a bourbon distiller. That one was 15 years of age; for this one, says Master Distiller Eddie Russell, “we took the historic process and protocol of aging for four years to the next level.”

SRP: $175  
wildturkey.com

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12. **CHÂTEAU CLIMENS 2018 ‘ASPHODÈLE’**
Breaking fresh ground in Bordeaux, Château Climens—known for making sweet white wines in the region of Barsac—is making a dry Semillon. Proprietor Berenice Lurton collaborated with Pascal Jolivet from Sancerre. From a vineyard that converted to biological methods in 2010, the 100% Semillon grapes were fermented with natural yeasts and aged for eight months on the lees in stainless steel, not oak. Asphodèle is the French name for a wild lily.

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THE COVID-19 CRISIS HASN'T DENTED CHIEF'S BAR'S STANDING IN ITS COMMUNITY

BY TEDDY DURGIN

Chief’s Bar is the kind of place people REALLY miss going to when there is a snowstorm, a tropical storm, when they’re traveling … or when there’s a global outbreak of a deadly coronavirus. The business has been a community hub in Tall Timbers, Md., since 1927. David Dent is the second generation of his family to own the business since 1978. He has come to appreciate both Chief’s history and the place it has in people’s hearts.

"Chief’s is truly ‘Your Neighborhood Bar,’" he declared, during a late May interview with the Beverage Journal. "I am always amazed at the number of guests who celebrate their birthdays with us. We have hosted birthday parties for guests as young as one year old to guests well into their 90s.

It helps that Chief’s is more than a bar. It’s more than a restaurant. It’s also a deli, a store, and a caterer. Having so many different areas of operation can be challenging. "I find several key factors that make a business successful," Dent said. "You must have great systems and consistent training to set your staff up for success. Chief’s most important asset is our employees. Invest in your employees, and your guests will be well served."

But even the best employees have never experienced anything like the shutdown orders, business restrictions, and social distancing guidelines that were imposed when COVID-19 started take hold of the country and Maryland. This is where steady leadership is so important. "Since the start of the closure," Dent stated, "our sales are down. But we are at least open and still able to serve our community. Although most of our full-time staffers continue to earn a paycheck, it has been necessary to adjust our food service procedures and reposition some of the staff members. But all things considered, we’ve been very fortunate during the pandemic."

The challenges haven’t diminished his love for the work. Dent says it is has been especially rewarding to help preserve certain long-standing St. Mary’s County food and beverage traditions. "Our county is the home of the 10-ounce Budweiser and Stuffed Ham," he noted. "Ten-ounce Bud and Bud Light beers are staples of county..."
life. Nothing is better than eating a Stuffed Ham sandwich while drinking a 10-oz."

Still, being the boss does have its personal challenges. "I find communication can be very challenging," Dent shared. "To be a good communicator, you must also be a good listener. You must take the time to listen to others to be a problem solver."

He credits his dad, a retired Senior Chief from the U.S. Navy, for instilling in him the qualities of a good decision-maker. "He led by example and instilled in me a strong work ethic," Dent remarked. "He taught me to set goals, then to enjoy the rewards of working hard. It's amazing how lucky you can get when you work hard to accomplish goals."

Dent also learned much as a past president of the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA). He enjoyed his time while at the reins and was also an active participant of the American Beverage Licensees (ABL). "I have been associated with the MSLBA for many years," he noted, "and I have found the association to be an integral part of our success here at Chief's. In Maryland, the alcohol beverage business is regulated at the local level to ensure responsible retailers are looking out for the best interests of their community. Chief's is the definition of a local 'Mom and Pop' store. As part of the MSLBA, not only do I have access to important information concerning legislation that directly affects my bottom line, but I have a voice that allows me to help not only my business but other small businesses. I would urge all alcohol retail licensees to join MSLBA. During this CO-VID-19 crisis, the association has been an invaluable resource to help licensees navigate the executive orders, guidance, and support available for small businesses."

Looking ahead, Dent is eager for a time when Chief's and Maryland, in general, have moved past the virus. He is cautiously optimistic that the second half of 2020 will go well. As of May 29 when this interview was conducted, restaurants and bars were permitted to begin reopening with outside table service.

At that time, he commented, "We are focusing on a plan to safely reopen for outside service and hope that will soon lead to the lifting of closure orders and allow us to reopen for regular business. There is so much pent-up demand, so I am sure we will have the opportunity to be successful … as long as everyone practices common-sense measures."
Yet one day, Todd Boera, Fonta Flora’s head of brewing operations, was at his business partner’s house, where the fridge contained White Claw for his gluten-free wife. He started to think about whether the brewery could make something better.

Using fresh fruit and herbs was “an opportunity to make a very different product,” Boera says. Fonta Flora’s Topsy “Boozy Seltzer,” launched in early 2019, feature North Carolina apples, hand-zested lemons, and black tea grown in Charleston, South Carolina. Incorporating the same ingredients the brewery uses for its beer, Fonta Flora creates hard seltzer according to the founders’ “moral compass” with distinct tastes and sense of place.

“When you think about it, it’s really the same reason why homebrewers started homebrewing,” Boera says. “They were unhappy with what was commercially available.”

SMALL-SCALE SELTZER INNOVATION
Off-premise hard seltzer sales have accelerated during the pandemic, and analytic firm Cowen predicts that hard seltzer could account for 10 percent of the beer category’s dollar sales this summer. Many craft breweries have had
Testimonials

“He did a great job and I would recommend anyone who is thinking of selling their business to contact Steve prior to signing with anyone else. He does his research and puts people together...”

Barry G., Prince George’s County

“Your knowledge and ability to put out fires can’t be measured in dollars and cents. With all the things that came up, I’m not sure this sale would have happened without your expertise...”

Ron S., Frederick County

“Steve followed the transaction through every step of the process offering advice on dealing with the Landlord, the Governmental authorities as well as the buyer. The expertise that Mr. Atkins brought to the sale was appreciated by both parties and was the sole reason that I was able to complete the sale and retire.”

Maben K., Anne Arundel County

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to make a decision: Stay in their beer lanes, or buy some cane sugar and get in the seltzer game? Increasingly, small and regional breweries are entering the hard seltzer category, producing a crafty counterpoint to big brands such as Truly and White Claw.

The newer participants have discovered it’s a wide-open field for experimentation. In a category unconstrained by style guidelines, craft breweries can explore a range of flavors, aromas, and ingredients. Dry Dock Brewing, in Aurora, Colorado, makes Mysters Hard Seltzer in flavors inspired by its beers, including its flagship Apricot Blonde. In March, F.X. Matt Brewing, in Utica, New York, began distributing Saranac Green Tea Spiked Seltzer. In May, Wachusett Brewing, in Westminster, Massachusetts, debuted the lemonade-inspired Country Hard Seltzer. SweetWater Brewing, in Atlanta, offers the Hydroponics line of cannabis-inspired hard seltzer, which mimics the scents of certain strains with plant-based terpenes. Mill House Brewing Company in Poughkeepsie, New York, is offering lime and raspberry hard seltzers at its taproom; each is lightly tinted and cloudy in appearance.

“Seltzer itself actually offers a pretty interesting blank canvas,” says Collin Castore, a cofounder of Seventh Son Brewing, in Columbus, Ohio. Instead of using extracts or flavorings, the brewery infuses its richly colored Kitty Paw “craft hard seltzer” with fruit purees such as raspberry. “This is sort of the only way we were going to make the stuff,” says head brewer Colin Vent, who also uses fruit purees in his sour beers.

Kitty Paw serves as a sister brand to Seventh Son, whose name is discreetly placed on the distinct cans, which are sold around Columbus. The message is clear: Seventh Son is beer, while Kitty Paw, as a seltzer, is the gluten-free alternative. “We are seeing it cut across some pretty broad demographics,” Castore says, noting that the seltzer is enticing health-conscious and new-to-craft consumers. “Kitty Paw’s simplicity is part of its draw,” he adds.

RECRUITING NEW CONSUMERS

Creating something for non-beer drinkers had long been a goal for St. Elmo Brewing, in Austin, Texas. The brewery crafts a wide range of beer, from smoky lagers to coffee-infused cream ales, IPAs, coconut imperial stout, and even malt liquor. Despite this diversity, when a big group visits the brewery’s taproom, “there’s always one or two people who don’t want to drink beer,” says cofounder and head brewer Bryan Winslow.

Because St. Elmo is not licensed to produce wine or cider, it began making a sugar-based hard seltzer, Ripple, which customers can flavor with the taproom’s house-made syrups, including cherry-lime and lavender-lemon. With the taproom closed during the coronavirus pandemic, St. Elmo started packaging the Tropical Ripple variant in four-packs of 16-ounce cans, offering it to-go.

As hard seltzer matures, expect more craft breweries to make a flavorful mark in the category. It’s in their DNA to disrupt the status quo. “There are accounts who believe [hard seltzer] will never move past the few main players,” says Seventh Son’s Castore, “but what a boring world it would be if brewers had just given up at Budweiser and Miller.”

Infusions are key for craft seltzers. Fonta Flora makes Topsy using North Carolina fruits and plants; SweetWater Brewing in Atlanta makes Hydroponics “Hard & Heady Seltzer” with cannabis-based flavors.

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Not everybody has to like beer.

— Collin Castore, Seventh Son Brewing, Columbus, Ohio
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Jerry Humphreys, Mid Atlantic Area Manager at J. Lohr Vineyards recently presented Melinda Colgan, Breakthru Beverage Group Premier Wine Sales Associate, with a solid gold plastic crown and a three liter commemorative bottle of J. Lohr Hilltop Cabernet. Steve Lohr, co-owner/CEO at J. Lohr Vineyards also signed the bottle congratulating her as the winner of the Queen of the Hilltop program.