

Beverage Journal

A man and a woman are standing in a well-lit wine cellar. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and dark pants, leaning against a wooden shelf. The woman, on the right, is wearing a white blazer over a striped shirt and white pants, holding a bottle of wine. They are both looking at the bottle. The shelves are filled with many bottles of wine, and the lighting is warm and focused on the couple.

AUGUST 2023

LEVEL UP

TIPS AND TOOLS TO MAKE
YOUR BUYING JOB EASIER

INSIDE WINE
ALLOCATIONS

HOW RETAILERS
OPTIMIZE THE
UNDER-\$15 SHELF

LEVERAGING
THE SALES REP
RELATIONSHIP



THE STATE
OF RTD COCKTAILS



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ABL HONORS OUTSTANDING BEVERAGE ALCOHOL RETAILERS AT ANNUAL MEETING

American Beverage Licensees (ABL) recently recognized outstanding bar and package liquor store owners from across the country as **ABL Retailers of the Year** at the ABL Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri on June 11. Nominated by their state licensed beverage associations for excellence in advocacy, commitment to responsible sales and service practices, community engagement, and support of their state association, these leaders are ambassadors of the vibrant retail alcohol marketplaces found in states throughout the country. Whether operating on-premise bars or taverns, or off-premise beer, wine and liquor stores, these business owners are examples of American entrepreneurship and the small businesses that create jobs that power the economy.

“Our members are the engines that make their businesses, associations and industry go,” said ABL Executive Director John Bodnovich. “They’re on the front lines when it comes to telling the stories about exciting products, creating a welcoming atmosphere for their guests, fighting for their businesses and employees in their state legislatures, and making sure that responsible sales and service never take a back seat. We’re humbled by their dedication and perseverance, and so pleased to recognize their hard work.”

THE 2023 ABL RETAILERS OF THE YEAR

Mary Burns | City Limits Package Store
Monroeville, AL

Ken Kichler | Tacky Jacks
Orange Beach, AL

Ron Harrison | Loganville Package Store
Loganville, GA

Jim Shirey | Irving Athletic Club
Joliet, IL

Gary Gardner | Belmont Beverage
Fort Wayne, IN

Julianne Sullivan | Bella's Liquors
Annapolis, MD

Jaskinder Gill | AJ Liquors
Colmar Manor, MD

Jay Bond Patel | Curtis Liquors
Weymouth, MA

Sue Minehart | Mine Again's Bar & Grill
Albert Lea, MN

Dax Cetraro | Rialto Bar & Casino
Helena, MT

Amy & Michael Patalano | Spirits Unlimited
Toms River, NJ

Ritesh Pastel | Tiverton Liquor Store
Tiverton, RI

Ralph Cantey, Jr. | Traders of Camden
Camden, SC

Jimmy & Ann Cole | Poplar Wine and Spirits
Collierville, TN

Anuj Mittal | Zipps Liquors
Conroe, TX

Mark Rehwinkel | Cusack's Pub
Marinette, WI

Kevin Georges | DT's Liquor and Tusker Bar
Cheyenne, WY

Congratulations to all the winners. ■

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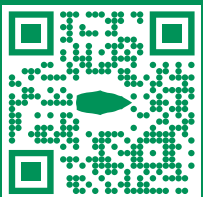
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WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

Hudson Whiskey's most recent, limited-release innovation is a five-year-old New York Straight Bourbon Whiskey. Produced at Tuthilltown Distillery in the Hudson Valley, the grain-forward spirit is pot-distilled from a mash bill of 95 percent corn and five percent malted barley grown by local family farmers. The kosher-certified 92-proof whiskey, signaling a rise in the 20-year-old brand's aged varieties, then rests for a minimum of five years in American oak casks.

SRP: \$49.99 per 750-ml bottle



BBQ SEASON

Fans of the autumnal Harvest Whiskey Sour, the first ready-to-drink collaboration from **George Dickel** and **Social Hour**, now have a summery canned cocktail (20% ABV per three servings) to look forward to. The Bourbon Smash, a cross between the mint julep and whiskey sour, showcases eight-year-old Dickel bourbon complemented by notes of muddled mint and Meyer lemon. Perfect for alfresco outings, it can be simply poured over ice and garnished with a peach slice or strawberries.

SRP: \$28 per four-pack of 250-ml cans

WOOD FINISH

Alabama-made **Clyde May's Whiskey** now has a nine-year-old cask strength rye. Matured for a minimum of nine years in former bourbon barrels, the limited-edition 113-proof whiskey is buoyed by steeping an assortment of French oak and American oak and cherry wood chips in the liquid for an additional four months to garner layers of spice, caramel, and vanilla.

SRP: \$64.99 per 750-ml bottle



OLD-TIMER

Kentucky master distillers Jimmy and Eddie Russell have unveiled their third iteration of the limited-edition **Russell's Reserve** 13-year-old bourbon. The 114.8-proof whiskey, the oldest variant in the Russell's Reserve portfolio, unfurls with notes of dried dark fruit and burnt brown sugar, paving the way to a warm, smoky finish.

SRP: \$150 per 750-ml bottle



KENTUCKY TERROIR

In 2022, the James B. Beam Distilling Co. debuted **Hardin's Creek**, a label centered on limited-edition rare whiskeys. Its latest offering, The Kentucky Series, magnifies the impact landscape has on flavor profile. The three expressions, all 17-year-old Kentucky straight bourbon whiskeys using the same mash bill, were aged on different Beam campuses with distinct microclimates. For instance, the 110-proof Frankfort, new this month, was influenced by the presence of a creek bed. It follows Clermont, which kicked off the series in June, and precedes Boston, slated for September.

SRP: \$169.99 per 750-ml bottle





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UMAMI KICK

The koji that gives life to soy sauce, sake, and miso also makes an appearance in Hikari Distillery's sherry cask-aged **Hakata** whiskies, produced in Fukuoka, Japan. Now available in the U.S., the range comprises 10-, 12-, 16-, and 18-year-old expressions distilled solely from barley, a small portion of which is fermented with koji. This ancient technique lends the spirits a savory, complex appeal.

SRP: \$80 (10-year-old), \$100 (12-year-old), \$150 (16-year-old), and \$190 (18-year-old) per 700-ml bottle



AZTEC DELIGHT

It's a centuries-old staple in Mexico, yet effervescent tepache is little known among U.S. consumers. However, the arrival of **Tepache Sazón**, the first commercially produced alcoholic version in the country, promises to bring the fermented tropical fruit beverage into the limelight. Made in the small town of San Pedro, on the Pacific Coast of Mexico in Nayarit, it combines three ingredients: piloncillo (raw cane sugar), canela (Mexican cinnamon), and sweet, locally grown pineapple. A chilled Tepache Sazón can be savored straight from the bottle or alongside agave spirits.

SRP: \$23.99 per four-pack of 375-ml bottles



AFTER DINNER DRINK

Throughout India's Punjab region, cooling off with sugarcane juice and distilling it for home-brewed elixirs are common rituals. In honor of these traditions, Piccadilly Distilleries—home of Indri-Trini Indian Whisky—developed the just-launched stateside **Camikara** pure cane sipping rum. Matured for 12 years in American oak casks, it's rife with honey, vanilla, and chocolate notes and best enjoyed neat.

SRP: \$90 per 750-ml bottle

BEACH COOLER

Bolstering **Something & Nothing**'s premium cocktail mixer-friendly sodas brightened with grape and lemon juice is a trio of 4% ABV spritzes. There's citrusy

Sauvignon Blanc & Cucumber—which pairs especially well with the cucumber soda—French Rosé & Hibiscus, highlighting dry rosé from Côtes de Gascogne, and the umami-tart Japanese Junmai Saké & Yuzu, all born from natural juices, extracts, and botanicals.

SRP: \$69.95 per 12-pack of 330-ml cans



COFFEE BREAK

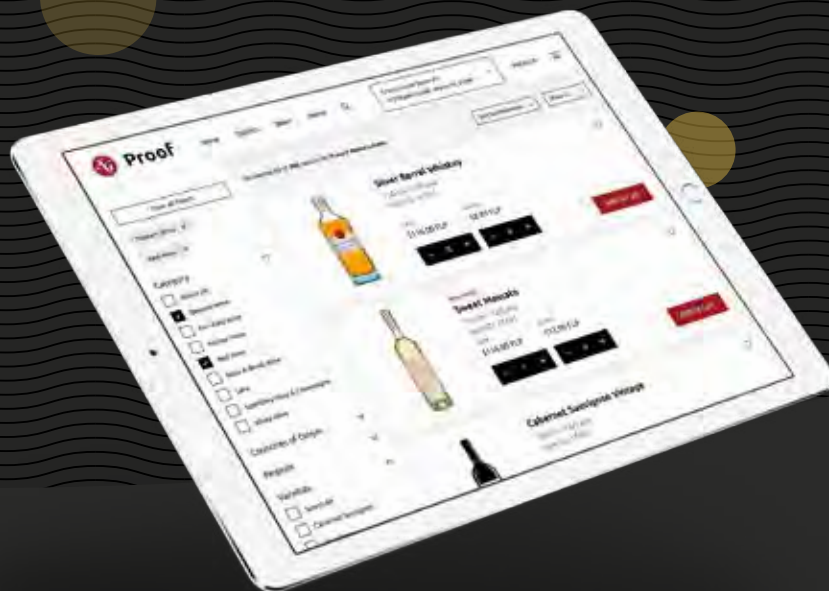
Tequila and coffee ambitiously unite in **Quintaliza**, a certified-organic, additive-free reposado. Double distilled from 100 percent Blue Weber agave, the spirit is aged in both one-time bourbon casks and those that formerly held organic coffee roasted from beans harvested in Chiapas, Mexico. With sustainability in mind, the coffee grounds are used to fertilize agave fields. The result is an earthy tequila that balances flavors of caramelized agave, oak, and dark chocolate.

SRP: \$79 per 750-ml bottle



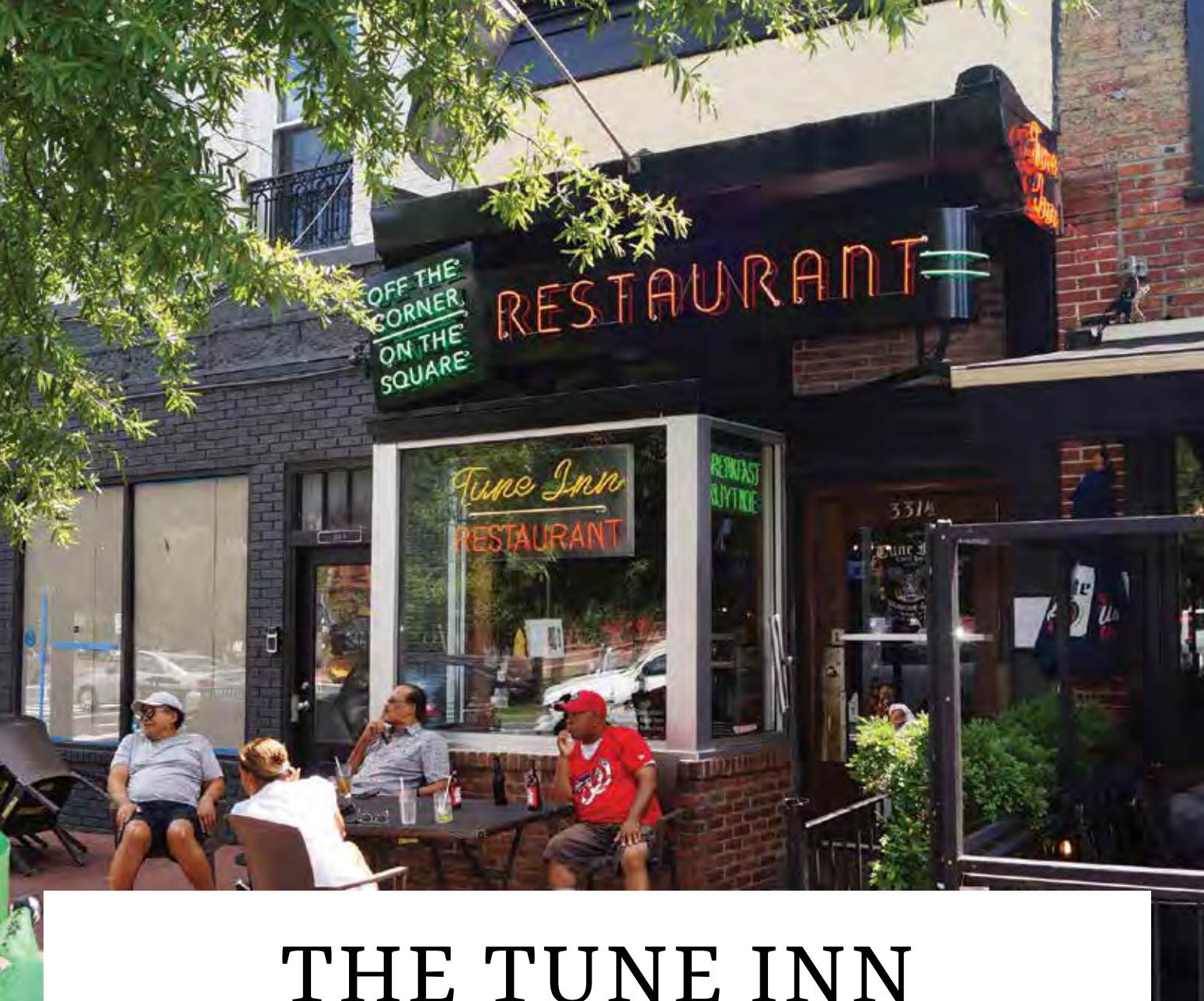
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THE TUNE INN

LONG-TIME REGULAR CUSTOMERS ARE CREDITED WITH CARRYING THE TUNE

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

The Capitol Hill building that houses the Tune Inn has been many different things over the last century. It was once a candy kitchen. In the 1920s, it was a speak easy. Not long after, it was a men's tailor shop that catered to the gentlemen of the U.S. Congress. In 1947, though, Joe Nardelli

purchased the site, turned it into a tavern, and gave it the name that has stuck to this day. Today, it holds the distinction of being the second oldest liquor license in the nation's capital since the repeal of Prohibition. Currently, Joe's granddaughter, Lisa Nardelli, is the Tune Inn's owner and operator.

Stephanie Hulbert
General Manager
The Tune Inn



Being a family-owned and operated business for more than 70 years is quite a feat and more than qualifies it for our ongoing series of historic bars and taverns in Maryland and Washington, D.C. What's the secret to this popular and unpretentious bar's success and longevity? General Manager Stephanie Hulbert was eager to respond. "People like consistency," she said. "They like knowing that they'll see

the same faces. Many get served their favorite drink without having to even ask for it. The community and our regulars definitely make up the bar's [core clientele]. Most of them have been coming for 20 to

30 years. Their support has been everything. It's a cliché. But a lot of people who walk in for the first time or are from out of town immediately go to the 'Cheers' reference . . . 'Where everybody knows your

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James Williams
Bartender
 The Tune Inn

name.' That's exactly what makes it a great atmosphere."

She continued, "Our regulars have supported us through everything. We saw that most during COVID. A lot of small bars and restaurants like ours were closing down. I'm not going to say that we thrived. But the community really kept coming in almost every day."

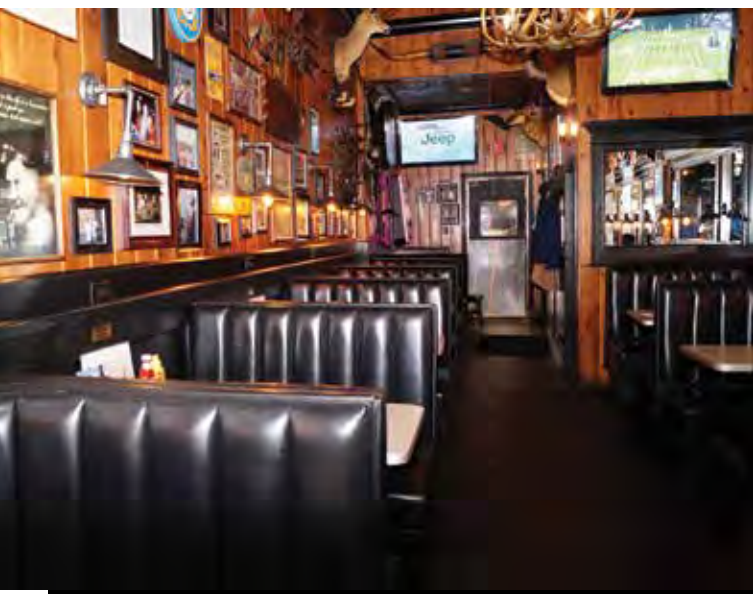
That beloved level of consistency has also been set by The Tune's – as regulars affectionately call it – group of long-time employees. Hulbert noted that one bartender, Matt, has been at The Tune for 26 years. Another bartender, James, has been on staff for the past 18 years. "And both of our long-standing cooks have been here

for over 20 years. It's definitely family-oriented as far as the employees go."

The Tune features an impressive menu of food items for its size. It is complemented well by a beverage menu that doesn't try hard at all to impress. "Our beverage philosophy is to 'keep it simple,'" Hulbert said. "We're quirky in the way that we respond to drink requests. When people come in and ask for a wine list, we say, 'Red or white? Chardonnay or cabernet?' We don't have a formal cocktail list. We just tell people, 'If we have the ingredients, we'll make it for you!' We've made quite a lot of Old Fashioneds and Moscow Mules and Manhattans lately. I think we now have four martini glasses behind the bar."

She added, "We're more of a beer bar. We do try to keep it local. So, we do have D.C. Brau on tap. We have three of those, in fact. We also have the classic Natty Bo, which has always been a staple at The Tune. We have multiple signs from years and years ago within the bar."

Hulbert briefly left The Tune in December 2021 to run her own pop-up restaurant. But she's been back since March. "When I was gone for a while," she remarked, "I really learned how much The Tune has taught me. This place is an anomaly in some many great ways. It has taught me patience. It has taught me how to deal with different characters – not only the folks who come in but also the people you work



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with. For me, I've invested a lot of my life and a lot of my career in The Tune. I've essentially grown up here, and that's crazy to say out loud! I never would have thought that years ago. It's molded me into a more patient person, a more 'people person.' I know now to never judge a book by its cover. There are a lot of people who walk into The Tune, and you don't know their story. Often, it's pretty amazing. And of course, there are the managerial aspects of it. Hey, in 12 years, I've learned how to run a restaurant and bar!"

In addition to the regulars, Hulbert while she was away missed the eclectic mix of famous folk who come in to The Tune from

time to time. Years ago, Kevin Spacey was a one-time customer. "He was very intoxicated!" she recalled with a hearty laugh. "I remember it was crowded, and he had his head down on the table. It was pretty funny. Jack Black has come in. Anne Burrell from The Food Network also came in, and I ended up having a nice, long conversation with her. But, of course, everyone always asks me, 'What politicians have been in?' Yes, I've seen a lot of them, and I've seen some things I probably shouldn't have been privy to. I've just kept my mouth shut on all of them. I've yelled at interns who have gone up to congressmen and women at the bar [to talk politics]. I tell them, 'They're

not here for that right now. They come to The Tune to have a drink and enjoy themselves."

Looking ahead, Hulbert hopes to bolster the events side of The Tune's business. She concludes, "We are open to a lot of private events. We're doing a crabfest at the end of July. And we will be doing some music events and some more informal pop-up dinners in August and September. I am trying to schedule these events for specific days where I think we may need to increase business. I actually don't think a lot of people know they can rent out The Tune. But you can. We're here for our locals and for everyone!" ■





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ONE GLASS

On the heels of securing another round of multi-million-dollar funding, **Wander & Ivy** has expanded its lineup of organic, single-serve offerings with a Sauvignon Blanc from a family-owned winery in France's Languedoc region. Also new to the range—spanning a Spanish red blend from Valencia, Languedoc rosé, and Mendocino County, California, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay—are convenient four-pack, single-varietal sets.

SRP: \$68 (Sauvignon Blanc) per eight-pack and \$34 (varietal set) per four-pack of 187-ml bottles



TASTE OF PROVENCE

Sainte Marguerite en Provence

wines, now available in the U.S., speak to the market's continued interest in fresh, aromatic Côtes-de-Provence AOC rosés. The family-owned label, founded in 1977, has embraced organic viticulture since 2003 and is known for its elegant blends of Grenache, Cinsault, and Rolle. *Symphonie*, for example, is a pale pink cuvée expressing notes of citrus and white peach, while the juicy, floral *Fantastique* is the only organic Cru Classé from Côtes de Provence.

SRP: \$24.99 (*Symphonie*) and \$39.99 (*Fantastique*) per 750-ml bottle



SEAFOOD PAIRING

Mary McAuley, the founder and winemaker of **Ripe Life Wines**, has followed up her Jersey Shore-inspired Clambake Chardonnay and rosé with Moules Blanc de Blancs Brut. The dry bubbly, made by the *méthode Champenoise* with 100 percent sustainable Chardonnay grapes sourced from California's Lodi Valley, has a lively acidity coupled with fruity notes that make it ripe for drinking with classic moules frites.

SRP: \$36.50 per 750-ml bottle



HERITAGE VINES

Haynes Vineyard is a 43-acre parcel of land in Napa Valley's Coombsville AVA featuring vines planted in the 1960s. Now the historic site, characterized by cool temperatures and marine fog, has birthed a new brand from **Lawrence Wine Estates**. Overseen by winemaker Nico Cueva, the Haynes collection of single-estate bottlings includes the 2020 vintages of Vignerón, Forgeron, and Corazon Chardonnays and the 2021 releases of Forgeron Syrah and Forgeron Pinot Noir.

SRP: \$120 (Vignerón Chardonnay), \$150 (Forgeron Chardonnay, Syrah, and Pinot Noir), and \$250 (Corazon Chardonnay) per 750-ml bottle



VISUAL CONNECTION

Launched in 2005 as Chile's first sustainable winery, **Root: 1** has taken a pioneering stance on everything from growing practices to carbon offset measures. To illuminate its initiatives revolving around the pillars of clean energy, water conservation, waste management, minimal intervention, and community connection, Root: 1 has redesigned the packaging for its estate-bottled wines, including the 2022 vintages of Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Magnified illustrations of rootstocks celebrate old vines, while paper labels flaunt Wines of Chile sustainability seals.

SRP: \$13 per 750-ml bottle



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THE FROSADO

1½ oz. Don Julio Rosado tequila
1 oz. Crème de Pamplemousse
¾ oz. lime juice
¼ oz. grapefruit juice

Method: Cocktails should be batched and poured over shaved ice in a coupe or Margarita glass to be enjoyed like an adult snow cone. Garnish with pink salt rim and half a slice of grapefruit.



SEASIDE PALOMA

Created by Everleaf

1¾ oz. Everleaf Marine non-alcoholic aperitif
½ oz. lime juice
½ oz. agave syrup
Pinch of salt
Top with pink grapefruit soda

Method: Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass, stir, and then pour over a wine glass or highball filled with ice. Garnish with a grapefruit wedge.



LAS CAL SUNSET

2 oz. Las Californias Cítrico gin
2 strawberries
¾ oz. honey syrup
¾ oz. lemon juice
Peychaud Bitters to taste

Method: Slice and muddle strawberries in a shaker. Add remaining ingredients. Add ice and shake. Fill a highball glass with ice. Double strain. Top with Peychaud Bitters and garnish with mint leaves.



SANTA TERESA 1796 PANA

1½ oz. Santa Teresa 1796 rum
¾ oz. St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur
¾ oz. Fernet Branca
2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters

Method: Pour all ingredients into a mixing glass with ice and stir. Strain into a coupe or snifter. Express the oil from an orange peel and then discard the peel.

ULTIMATE OCEAN POI DOG

2½ oz. fresh squeezed pomelo juice (or grapefruit)
¾ oz. yuzu citrus
¼ oz. yuzu juice
½ oz. lemon juice
¾ oz. Thai basil and black peppercorn syrup
1½ oz. Ocean Organic vodka

Method: Rim half a Collins glass with salt and pepper. In a mixing tin, combine all ingredients and shake for 10 seconds. Fill the Collins glass with fresh ice and strain. Garnish with one sprig of basil.





NAVIGATING THE TRICKY WORLD OF WINE ALLOCATIONS

HARD-TO-FIND BOTTLES ADD BUZZ TO A RESTAURANT WINE PROGRAM OR RETAIL SHOP, BUT SACRIFICES AND LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS EXIST IN PROCURING THESE LAUDED EXPRESSIONS

BY KELLY MAGYARICS

Highly allocated bottles—those for which demand outstrips supply—are the unicorns of the wine world. Whether offerings hail from a stellar vintage or from a boutique winery with a cult-like following, these sought-after wines can have wine professionals scrambling to place them on menus and shelves. But what's the secret sauce to snagging, keeping, and positioning allocated wines? And is it all worth it?

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS IS A MARKED ADVANTAGE

"Securing allocations is not about tricks or strategies; it's about continued support

and being a good, respectful partner with your suppliers," says Andy Fortgang, who along with Sergio Licea owns Flor Wines, a retail shop in Portland, Oregon. Maintain-

ing a mutually beneficial relationship via continuous sales throughout the year can yield the opportunity to purchase more difficult-to-acquire wines.

While Braithe Tidwell, the beverage director for the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group in New Orleans, agrees with the philosophy of always being polite, on time, and kind to sales reps, she believes getting your hands on allocations starts with a little sleuthing. "Reach out to your distributor's sales teams and find out what's available in your market," she says.



LEFT: Sergio Licea (left) and Andy Fortgang (right) own Flor Wines in Portland, Oregon. Fortgang says maintaining a strong, respectful relationship with suppliers is the key to securing allocations.

She also suggests managing expectations; some wines just never make it to certain parts of the U.S. because larger, more populous markets end up with the lion's share. Moreover, laws dictating the rules for allocations vary among the states.

For example, depending on the vintage, there are only 250 to 450 six-pack cases of Castello Banfi 'Vigna Marrucheto' Brunello di Montalcino—the Tuscan winery's single-vineyard release—imported into the U.S.. These are allocated to each region based on the percentage of business as it relates to the sales of Banfi's Brunello portfolio, explains executive marketing director Lauren Marano. However, there is some flexibility built in to ensure that loyal customers also have access, regardless of market size. "Banfi relies on their distributor partners and the discretion of their sales team to determine the channel mix and accounts where these wines are sold," says Marano. "It's most often the best and longest-standing Banfi customers who purchase these wines because ultimately, they are buying for end consumers who are familiar with the portfolio and actively seek them out."

There is one form of networking and relationship-building that buyers might overlook: going directly to the source. "Reaching out to a wine producer to share how much you love and care about their wines can help ensure that you receive al-

"For some wineries and importers it's a direct equation: you buy X amount of A, you can get Y amount of B."

– Andy Fortgang, Flor Wines

locations," says Natalie Tapken, the wine and beverage director for Bluepoint Hospitality Group in Easton, Maryland. "Producers want to know their wines will be placed at restaurants [or in shops] where there is great care and respect." Contacting a producer directly as well as signing up for a newsletter, following them on social media, and attending their local tastings all show loyalty to a favorite brand—and may keep your restaurant or retail shop top-of-mind for allocation opportunities.

PLAYING THE ALLOCATION GAME

Still, Fortgang believes the process can often be distilled down to math. "For some wineries and importers it's a direct equation: you buy X amount of A, you can get Y amount of B," he says. While this may

RIGHT: Lauren Marano, the executive marketing director of Banfi Wines, says allocations have regional flexibility to ensure access for loyal customers across markets.

make wine seem more like a commodity prone to pay-for-play tactics, it has the intended consequence of parity: assuring there is enough of a really popular wine to go around by also requiring a buyer to stock one that's much more readily available. And, he says, just as it's within the rights of an importer or distributor to force your hand, it's also within your rights as a buyer to bow out.

At Bas Rouge, Bluepoint Hospitality Group's 24-seat contemporary European restaurant, Tapken is able to receive allocations in part because the wine program supports multiple wines within a given portfolio. "The distributors want to work with trusted people who have taken the time to build a small relationship over time," she says.

According to Tidwell, distributors and importers will often require a by-the-glass placement or a long-term buying commitment to receive certain allocations. The former can be a great method to encourage experimentation—and a way



to appeal to fans of more mainstream, wallet-friendly selections. But signing an agreement to stock or carry certain wines over the long term only works with honesty. “Be transparent—let your reps know the direction of your program and how much you can buy,” she recommends.

Beyond market preferences and stocking requirements, other challenges exist. “Some wineries only want, or mostly want, their wine in restaurants,” Fortgang points out. “Then it’s up to the distributor to honor the request of their supplier, while still keeping their customers happy.” Tidwell and Tapken agree that on-premise placements are seen as more prestigious for some producers. But Rich Martini, a key accounts manager for Tri-Vin Imports in New Rochelle, New York, believes the appeal of on-premise versus off-premise can depend on factors including the amount of business an account does with a supplier as well as how large (and prestigious) they are. The uptick in direct-to-consumer sales also takes a slice from the retail portion.

An unsaid expectation dictates that buyers accept their allocation each year.

BELOW: Natalie Tapken, the wine and beverage director for Bluepoint Hospitality Group in Easton, Maryland.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SIMONEINK / BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY

“[An allocated wine] can either be marked up to match its rarity and therefore boost your cost of goods, or let it be a hidden gem on the menu.”

– Braithe Tidwell, Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group

“If you don’t take it, you can lose it,” says Fortgang. If a buyer opts out, another one will step in who may be upset the following year if you take “their” portion—it’s the wine industry’s version of “robbing Peter to pay Paul.” Vintage variables also factor in if a region loses a portion of the harvest due to hail, rot, disease or fire.

Still, Tidwell believes exceptions exist. During the pandemic, she was offered an extra allocation of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Though she knew it could jeopardize future offers, she turned it down as the restaurant group was being conservative with every purchase. “Because I was transparent, we were able to stay on the list.”

ARE ALLOCATIONS WORTH IT?

Once these wines find their way into a shop or a restaurant’s wine cellar, it’s up to the wine professional to market them as a treasure—or a treat. For reasonably priced wines like Château Rayas’ ‘Château des Tours’ Côtes du Rhône, Tidwell takes one of two tacks. “It can either be marked up to match its rarity and therefore boost your cost of goods, or let it be a hidden gem on the menu.” She relishes the chance to see guests get excited about the latter. Tapken also puts an unexpected al-



ABOVE: Braithe Tidwell, the beverage director for the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group in New Orleans.

located option on the menu to build loyalty among connoisseurs. While it makes financial sense to hold back higher-end bottles to appreciate in value, she prefers to list all of them to drive up enthusiasm for her program.

On the retail side, the staff at Flor Wines is mindful of not selling an entire allocation to a customer just because they walked in on the right day; instead, they would rather spread the word and open a dialogue. “It’s an opportunity to drive the point home that wine is an agricultural product and there is only so much to go around,” says Fortgang. That also becomes a way to educate disappointed repeat customers when their new favorite wine is gone from the shelf.

An allocation can be a great boost to a wine program, but is it ever worth fighting for? It can be for coveted bottles, Tapken says, but not at the expense of purchasing others you won’t be proud to offer. But Fortgang believes “fighting” isn’t worth it. “It means you’re going about your relationship with the supplier wrong, working against either other and not with each other,” he says. And with so many amazing global wines and the unknown factor of how vintages will develop over time, Tidwell has never fought for an allocation. “It’s best to move on and develop other parts of your list that need work.” ■

QUALITY GIN WITH A CHARITABLE CAUSE

GIN LANE 1751 MAKES A WIDE RANGE OF HIGH-QUALITY, AWARD-WINNING GINS WHILE DEDICATING ITSELF TO BREAST CANCER RESEARCH BY DONATING HALF OF ITS PROFITS EVERY FALL

Since Gin Lane 1751's launch in 2017 in partnership with eighth-generation distiller Charles Maxwell of Thames Distillers, it has created a range of classic, Victorian-style gins that are bold and balanced. It's also a gin brand with a purpose: Every fall, Gin Lane 1751 donates 50 percent of its profits to the breast cancer research charity The Pink Agenda.

"At the end of the day, you need to make a choice on what you as a person and company stand for and how a social cause component can be woven into your business plan," says Geoff Curley, the founder and CEO of Gin Lane 1751. This particular cause is near and dear to Curley's heart, having lost several family members to breast cancer.

"Whether it's fundraising for a deadly disease, assisting in the betterment of society in general or your local community, there are many ways to be part of something that can really have an impact."

Imported by M.S. Walker Brands, Gin Lane 1751 is a brand you can feel good about supporting. It's also one with high-quality gins that are easy to drink, from traditional styles like London Dry and Old Tom to innovative options like Violet Gin. The brand's name comes from two crucial moments in England's gin history. The first is 18th-century artist William Hogarth's infamous Gin Lane engraving. The second is the Gin Act of 1751, which set gin on its path to becoming the classic spirit enjoyed today.

Gin Lane 1751's latest releases, Cucumber-Watermelon-Mint and Violet



Gin Lane 1751's full range relies on a core, eight-botanical recipe with juniper, star anise, and Mediterranean citrus notes. Among the company's spirits are gin styles that are often overlooked by distilleries. There's the classic Old Tom, as well as an authentic 'Victoria' Pink Gin, a historic spirit that mixes London Dry with an Angostura-like bitter. The style was first created by the British Royal Navy to balance out dry and sweet gins, and Gin Lane 1751's version is refreshing and floral with a hint of savory bitters.

The latest releases, Cucumber-Watermelon-Mint and Violet, are part of the Victorian Garden series and are made with natural, freshly foraged ingredients. For the latter, inspiration comes from the pre-Prohibition Aviation cocktail and uses natural violet leaf oils.

Regardless of which Gin Lane 1751 spirit you're drinking, quality is front and center. All are award-winning, go-to options in cocktail bars and restaurants. Combined with the brand's commitment to breast cancer research, Gin Lane 1751 is a brand to know and love. ■

This content was produced in collaboration with our partners Gin Lane 1751 and M.S. Walker Brands. Learn more about The Pink Agenda at thepinkagenda.org.



Every Fall, GIN LANE 1751 donates
50% of all profits to help find
a cure for Breast Cancer.



We are proud to continue our donation
to **The Pink Agenda** in their commitment
to raise funds for breast cancer research.

thepinkagenda.org

#Cocktail4Cause • GinLane1751.com



5 WAYS TO LEVERAGE YOUR SALES REP RELATIONSHIP

FROM FOSTERING TRANSPARENCY TO CLARIFYING WHO YOUR CUSTOMER IS, THESE TIPS WILL HELP BUYERS AND SALES REPS WORK TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY

BY SHELBY VITTEK

Selling wine is not rocket science, but it does require a certain set of skills, and not all of them hinge on one's knowledge of wine. It takes relationships built on authenticity, honesty, trust, and respect.

Nowhere is that more evident than the relationship between a buyer and their sales rep. When done right, it's a mutually beneficial connection—one that not only serves you as a buyer, but also your customers.

Of course, it takes time to build any meaningful relationship, but there are ways to accelerate and deepen the process. To help you get the most out of the sales

rep relationship, *Beverage Media* gathered tips from experts across the country.

**TIP
1**

BE HONEST AND TRANSPARENT

If you're not interested in ordering a certain wine, just say that. Nobody wants to waste your time pouring a wine you're never going to buy.

"If a buyer can be really direct about what their needs are, then they'll get more out of the relationship," says Mariel Wega, Pennsylvania sales lead for Skurnik Wines, who says she didn't fully appreciate the power of transparency during her former days as a restaurant wine director.

Being honest with your sales rep will allow them to better curate the wines they bring to you. "There's a nice way to say 'no



"If a buyer can be really direct about what their needs are, then they'll get more out of the relationship."

- Mariel Wega, Skurnik Wines

thank you,' and that can really be helpful for homing in on what's going to be appropriate down the line," she says. "We all want to achieve the same thing. If you're open and honest, you're not going to hurt my feelings."



"At the end of the day, we are all trying to find things that not only the buyer wants, but what the buyer's customer wants."

- Lourdes Arena, MFV Wine Co.

TIP 2

TELL THEM WHO YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE

No sales rep wants to see a case of wine they sold months ago still sitting on the shelf. They want to help you move bottles, too, and that means they want to help you find the ones your customers desire.

"I want to build the relationship with not just my client, but the client's client," says Lourdes Arena, the New Jersey sales manager for MFV Wine Co. A rep can get a sense of a restaurant or shop's following by the kind of wines they already carry, but any additional information you can provide them with about customers will only help them help you further.

"We can all get jaded with the 'job' aspect of the business," says Drew Prazneau, the Portland, Oregon, account manager for Grape Expectations. "At the end of the day, we are all trying to find things that not only the buyer wants, but what the buyer's customer wants."



Inviting buyers to attend off-site portfolio tastings is a great tool that "gives [buyers] a chance to try through lots of wines quickly and efficiently."

- Drew Prazneau, Grape Expectations

TIP 3

STAY OPEN TO CREATIVE TASTING FORMATS

The pandemic disrupted a lot of industry traditions, but it also helped pave the way for new ones. While on-premise tastings with sales reps are key to doing business, they're not the only way to taste.

Sales reps know that buyers often wear many hats. Wine buyers might also be the general manager, run staff training programs, or have to check customers out. To weed out some of those added disruptions, reps have gotten creative by inviting buyers to attend off-site portfolio tastings, either one-on-one or within a small group. Prazneau says this is a great tool that "gives [buyers] a chance to try through lots of wines quickly and efficiently."

TIP 4

TELL YOUR REPS HOW YOU LIKE TO COMMUNICATE

A sales rep can sometimes meet with dozens of different clients in a given week, all of whom have their own unique taste in wine—and communication style. It's up to a sales rep to be available, helpful, and responsive, but communication is a two-way street. Tell them whether you prefer to be in touch about orders through email, phone calls, or texts.

Mallory Smith, the founder of Alt Wine Fest and a buyer at 1856, a bottle shop and bar in Portland, Oregon, finds different methods of communication fit different needs. "I go back and forth between email and text," she says. "Email is good for longer orders and inquiries in the evening or on weekends. But I also prefer the casual nature of text for quick questions and last-minute orders."



"Email is good for longer orders and inquiries in the evening or on weekends. But I also prefer the casual nature of text for quick questions and last-minute orders."

- Mallory Smith, 1856 and Alt Wine Fest

TIP 5

DON'T BURN BRIDGES

This one might seem like a no-brainer, but it's always a good reminder to be kind. You never know what importer or distributor a sales rep might end up after their current gig. If you burn that bridge now, you might face a challenge when you want those wines in the future.

"You don't want to burn bridges," says Wega. After all, wine "is a small community." ■



THE RETAILER'S GUIDE TO ENTRY-LEVEL WINE SELECTIONS

IN THE AGE OF INFLATION, INDUSTRY EXPERTS SHARE
THEIR INSIGHTS ON HOW THEY MAINTAIN A WORTHWHILE COLLECTION
OF AFFORDABLE BOTTLES FOR CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR VALUE

BY JANICE WILLIAMS

There was a time when wine lovers could walk into almost any retail store and grab a bottle with a single-digit price tag. But with rising interest rates, ongoing inflation, surging oil prices, supply chain issues, the high price of glass, and much more, it's become increasingly challenging for retailers to find quality bottles to offer at lower prices.

"When we opened up 15 years ago, our daily wine collection was priced at \$11.99 or less. At the beginning of January, we bumped that up to \$14.99. That's the first major shift we've had to do re-

garding our value wines selection," says Craig Heffley, the owner and wine buyer at Wine Authorities, which has shops in Durham and Raleigh, North Carolina.

Of course, budget wines do still exist. However, the threshold for what's considered value for quality bottles has changed. For many retailers, the standard for reasonably priced wines worth drinking now ranges from \$15 to \$20.

"There was a time when we could find items under \$10, but that pool has gotten very generic," says Seamark Zarisfi, the wine buyer at Millesima in New York City. While \$15 to \$20 seems to be the value range for Millesima's demographic, Zarisfi says there isn't "much resistance from clients" for bottles inching into the \$22 to \$24 category.



So how do retailers make the most out of their value selections in today's ever-stressful economic climate? It starts with lining shelves with bottles of highly regarded varieties sourced from regions beyond the usual.

EXPANDING THE SEARCH FOR QUALITY WINE

While any buyer would be hard-pressed to find Sancerre for less than \$30 these days, worthwhile bottles from Touraine—a nearby subregion of the Loire Valley that also specializes in Sauvignon Blanc—are easy to score for half the price. At Conville Wine & Spirits in New York City, the cheapest bottle of Sancerre is set at \$29, but Domaine de la Potine Sauvignon Blanc from Touraine costs just \$13. Store owner and wine buyer Jesse Warner-Levine can barely keep it on the shelf.

“What’s happened is that new wines are providing the value, opposed to the historic bottles we used to be able to depend on,” says Warner-Levine. “That means I have to go find new wines and take the time to unearth something that actually offers a value at the under-\$15 price point, because any reliable bottle that kicked ass at \$14 is now \$22.”

IT ALSO PAYS TO LOOK FOR WINE OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSIC REGIONS.

“We’re bringing in a lot more wine from Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Israel, Greece, and Portugal,” says Jade Palmer, a wine as-

“At least 25 percent of customers that come through the shop ask for at least one value selection in their entire transaction.”

— Jade Palmer, 3 Parks Wine Shop

sociate at 3 Parks Wine Shop in Atlanta. “These places are just starting to get notoriety, or they’re a little more undervalued than France, Italy, and California in the wine world. So you’re still able to get excellent quality stuff for incredible value out of those regions.”

Buyers who find wines from less-popular regions get the benefit of buying bottles for less at wholesale. Still, Heffley says researching, locating, tasting, and stocking value wines from underrepresented wine areas does more for the customer than save them money; it gives customers the “experience of trying something new and exciting.” He points to a producer in León, Spain, who makes wine from the obscure grapes Prieto Picudo and Albarín. “None of our customers asked for these wines, but they’re high quality and afford-

able. Our customers are becoming more and more interested in them,” he says.

THE LESS-IS-MORE APPROACH

The demand for value wine is still as high as it’s ever been, according to most retailers, but as wine drinkers become savvier, it’s crucial to provide a bevy of options that will appease their palate and their pockets across all varieties and price points.

“At least 25 percent of customers that come through the shop ask for at least one value selection in their entire transaction,” says Palmer. “The difference is that customers are more open to buying maybe two bottles of wine in the \$15 to \$20 range instead of buying four bottles of something that doesn’t have as good of quality for \$10.” Considering this, Palmer says that offering a variety of wines spread across different price points is better for them.

The number of value SKUs in a wine shop does matter, though. At Millesima, Zarisfi has found that smaller shops should have no more than five to seven value bottles per variety. That way, customers still have options within the price range but not so many they’re deterred from trying something different. “You’re always looking to not only build a client base, but also guide the client base up the ladder,” says Zarisfi. “If you have a ton of value-driven wine, then it becomes difficult to move a customer up the ladder because they’re just moving between wines in the same category.”

OPPOSITE: The selection at Gary’s Wine & Marketplace
ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Jesse Warner-Levine, Conville Wine & Spirits; Craig Heffley, Wine Authorities



Gary Fisch, the CEO and founder of Gary's Wine & Marketplace in New Jersey and Napa, says it's all about "controlling your inventory."

"I believe 100 percent that no one size fits all," he adds. "We need to have style and pricing differences within every category. But you still need to ask yourself, 'how many wines in that price point do I carry? Can my selection benefit from adding one wine at that price point?'"

MAXIMIZING PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Location also plays a role in maximizing sales of value selections—although every retailer has their own method. For some, maintaining a separate value table or shelf is helpful for customers who don't necessarily want to engage with the staff or want to find something worth drinking with ease—but that doesn't mean retailers have to limit value offerings to that section.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: At 3 Parks Wine Shop in Atlanta, stocking a variety of wines spread across different price points works well for customers; the value price point seems to be between \$15 and \$20 for customers at Millesima in New York City.

"If [a customer is] open to spending between \$12 to \$15 and there's a fantastic bottle for \$16.99 ... right next to it, they may be open to spending more."

— Gary Fisch,
Gary's Wine & Marketplace

"We have two tables right when you walk in that are everyday, value-price offerings," says Dan Weber, a wine buyer at Leon and Son Wine in Brooklyn. "Twenty dollars and under is the limit there, but we have so many wines in that price range that they don't just fit there. So they're also peppered in with the rest of the selections around the shop."

At Convive, Warner-Levine finds it's a more exciting shopping experience for customers if the store isn't organized around price point. "The wines that we have on the shelf all offer value and are sensible for the price, but our value as

a store is that the quality is high for everything we have," he says. "So it doesn't matter if a \$15 bottle is next to a \$30 bottle—both wines will be exceptional for the price."

Fisch says that mixing value selections with the rest of the inventory can offer natural opportunities for consumers to incrementally trade up. "If somebody's mindset is stuck on \$12 to \$15 wines, and all those bottles are together, that's what they will end up with," he says. "But if they're open to spending between \$12 to \$15 and there's a fantastic bottle for \$16.99 that they're interested in right next to it, they may be open to spending more."

Aesthetics aside, building trust with customers is the most important factor for maximizing value selections in a continuously changing wine industry.

"When people come into the shop, I want them to feel confident with their purchase, whether it's an inexpensive bottle or the most expensive," says Weber. "They know we've given every bottle a lot of attention and thought about why we selected it, and they can trust that it's going to do the thing they hope it's going to do." ■



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. SMOKE LAB VODKA

Smoke Lab Vodka, distilled five times from Basmati rice and Himalayan spring water, is truly evocative of India. First came the classic and aniseed variants, and now there is an earthy, floral one created from prized, rare Kashmiri saffron grown in India's Kashmir Valley, surrounded by the Himalayas.

\$ SRP: \$30 per 750-ml bottle

globe smokelabofficial.com

2. KINGS COUNTY DISTILLERY

Kings County Distillery cofounder and distiller Colin Spoelman spent a year of R&D hatching a lightly caffeinated, 80-proof coffee whiskey with his team at their headquarters in New York City's Brooklyn Navy Yard. The star ingredient? Cold brew from Parlor Coffee, a Navy Yard neighbor. It imparts the bourbon and corn whiskey blend, reminiscent of amari, with layers of tropical fruit and creamy chocolate.

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

globe kingscountystillery.com

3. CASAMIGOS

Typically, cristalino tequilas have an añejo base, but the backbone of the Casamigos version is a smooth reposado double distilled from 100 percent Blue Weber agave and matured in American white oak barrels. Charcoal filtration lends the crystalline spirit flavors of vanilla bean and dried raisin that stand out in riffs on the Martini and Old Fashioned.

\$ SRP: \$60.99 per 750-ml bottle

globe casamigos.com

4. CROWN ROYAL

Tastes of Golden Delicious apples, vanilla, cinnamon, and toasted oak meld in Crown Royal's 23-year-old Golden Apple. The limited-edition whisky, lavishly presented in a golden bottle accompanied by a gold-foil collector's box and the brand's signature suede bag, also crosses over into lifestyle territory through a partnership with multidisciplinary artist Solange Knowles and her creative platform Saint Heron.

\$ SRP: \$249.99 per 750-ml bottle

globe crownroyal.com

5. BODEGA ARGENTO

Through Matriz Viva, Bodega Argento's research and development program, winemaker Juan Pablo Murgia champions a holistic wine ecosystem. Dovetailing with this mission is the Artesano 2022, an organic white Malbec teeming with green apple and citrus notes made in the Blanc de Noir tradition. The grapes, sourced from Alto Agrelo in Mendoza, were harvested early to ensure a bright acidity, then pressed immediately with no skin contact.

\$ SRP: \$14.99 per 750-ml bottle

globe bodegaargento.com

6. TAILS COCKTAILS

A shaker, ice, and glassware are all that home bartenders need to serve Tails Cocktails from Bacardi. The pre-mixed libations (20% ABV per three to four cocktails) include the Bacardí Rum Daiquiri that yields floating ice crystals upon shaking, and the Espresso Martini and Passion Fruit Martini with Eristoff vodka that produce eye-catching natural foam when poured out of the mixing tin. Next up? The Cazadores tequila Pomegranate Margarita.

\$ SRP: \$14.99 per 375-ml bottle

globe tailscocktails.com

NEW PRODUCTS



7



8



9



10



11



12

7. THE PRISONER WINE COMPANY

Blindfold, The Prisoner Wine Company's white wine label, has followed up its Blanc de Noir with an equally unconventional Sauvignon Blanc. After pressing the grapes from the North Coast of California, including a fraction of Sémillon, half the juice fermented in oak, while the other batch headed for stainless steel. Fusing them culminated in fresh, food-friendly notes of honeydew, nectarine, and grapefruit.

\$ SRP: \$32.99 per 750-ml bottle
thepisonerwinecompany.com

8. DE SOI

Recalling an effervescent brut rosé, the non-alcoholic apéritif Très Rosé joins Katy Perry and master distiller Morgan McLachlan's De Soi lineup. The canned concoction (750-ml bottles are forthcoming) is laden with adaptogens and botanicals like lion's mane, saffron, and rooibos, with tastes of red fruit and lychee.

\$ SRP: \$25 per four-pack of 8-oz. cans
drinkdesoi.com

9. CHAMPAGNE BILLECART-SALMON

Named for Billecart-Salmon's first chief winemaker, the Louis Salmon 2009 is a prestige cuvée comprising 100 percent Chardonnay Grands Crus from choice plots in the chalky Côte des Blancs terroir. The bubbly delivers a rush of marzipan and brioche on the palate underpinned by minerality.

\$ SRP: \$220 per 750-ml bottle
champagne-billecart.com

10. SANTO SPIRITS

Sammy Hagar and Guy Fieri ramped up their Santo Spirits agave portfolio, known for its Mezquila, with a bold añejo. Crafted by third-generation distiller Juan Eduardo Nuñez and tequilera Karina Rojo at El Viejo Distillery from 100 percent Blue Weber agave, the additive-free tequila is aged for an average of 24 months in casks that previously held American whiskey to amplify the agave's sweet, peppery characteristics.

\$ SRP: \$74.98 per 750-ml bottle
santospirits.com

11. MELETTI

The Meletti distillery in Ascoli Piceno, on Italy's Adriatic Coast, has been producing after-dinner liqueurs like amaro, anisette, and sambuca since 1870. The latest 19th-century recipe to make its way to the U.S. is Meletti Coffee, a union of coffee infusions, cacao, sugar, and neutral spirit that boosts espresso martinis with its chocolate aroma and nutty finish.

\$ SRP: \$25.99 per 750-ml bottle
meletti.it

12. ORNELLAIA

Bolgheri wine estate Ornellaia has released its citrusy, floral Poggio alle Gazze dell'Ornellaia 2021. A reflection of the Tuscan coast, the Sauvignon Blanc-dominant blend is rounded out with touches of Vermentino, Viognier, and Verdicchio. The wine spent time in a mix of wood, concrete, and steel in the cellar before a year of bottle aging.

\$ SRP: \$82 per 750-ml bottle
ornellaia.com



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Coppa Cocktails
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THE STATE OF RTD COCKTAILS

SPIRITS-BASED READY-TO-DRINK COCKTAILS HAVE SKYROCKETED IN RECENT YEARS—WHAT'S NEXT?

BY KELLY MAGYARICS

MARKET OVERVIEW

\$1.2 BILLION
IN 2020

\$1.6 BILLION
IN 2021

Ready-to-drink (RTD) cocktail revenue rose \$489 million from 2020 to 2021.

Source: Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS)

INCREASE OF
\$489
MILLION

56%
INCREASE IN
VOLUME

42%
INCREASE IN
REVENUE

RTD cocktail volume rose by 13.1 million cases from 2020 to 2021, from 23.5 million to 36.6 million nine-liter cases.

Source: DISCUS

Spirits-based RTDs comprised the fastest-growing spirits category in 2021, with a 42 percent increase in revenue from 2020 to 2021.

Source: DISCUS

The next highest was tequila and mezcal, with a 30 percent increase in revenue.

DEFINING RTDS



The RTD category encompasses any alcoholic beverage sold ready for consumption, and can be segmented into malt-based

RTDs (like hard seltzer), wine-

based RTDs (like sangria or wine coolers), and spirits-based RTDs (like pre-mixed or RTD cocktails).

In the market, these definitions can get blurry; High Noon pioneered the vodka-based hard seltzer style in 2019, which is marketed as a hard seltzer but technically classified as a spirits-based RTD cocktail.



As a whole, spirits-based RTDs can include:



RTD
Cocktails



Spirits
Seltzers



Shooters



Frozen
Novelties



Pods

Partner

COPPA COCKTAILS

Imported from the Netherlands, Coppa Cocktails deliver bartender-quality cocktails in award-winning, shaker-inspired bottles. With classics like the Margarita, Cosmopolitan, and more, these 750-milliliter ready-to-serve cocktails retail for \$14.99 to \$17.99.



According to point-of-sale polling, 55 percent of respondents prefer a spirits-based RTD beverage to malt-based or wine-based choices.

Source: DISCUS

Top two reasons consumers prefer spirits-based RTDs: They prefer the taste, and they are made with real spirits.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RTDS

17TH CENTURY

Punch (a mixture of spirits, citrus juice, sugar, water, and spices) originated in the 17th century. If someone stored leftover punch in a bottle or container, it could have been the first RTD cocktail.

1892

At an event at the Heublein Hotel in Hartford, Connecticut, staff made pre-batched Manhattans and Martinis for a summer picnic. It was the inspiration for Heublein Brothers' Club Cocktails, the first trademark for bottled cocktails.

These Martini variations were sold individually and in mixed sets.

1960s

Improved canning technology, which lines cans with plastic, meant that the flavor of higher-ABV cocktails wouldn't be marred by metal. Brands like Jim Beam, Party Tyme, Duet, and many more released canned cocktails in the 1960s and beyond.

1990s

Other mixed-drink RTD cocktails launch, such as Gordon's Gin & Tonic and Bacardi's Rum & Cola. This also marks the advent of sugary RTD cocktails, particularly the large-format Margarita, along with malt-based alcopops like Smirnoff Ice and Bacardi Breezer.

2013

The recent revival of RTDs was preceded by bars looking to reduce waste and service time through pre-batching cocktails, such as Ryan Chetiyawardana's groundbreaking White Lyan, which opened in 2013 with an entirely pre-batched menu. Amidst the modern RTD revival, bartenders have released their own commercial RTD cocktails, such as Social Hour by Ivy Mix and Tom Macy.

1840

Pimm's Cup, created in Britain in 1840, is another example of an (almost) RTD cocktail. The mixture of spirits (usually gin), and other wines, liqueurs, and infusions was usually served with sparkling lemonade or another mixer. Creator James Pimm then bottled one of his Pimm's Cups to be diluted and served.

1932

Campari released three-ounce glass bottles of Campari and soda water. It's still one of the top-selling RTD cocktails.

1980s

Burrough's Mixed Doubles was released, introducing the notion of RTD mixed drinks. The range consisted of a Gin & Tonic, Whisky & Dry Ginger, Whisky & Lemonade, Vodka & Tonic, Vodka & Lemonade, and Rum & Cola, bottled in glass.

2009

The launch of celebrity brand Skinnygirl Margarita is an early signal of the shift towards lower-sugar, lower-calorie, "better for you" RTD cocktails. Today, natural and organic ingredients, premium spirits, and at times, lower alcohol are common among RTD cocktails.

MID-2010s

A new crop of single-serve, canned RTD cocktails hit the market. This marked a shift from bottles to cans, valued for their portability and convenience.

2020s

The pandemic accelerated the already-growing RTD cocktail segment. With bars and restaurants closed, consumers were looking for a simple, convenient way to drink their favorite cocktails. At the same time, canned beverages became valued for their single-serve, low-touch format amidst health concerns.





CHANGING FORMATS

Single-serve RTD cocktails are on the rise, but large-format packaging still dominates.

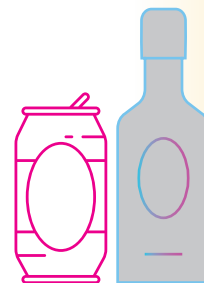
The 1.75-liter format decreased from 70 percent share in 2019 to 57 percent share in 2021.

57%
1.75-LITER
BOTTLES

At the same time, 355-milliliter cans increased from seven percent share in 2019 to 31 percent share in 2021.

Source: IWSR Drinks Market Analysis

31%
355-ML CANS



The majority of single-serve spirits-based RTDs are in cans, which are lightweight, easily recyclable, and have a lower carbon footprint.



However, there is a question about the shelf stability for certain RTD cocktails in cans. Citrus-based ones, for example, can eat away the inside of the can.

BASE SPIRITS

45.9%
VODKA-
BASED

In 2021, vodka overtook tequila as the most popular base for spirits-based RTDs, with 45.9 percent of market share. *Source: IWSR Drinks Market Analysis*

33.3%
TEQUILA-
BASED

8.0%
RUM-
BASED

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IMPERIAL CIDERS ARE GROWING FAST—HERE'S WHY

HIGH-ABV CIDERS ARE TRENDING THANKS TO UPDATED REGULATIONS ON PACKAGING AND TAXATION—AS WELL AS SHIFTING CONSUMER DEMANDS

BY BETH DEMMON

Commercial cider in the U.S. tends to be painted with a broad brush by many consumers: a sweet, sugary drink meant for autumn.

But as the cider segment evolves, so does the consumer demand for variety. Cider's slow but steady growth has come by expanding on the light, bubbly sessionability for which it's associated into higher ABV options. Enter: imperial cider.

The term "imperial cider" was first used in 2010 by 2 Towns Ciderhouse in Corvallis,

Oregon, to launch The Bad Apple, their 10.5% ABV cider made with Northwest apples and Meadowfoam honey, and since then countless others have joined the subcategory's ranks. Imperial cider is defined by alcohol-by-volume rather than flavor, and is typically 8% ABV or higher. It is now the fastest growing style in total beer sales in the U.S. per IRI data, according to the American Cider Association (ACA), showing year-on-year growth of 111 percent.

As cider in the U.S. matures, the growing strength of imperial cider is in-

ABOVE: 2 Towns Ciderhouse's The Bad Apple was the first imperial cider to launch in 2010.

fluencing the cider industry in profound ways, changing the way cider makers operate as they respond to consumer demand for higher-alcohol options.

AN EXPANDING CATEGORY

The original definition for imperial cider coined by 2 Towns has largely held, according to marketing director Danelle Krommiller, "both internally at 2 Towns and

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"Imperial ciders offer a shopper value proposition that most ciders, beers, and seltzers can't."

– Joe Gaynor, Angry Orchard

in the industry at large," and it remains a leader in the category. 2 Towns' Cosmic Crisp is the top-selling imperial cider SKU in the U.S., according to IRI data, and its success inspired the launch of the Imperial Cosmic Explorer line in 2022.

Schilling Cider in Seattle, Washington, has added its own interpretation to the style. "For us, imperial cider means a cider where you add extra ingredients to achieve a higher ABV than the apple juice would ferment to on its own," says Schilling cofounder and CEO Colin Schilling. "We import bitter sharp and bitter-sweet cider-specific concentrated apple juice from Europe which we then add to our fresh pressed juice in order to boost the potential alcohol, then we add an heirloom-style tannin structure we love in an imperial cider."

He says the top-selling cider in the Schilling portfolio is their Excelsior Imperial Apple (8.4% ABV), Schilling's first imperial cider available in a six-pack upon its launch in 2018.

More cideries across the U.S. have also clued in to imperial cider's appeal, including: Square Mile Cider in Portland, Oregon; Bold Rock Cider with cideries in North Carolina and Virginia; and Blake's Cider in Armada, Michigan, all of which prioritize imperial ciders in their lineup. Some have adjusted operations to meet current and projected demand. Kronmiller says 2 Towns recently added another building to their campus "to accommodate growing



ABOVE: Schilling Cider's Excelsior Imperial Apple (8.4% ABV) is also available in six-packs.

demand," while Texas' Austin Eastciders has gone even further. "Operations have expanded to include updated blending notes, adjustments to product priority in our production line, and staff training to help support the success of our Imperial Line. We also updated our cartoning equipment to support a new four-pack package size for this line," says Erika Guin, the operations manager.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF IMPERIAL CIDER

This consumer emphasis on high-alcohol options is not unique to cider, says Joe Gaynor, the cider maker at Angry Orchard in Walden, New York, the largest cider company in the U.S. "Higher, imperial ABV options are growing across many categories, including beer, flavored malt beverages, and cider," he explains. He says after witnessing imperial cider become the lead growth driver in the cider category,



Angry Orchard launched their Hardcore Dark Cherry Apple Hard Cider in 2022 as the brand's first nationally available 8% ABV cider.

With market conditions such as high inflation and a plethora of product choice, drinkers increasingly seek the best value in their purchases, which can translate to higher ABV. "Imperial ciders offer a shopper value proposition that most ciders, beers, and seltzers can't. Especially in the crowded alcohol space, value without sacrificing on quality is key," says Gaynor.

Guin says Austin Eastciders aims to appeal to consumers who want to try something new that's intensely flavored, but perhaps wish to limit their intake. "People want to feel that they are getting what they pay for," she says. "Products with a higher ABV provide more bang for your buck which engages consumers concerned with cost or who otherwise don't want to drink large volumes."

She goes on to add that they also look to other categories, such as ready-to-drink cocktails, for clues on what's trend-

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ing. Imperial offerings are providing an opportunity for makers in emerging segments like cider to insert their products in new-to-them occasions, taking the place of other premium products.

“Imperial products draw the attention of a slightly different demographic and are typically associated with drinking to celebrate a specific occasion or when drinking in higher-energy, social groups,” says Guin.

REMOVING THE LEGAL ROADBLOCKS TO HIGHER-ABV CIDER

Kronmiller says it took years of lobbying to get the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to sign off on using the word “imperial” on cider labels. But even after that happened in 2014, the imperial cider subcategory still faced regulatory hurdles.

Schilling points to a number of legal changes that have helped imperial cider to grow. “Around 2017, the TTB updated the definition of hard cider to include ciders up to 8.5% ABV from 7% from a tax class perspective,” he says. While that only applied to ciders with no additional fruit added (which excluded fruit-flavored cider), it reduced the tax structure for higher-ABV ciders to bring it more in line with beer rather than wine.

“After 12-ounce cans were allowed to be used for imperial cider, many other cider makers entered the category.”

– Colin Schilling, Schilling Cider

Then, in 2021, the TTB updated their standards of fill to include 12-ounce cans. Previously, the requirements for compliance were 375 milliliters, which did not correspond with many standard packaging materials. This update greatly streamlined logistics for cider makers and allowed the sub-category to flourish.

According to 13-week IRI data on the cider category in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, ciders between 7.1% and 8% ABV were the biggest category by dollar sales, roughly doubling after the 12-ounce format was approved.

“After 12-ounce cans were allowed to be used for imperial cider, many other cider makers entered the category, leading to even more rapid growth,” Schilling explains. There are still some restrictions—no standards of fill approval for 16-ounce or 19.2-ounce ciders or inclusion of fruit-



ABOVE: Hardcore Dark Cherry Apple is Angry Orchard's first nationally available high-ABV cider.

flavored imperial ciders under the same tax structure—but makers remain hopeful more change is coming as organizations like the ACA continue to lobby the TTB.

THE FUTURE OF IMPERIAL CIDER IS BRIGHT

While some cider sub-categories are experiencing stagnation or losses, such as citrus- or stone fruit-based ciders, imperial cider's expansive growth offsets much of this as the category as a whole continues to grow. Even Angry Orchard, American cider's Goliath, is betting big on imperial ciders. “We see imperial cider as a great opportunity for growth on a national scale,” says Gaynor.

Kronmiller estimates 40 percent of 2 Towns' current portfolio is imperial cider, but predicts it will go higher. “We see that growing alongside market demand,” she says. Based on imperial cider's success to date, Guin says Austin Eastciders also plans to invest even more in the category, adding more imperial flavors and updating production to meet demand. She's optimistic about the future. “We feel that this type of product is one worth the investment,” she says. ■

LEFT: 2 Towns recently expanded their cidery to meet growing demand.



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