

Beverage Journal

OCTOBER 2025

MOVING UP IN BEVERAGE

INSIGHTS TO PROPEL YOUR FUTURE
CAREER IN THE INDUSTRY



TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR LATEST
CAREER AND SALARY SURVEY

LANDING A NEXT-LEVEL
BARTENDING JOB





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PRINT ENDURES IN MARYLAND

Some of you may have seen the headlines earlier this month when Provi, the e-commerce company that acquired Beverage Media Group, announced that it was phasing out its print editions in New York, New Jersey, and Florida. Their move to what they're calling a "digital-first strategy" sparked plenty of conversation, and no small amount of confusion.

More than a few people reached out to ask me if the Maryland Beverage Journal was also shutting down. Let me set the record straight right here: **the Maryland Beverage Journal will continue to publish**, month after month, as it has since the days following the repeal of Prohibition.

When the 21st Amendment gave states the authority to regulate alcohol in 1933, Maryland retailers needed a reliable way to track the products they could offer to their customers. Out of that need, the Maryland Beverage Journal was born. For nearly a century, this publication has served as the essential reference for our state's licensed beverage alcohol community. Through world wars, industry consolidation, regulatory changes, and countless economic cycles, the Journal has never missed an issue.

That won't change because a tech company in Chicago decided to discontinue three editions they own.

The Maryland Beverage Journal is independently published and locally operated. Our wholesalers send us their information directly, and we compile it into the hundreds of pages you see every month. We add local editorial and industry updates that speak specifically to Maryland's trade. We also provide subscribers with access to a PDF edition online for convenience, but make no mistake: the printed book remains at the heart of what we do.

For years, futurists and analysts have



predicted the death of print. And yet here we are, almost 90 years later, with thousands of professionals across Maryland still depending on the Journal to do business. Why? Because a printed book offers permanence, clarity, and trust. You can flip through its pages, mark it up, leave it on the counter for a colleague, and know that the information is there when you need it. It doesn't get lost in an inbox or buried under digital clutter.

That's not to say online tools don't have value; they do. But time and again, when retailers are compiling their orders, when bars and restaurants are mapping out their beverage lists, they reach for the book. It has been called "the industry bible" for a reason.

Independent publishers like myself and my colleagues in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, are small, family-run businesses. We are not massive corporations chasing investors and quarterly growth reports. We are part of the Main Street fabric of this industry, and our mission is simple: to give you a tool you can count on.

So let me say it plainly: the Maryland Beverage Journal is here to stay. December may mark the end of Provi's print editions, but it will not mark the end of ours. We will keep printing, keep delivering, and keep supporting the three-tier system in Maryland as we have since the repeal of Prohibition.

Thank you for your trust, your readership, and your partnership. As always, my door is open if you have questions or concerns. Cheers! ■

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1. TORABHAIG

Just beside Torabhaig's distillery on the Isle of Skye lies the narrow sea channel Sound of Sleat from which the fourth chapter in the single malt Scotch whisky's Legacy series takes its name. Aged in both new and former bourbon American oak casks, the 92-proof, 10-year-old whisky balances notes of seaweed and honey and is underpinned by a signature sweet smokiness. Gracing the bottle is a new label painted by local artist Ellis O'Connor.

\$ SRP: \$59.99 per 700-ml bottle

🌐 torabhaig.com

2. SEVEN DAUGHTERS

Actor, author, and entrepreneur Taraji P. Henson signed on as strategic advisor and creative collaborator to Terlato Wine Group's Seven Daughters label in 2024, and it's been booming ever since. Joining the refreshed Moscato is a red blend uniting Marzemino, Corvina, and Merlot grapes sourced from family vineyards in Italy's Veneto region. Subtly effervescent, it's best served chilled, amplifying its wild berry bouquet.

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

🌐 sevendughters.com

3. MISUNDERSTOOD WHISKEY CO.

For the last two years, Misunderstood Whiskey Co. has been hard at work refining its Orange Blossom Bourbon—the first bourbon in its portfolio. At 80-proof, the small-batch whiskey, hatched with the help of Dutch Gold Honey, flaunts layers of citrus, vanilla bean, and orange blossom honey that are ripe for weaving into Spritzes and Old Fashioneds. Alongside the Ginger Spiced Whiskey, a previous release, it kicks off Misunderstood's Botanical Series.

\$ SRP: \$29.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 misunderstoodwhiskey.com

4. LARKMEAD VINEYARDS

The Solari Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 from Napa Valley's Larkmead Vineyards has great aging potential, evolving from a fruit-forward profile to a more savory one over the years. Opening with aromas of vanilla and cassis, it culminates in a long dark berry and espresso finish.

\$ SRP: \$200 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 larkmead.com

5. LOCH LOMOND

Highlands distillery Loch Lomond has reintroduced its 92-proof, 18-year-old Scotch whisky stateside. Matured in three different types of casks at the onsite cooperage, the liquid is bolstered by a modest amount of peat, revealing restrained smoke that plays with dominant honey and green apple flavors.

\$ SRP: \$159.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 us.lochlomondwhiskies.com

6. KAHLÚA

Dessert fans can now look forward to Kahlúa Dunkin' Caramel Swirl cream liqueur, developed in partnership with coffee and donut behemoth Dunkin'. Combining one of Dunkin's most beloved flavor swirls with Kahlúa rum and 100 percent Arabica coffee from Veracruz, Mexico, the ready-to-pour liqueur tastes of toffee, vanilla, and dulce de leche, and can simply be served neat, chilled, or over ice.

\$ SRP: \$24.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 kahlua.com



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7. CHICKEN COCK WHISKEY

In 1860, the steamboat transporting 475 barrels of Chicken Cock whiskey collided with wreckage and sank. It was a severe loss for founder James A. Miller, but he persevered, and the limited-edition Miller's Reserve American whiskey is testament to that resilience. Bottled at 115-proof, it brings together 10-year-old double oak Kentucky whiskey, eight-year-old high-rye Indiana bourbon, eight-year-old West Virginia wheated bourbon, and 10-year-old Ohio wheated bourbon, all from states that border the Ohio River.

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

chickencockwhiskey.com

8. OLEANDRI WINES

Cabernet Sauvignon is the star of the La Scala 2022, a full-bodied proprietary red blend from Napa Valley's Oleandri Wines. Earthy and fruit-forward, it's rounded out with Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petite Sirah, and Petit Verdot, and highlights notes of anise and cocoa powder.

\$ SRP: \$100 per 750-ml bottle

oleandriwines.com

9. GLEN SCOTIA

Campbelltown distillery Glen Scotia has released a 15-year-old, single malt Scotch whisky born from 100 percent malted barley sourced from Scotland's East Coast and water tapped at Crosshill Loch. Influenced by Campbelltown's maritime setting, the 92-proof spirit exhibits citrus and tropical fruit on the palate.

\$ SRP: \$119.99 per 750-ml bottle

us.glenscotia.com

10. PURSUIT SPIRITS

Pursuit Spirits, from the team behind the *Bourbon Pursuit* podcast, who first released Pursuit United Rye, have now launched a 108-proof spinoff featuring a blend of straight rye whiskeys finished in XO Cognac casks. Together, the four- to seven-year-old whiskeys, once again courtesy of collaborators Bardstown Bourbon Company and Sagamore Spirit Distillery, elicit notes of baked apricot and black walnut.

\$ SRP: \$69.99 per 750-ml bottle

pursuitspirits.com

11. TEQUILA ZARPADO

An infusion of Carolina Reaper and Habanero chile peppers give Tequila Zarpado's Reaper an enticing jolt of spice. The blanco tequila is crafted in small batches from 100 percent blue Weber agave and lends cocktails like the Margarita a simultaneously fruity and fiery character.

\$ SRP: \$28.99 per 750-ml bottle

tequilazarpado.com

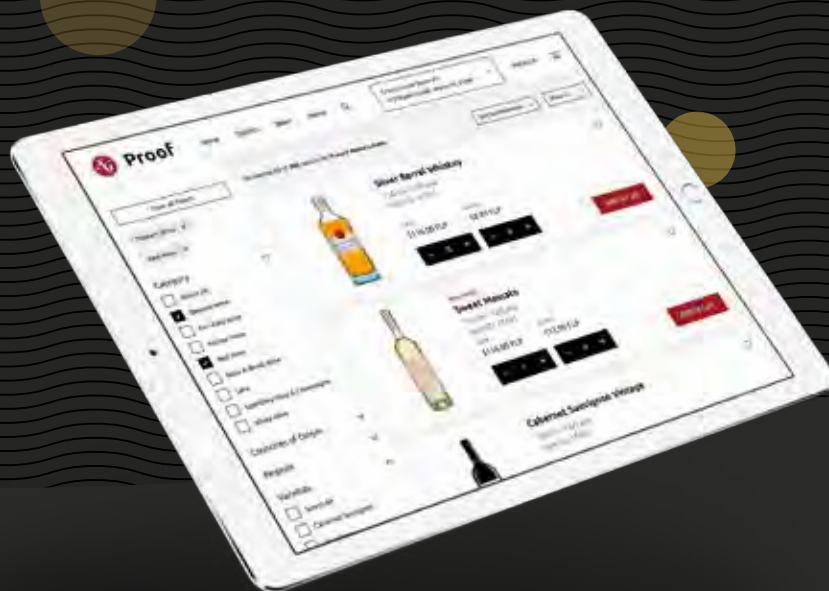
12. TEELING WHISKEY

To commemorate its shared Irish heritage, Teeling Whiskey and Notre Dame Athletics have teamed up for the second year in a row on a 92-proof, limited-release, small-batch expression finished for six months in rum casks. An ideal fit for cocktails like the Irish Coffee, the floral, herbal whiskey is housed in a collectible bottle adorned with an embossed University of Notre Dame emblem and gold capsule that recalls the Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team's uniforms.

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

teelingwhiskey.com

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NAUGHTY DOGS

RESTAURANT, PUB AND GRILL AIMS FOR BEST IN SHOW

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

In writing this ongoing series of articles on funny and quirky-named bars, restaurants, pubs and taverns in and around Maryland, how could I not eventually do a feature on Naughty Dogs Restaurant, Pub and Grill in Bel Air? It IS a restaurant and a pub. And it's got one of the most memorable names for an eating and drinking establishment in the state.

Owner John Roemer said in a recent interview with the Beverage Journal that the name, which he re-christened the place with when he bought the old Bull on the Beach in 2016, has nothing to do with any particular ill-behaving canine. "Our love of animals is how our name came to be!" he exclaimed. "I've always loved animals. And I believe animals can teach humans a lot, especially dogs. The actual dog on our T-shirt is Ringo, his family dog. He's named after Ringo Starr of the

Beatles."

Roemer went on to describe his business as a "local culture" bar and restaurant. Many have likened it to "Cheers," the famous TV watering hole "where everybody knows your name" that ran for years on NBC and in reruns. "Everybody seemingly knows everybody," he said. "It's in Bel Air, but it's definitely on the outskirts. So, we're more in the agricultural community. We have fresh food and great drinks, and we're very dog friendly. Our outside patio allows dogs. We also have an outside volleyball court where we do leagues and fundraisers out there."

In addition to its appeal to locals, Naughty Dogs Restaurant, Pub and Grill has become known for two things primarily, its value-priced menu and its community outreach. The menu includes such appetizers as pub nachos and crabby fries, entrees that range from fish and chips to a hot turkey dinner and the usual array of sandwiches, salads, and chicken wings. The standout section is the Naughty Dogs, a fun selection of hot dogs with such menu titles as The Jimmy Hoffa and the Dog King. And, yes, you can Create Your Own Naughty Dog.

John Roemer
owner
Naughty Dogs Restaurant, Pub and Grill



Community outreach includes the local volleyball leagues mentioned above. But Roemer and his staff really help causes and organizations close to the hearts of staff and ownership. One is the Ruritans, a service club located in numerous small towns and rural areas nationwide that focus on community service and local fellowship. He remarked, "We also work with autistic students, those who are functional and those who aren't. We supply and support them. We want to be known as a 'giving back to the community' restaurant, bar, and grill."

The beverage menu is one of the most underrated pluses of a visit to Naughty Dogs. Cocktails include such creative concoctions as the Fresh Pear Martini, the Pineapple Breeze Martini, and The O's Crush. The standout Salty Dog is made with Smirnoff Grapefruit, fresh squeezed grapefruit juice, and salt around the rim of the glass.

Roemer further noted, "We really don't do a lot of fancy stuff. That's not our clientele. We have flavored slushy machines. And we do a really good Sour Berry Vodka Lemonade. We also have a great bourbon selec-

tion. We host cigar and bourbon tastings out in the sand for Father's Day and other special events."

When asked what the favorite part of his job is, Roemer was quick to answer: "I love seeing my employees develop. I've watched so many of them grow. We're a 'stop and go' industry for the most part, especially being close to Harford County Community College. For a number of people who have worked here, it's been a short stint. If I can impact them and when they do leave, I hope they have a successful next chapter in life."

The flipside of that question is not so much the least favorite part of his job, but what does he still find challenging? Even hard? His reply:



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“Adapting to the changes in this industry is my biggest challenge. The goal has been to stay fresh, stay unique, and continue to grow sales in what’s been a struggling economy. But I believe people are bouncing back. It’s starting to grow again.”

He continued, “You’re never unable to learn. When you think you’ve learned everything, your employees will teach you something you never knew. And if you don’t listen, if you’re closed off, your business will suffer. Look at professional sports. Just because you’ve played your sport at a high level, you’ve been an All-Star, you’ll get cut if you don’t continue to grow and learn and perform.”

And for those young dogs and cats out there looking to own and operate their own place one day – any bartenders or barbacks or waiters/waitresses reading this with visions of doing what Roemer does – he offered the following stern words of wisdom: “No job

is below you in our industry. If you want to lead, you need to lead by example. From front to back, learn every piece of the business. You need to wash a dish, you need to know the whole industry to understand the industry.”

He concluded, “I track all of my sales. You

gotta watch every penny, and you better watch your markets. Your corn, your beef, etc. I keep a versatile menu so I can adapt. And I stay positive. Otherwise . . . why stay in the game? You should look forward to every day in this business!” ■



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EVERYDAY GLAMOUR

It was a memorable trip to Champagne that propelled fifth-generation winemaker Joe Wagner to introduce a duo of zero-dosage sparkling wines to the **Belle Glos** portfolio. Made in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley in the Méthode Champenoise style, the 100 percent Chardonnay blanc de blanc tastes of Meyer lemon and almond, while the Pinot Noir rosé is redolent of raspberry and cherry.

SRP: \$75 per 750-ml bottle



PROLONGING SUMMER

White grape varieties flourish in Washington State's Columbia Valley, and **Estival**, a new brand from Ste. Michelle Wine Estates overseen by head winemaker Lacey Steffey, puts the region's aromatic wines in the spotlight. First up is the Sauvignon Blanc 2024 from the Horse Heaven Hills AVA. Informed by the Columbia River's breezes and cool nights following long, sunny days, it fuses notes of pineapple, lemongrass, grapefruit, and passionfruit with minerality and salinity.

SRP: \$18.99 per 750-ml bottle



COME TOGETHER

Six different grapes—Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon, Viognier, Albariño, Riesling, and Chardonnay—thrive in **Mi Sueño Winery's** Casa Adobe Vineyard in the Sonoma Valley. The Unico Vino Blanco 2023, a complex high-acid blend, combines them all in a white wine distinguished by flavors such as lemongrass and tangerine.

SRP: \$55 per 750-ml bottle



THE OTHER SIDE

Fontanafredda is known for its powerful Barolos, but the historic Piedmont producer is venturing further into white wine territory, too. Building off the success of its Gavi di Gavi DOCG sourced from vineyards exclusively in Gavi, there's now an easy-drinking Gavi DOCG made with native Cortese grapes grown across the appellation's 11 communes. Bright, crisp, and food-friendly, it showcases the denomination's depth.

SRP: \$22.99 per 750-ml bottle



TRIBUTE TO THE LAND

Composed of 12 distinct blocks, one of them perched on a volcanic knoll, the Winery Ranch vineyard is a diverse expression of Napa Valley's Stags Leap District AVA. This is where **Baldacci Family Vineyards** produces its Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon, and the 2022 vintage is rife with layers of black fruit, tobacco leaf, and baking spice.

SRP: \$125 per 750-ml bottle





INSIGHTS FROM OUR 2025 CAREER AND SALARY SURVEY

THE FOURTH EDITION OF *SEVENFIFTY DAILY'S* INDUSTRY-WIDE REPORT, CONDUCTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PROVI, SHOWS A SECTOR GRAPPLING WITH ECONOMIC HEADWINDS—YET REMAINING CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE

BY SHANA CLARKE

W

hat draws people to the beverage industry is its dynamism—always evolving to confront new challenges and cultural shifts. This dynamism was on display in Provi and *SevenFifty Daily's* 2023 Beverage Industry Career & Salary Survey, which revealed a landscape dramatically altered in the wake of the pandemic. And this year's survey, just two years later, demonstrates a workforce again adapting to seismic shifts.

Today's market presents unique challenges to the beverage industry, with younger generations and newly health-conscious consumers turning away from alcohol in record numbers, alongside the economic fallout of inflation and President Donald Trump's erratic tariff policy, which has hit every sector. For industry members, however, feelings about the in-

dustry's future in light of these headwinds, as well as on their career progression and compensation, aren't necessarily what we might predict—and also offer bright spots of optimism for the future.

More than 1,100 beverage professionals responded to the anonymous survey from every trade tier, including retailers, restaurant and bar staff, importers, distributors, producers, and more. Their responses revealed an industry coming to terms with a changing market, seeking avenues for growth both professional and financial, and, ultimately, remaining hopeful. Here are three key takeaways—and visit our publisher Provi to download the full report.

TARIFFS DISPLACE SUSTAINABILITY AS THE INDUSTRY'S PRIMARY CONCERN

Since February 1, when Trump first announced the 25 percent tax on all goods from Canada and Mexico, there has been a litany of announcements and postponements regarding global tariffs, cre-

BELOW: Tom Wark, National Association of Wine Retailers



“When you don’t have a grasp on what your inventory costs will be, caution takes over. Reduced hiring is a reflection of caution as much as it is a downturn in sales.”

– Tom Wark, National Association of Wine Retailers

ating trade tensions and leaving the U.S. beverage industry scrambling to adapt. More than three-quarters of respondents (77 percent) expressed being "very concerned" about these policies, an increase of 27 percentage points from two years ago when a suspension was in place under former President Joe Biden.

“I think it's a very challenging time for the greater beverage alcohol industry,” says Chris Swonger, the CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, mirroring our respondents’ concern. “As tariffs settle in, it will have a cost impact on the end product. That could have some impact on consumers trading up or buying that special bottle of Scotch or Cognac.”

While retaliatory tariffs impacting alcohol are, for now, limited, that could change rapidly. According to Swonger,



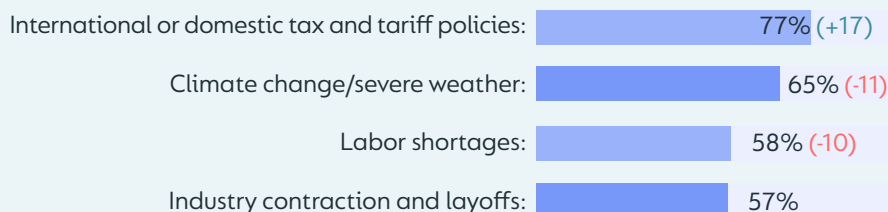
ABOVE: Chris Swonger, Distilled Spirits Council of the United States

American spirits producers lost 65 percent of their business in Canada during the trade dispute in March. It is the uncertainty that is causing the most strain. “The biggest concern that we have is there's a lack of predictability in the spirits industry,” he says.

Tom Wark, the executive director of the National Association of Wine Retailers (NAWR), seconds that sentiment, noting that it carries through to the off-premise. “When you don’t have a grasp on what your inventory costs will be, caution takes over,” says Wark. “Reduced hiring is a reflection of caution as much as it is a downturn in sales”

With tariffs dominating the conversation, other previously pressing concerns,

Please indicate if you are very concerned about these industry issues.



Figures in parentheses indicate percentage point changes over 2023 survey.

namely sustainability, no longer command as much attention. Sustainable packaging and climate change were the top two industry issues of growing concern according to respondents in our 2023 survey; this year, both fell more than 10 percentage points. Similarly, organic, biodynamic, and sustainable beverages are trending down with only half of respondents ranking them as growing in importance.

This sentiment was reflected at the NAWR Summit in May 2025. “I don’t think I heard the words sustainable, organic, and biodynamic come up one single time over the course of two days,” says Wark. “I did not hear a single word about sustainable wines and how they’re selling. It’s clearly not the most concerning thing for retailers right now.”

Charlotte Hey, the executive director of International Wineries for Climate Action, which counts over 170 wineries in 14 countries as members, believes the data doesn’t necessarily indicate a drop in concern but rather a change. “What has taken a hit is the term ‘sustainability,’” she says. “It’s such a woolly term. I think it’s part of the development of how we are moving forward in terms of all of the aspects that make up sustainability.”

Those who are truly committed, Hey believes, will continue to define and invest

in their priority areas. “The people who perhaps might have been paying lip service or doing it because they felt they had to do it before, they’ve dropped away,” she says, referring to greenwashing that has long been prevalent.

While industry members are being more careful about where they spend their money, Hey notes regenerative farming and sustainable packaging remain top developmental areas for producers. “The majority of conscientious wine producers already have [sustainable packaging] in their value chain and in their operational decisions. They know that reducing [bottle] weight is an advantage to any business plan going forward.”

CHALLENGES ABOUND IN THE OFF-PREMISE

While much of the industry has struggled amidst the economic turbulence of the last few years, our data suggests that the off-premise is the tier most negatively impacted. “When sales are down, as they have been for quite some time, there is less hiring, and when there are fewer positions open, salaries tend to retreat,” says Wark. “This is the situation we are in now, and there do not appear to be any signs of the downturn in wine sales (and hiring) abating in the near term.”

The median reported salary in retail was \$20,000 less than the overall median for the beverage industry. That’s true even as 88 percent of off-premise respondents held ownership or manager-level roles. It was also the only tier that did not see an increase in median salary since 2023, with 72 percent of respondents not receiving a raise in the past two and a half years. Con-



ABOVE: Deborah Brenner, Women of the Vine and Spirits

sequently, perhaps, off-premise workers are feeling the most pessimistic about the future. Only 22 percent viewed their opportunities for professional growth within the tier as “very good” or “excellent,” a drop of 15 percentage points over 2023.

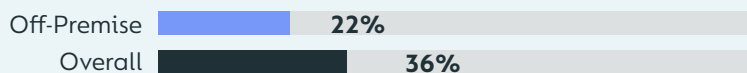
“The data is a reflection of what everyone working in and around the off-premise marketplace understands: The past two years have been among the most difficult retail environments for wine we have seen in decades,” says Wark. As the survey shows, stress levels have also increased over 2023.

The retail environment has changed, not just from the drop in consumption but from a proliferation of competition in the form of new beverage categories. “Wine no longer competes with beer and spirits,” says Wark. “It competes with RTDs, hard cider, hard seltzer, hard kombucha, canned cocktails, THC-infused beverages, and a number of other relatively new categories that had little impact twenty years

BELOW: Charlotte Hey, International Wineries for Climate Action



Respondents Reporting a Positive Career Outlook



ago.” He notes younger consumers in particular are opting for alternatives.

The fallout of this reaches producers, too, with brewers turning to cannabis beverages and hard seltzers to offset losses. “New beverage options are driving craft brewers to reconsider their own portfolios,” says Matt Gacioch, the staff economist for the Brewers Association. “Others are bringing in these new products from elsewhere to sell in their taprooms. Craft beer production was down in 2024, but at least some of that capacity was taken up by brewers expanding beyond beer production.”

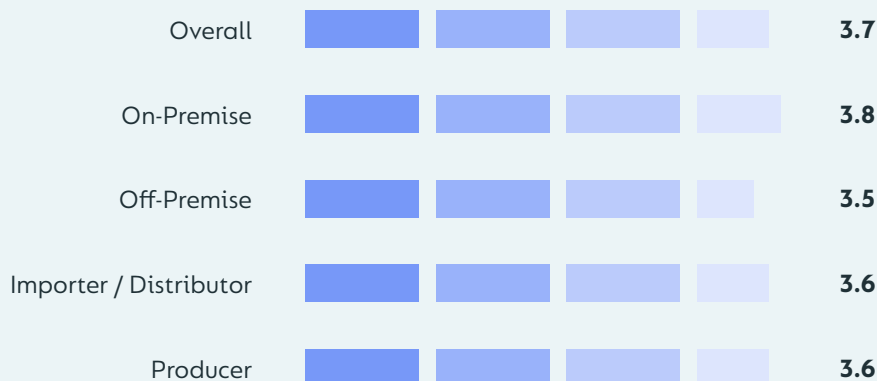
THE GENDER PAY GAP IS NARROWING

Despite the challenges, a cautious optimism prevails. Respondents rated their optimism about the future of the industry on average at 3.7 out of 5. This might be because compensation is looking up, with the median salary increasing seven percent over our 2023 survey, with the biggest leaps happening in the on-premise and producer tiers. (However, it’s important to note this only slightly outpaces inflation.)

One bright spot in the data was in the gender pay gap. Last time we looked at this issue, in our 2019 survey, men out-earned women by \$12,000. The 2025 results showed just \$4,000 median salary difference. The beverage industry is also closer to gender parity than the national average; women in beverage earn on average \$0.95 per dollar to men compared to \$0.85 nationally.

“More companies now understand that pay equity isn’t just the right thing—it’s a business imperative for retention and recruitment,” says Deborah Brenner, the founder and CEO of Women of the Vine and Spirits, an organization that mentors and empowers women in the wine industry. “Salary transparency, mentorship, and leadership development for women are making a measurable impact. Companies

How optimistic are you about the future of the beverage industry?



5 = Extremely optimistic; 1 = Not optimistic at all

are also placing more emphasis on intentional hiring and promotion practices, ensuring women have the same opportunities for leadership roles and higher-paying positions.” Brenner says opportunities for women are growing at every level, from production to corporate roles.

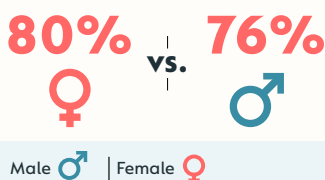
This progress might be indicative of the work of DEI programs, many of which were launched in 2020, but have since been widely dismantled after an Executive Order in January 2025 from Trump. Nearly half of respondents were more concerned about this policy shift than they were about the impact of AI, generational shifts

away from wine, and pressure from anti-alcohol messaging.

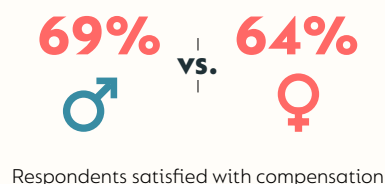
“I believe we will continue to see progress in closing the gender pay gap in the industry as the demand for great talent continues to grow,” says Brenner. “However, systemic change to an industry requires ongoing commitment, transparency, and accountability from all levels of leadership in all industry sectors and across all three tiers.” ■

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Women were more likely to have received a raise in the last 2.5 years than men.



However, men are happier with their compensation than women.



A BARTENDER'S GUIDE TO MOVING UP IN THE CRAFT COCKTAIL WORLD

WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING TO MOVE FROM BARBACK TO BARTENDER OR TARGET A MORE PRESTIGIOUS BAR, IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN WHAT'S ON YOUR RÉSUMÉ

BY PAMELA VACHON

The rise of craft cocktails over the past few decades has helped establish bartending as a profession worthy of aspiration. “People used to fall into this industry,” says Lynnette Marrero, an award-winning bartender and cofounder of Speed Rack, “and there's more intention now of really seeing this as a viable career.”

This shift coincided with a wealth of new resources. “Now more than ever, there's so much information out there,” says Julie Reiner, the cofounder and co-owner of New York City's Clover Club and Milady's. Between manuals penned by industry leaders, YouTube videos, educa-

tional seminars, professional conferences, competitions, and mentorship programs, there's no shortage of opportunities to learn, network, and demonstrate skill and drive.

“Watching the growth of the cocktail world over the past 25 to 30 years, it can be really tough to navigate for young bartenders now, because there's so much to know,” Reiner says, and that's beyond the requisite understanding of basic technique and classic cocktail formulas.

Whether you're a barback hoping to move up, a restaurant bartender looking

to sidestep to a craft cocktail concept, or a cocktail bartender in a smaller market eyeing a noteworthy bar in a big city, how do you actually progress? *Beverage Media* spoke with over a dozen industry leaders

RIGHT: Bartender Lynnette Marrero sees more people intentionally pursuing bar work as a viable career path.





ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Julie Reiner, Clover Club and Milady's; Jeffrey Morgenthaler, Pacific Standard and The Sunset Room; and Matty Clark, Attaboy and Good Guy's.

for their insights into what it takes for an ambitious and aspirational bartender to move up in the world of craft cocktails right now.

FIND YOUR FOCUS

It isn't necessarily important to have a specialization, but it's important to understand that cocktail bars offer a variety of drink styles and workplace cultures. "First and foremost, decide what kind of cocktail bar you want to work with," says Reiner. "Who do you want your owners or management team to be? Understand that you're interviewing the venue as much as the venue is interviewing you, and make sure that it's the right fit."

The approach to cocktails, however, contributes to a bar's culture as much as its team and management style. Once upon a time, "it was just craft cocktails," says Jeffrey Morgenthaler, the consulting partner of Pacific Standard and The Sunset Room in Portland, Oregon. "Now there are the tiki people, the hardcore classics people, the molecular mixology people. So by finding out what your specific interest is, you can try to connect with that facet of the community."

Matty Clark, the general manager of New York City's Attaboy and Good Guy's, recommends getting out there in person. "Before you start looking for work, go to the bars you enjoy going to and see how

they execute, and take notes," he says. "Meet those bartenders. Be smart—have two drinks and don't get drunk and out of line." Being an exemplary patron can help you connect with the bar staff and position you as a potentially positive addition to the team. "Come back every once in a while and ask about potential openings. That's how I got all of my bartending gigs in the beginning."

BUILD YOUR RÉSUMÉ, WORK YOUR WAY UP, AND ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

A glowing résumé might help, but if you don't have big names or competition wins, many top tier craft cocktail bars actually prioritize other attributes, for example, a variety of hospitality experience or longevity with previous employers.

"We love to see potential hires have a range of professional hospitality experience, not just cocktail bars," says Meghan Oleson, the administrative manager for Gin & Luck, Death & Co's parent operating company. "Hotels, full service restaurants, and [quick service restaurants]—working in a variety of environments builds up a dynamic set of service, beverage, and culinary skills over time."

Longevity is also valuable. "It never looks good to be someplace for only six months," says Reiner, no matter how prominent the bars on your résumé. "We all know those people in every single city," Morgenthaler adds. "They get identified very quickly as job hoppers."

According to Josh Harris, the founder of San Francisco's Trick Dog, you can better stand out as a candidate by working to elevate your current bar. "Put your skills into action wherever you're working now and build a reputation," he says. "Create industry respect through your own ability to rise through the ranks and increase the stature of that place."

Moving to an upper echelon cocktail bar, however, might necessitate taking a support position to start—it's rare for certain bars to hire people in at the bartender level at all. "We don't hire bartenders," says Harris, a sentiment echoed by several other interviewees. "Positions for bartending don't open up because we are focusing on the development of our team. We're looking for people in support positions that we believe are going to be poised to grow and develop, so when a position for bartending opens up, it is undoubtedly going to be filled with somebody on our team who has been working toward that," he says, from hosts and servers to barbacks. "There's no greater sign of humility than being willing to do that in the interest of pursuing a goal, and those people have proven to be outstanding teammates during the time they were with us."

In a support position, however, continue to express your interest in moving up, especially if you excel in your current role. "You need to demonstrate that you know the program where you're working," says Clark, "and you need to advocate for yourself. You need to say all the time, 'I want to be doing this.' People



will just leave you where you are if you're excellent at what you do."

Natasha Sofia, the global advocacy director for Mijenta Tequila, who worked her way up through cocktail bars in Puerto Rico and New York City, concurs: "If you want to be the head bartender, you have to ask," she says. "You have to come up with a plan of what you bring to the table. Any time I've gotten a raise or promotion, I come in with a deck and I'm like, 'Everybody sit down. I am about to show you why.'"

BECOME AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE BARTENDING COMMUNITY

Participation in the craft cocktail community in any way possible can help open doors to jobs. "You have to put yourself out there," says Marrero. "In larger markets that brands travel to, there are a lot of opportunities for education that are brand-supported. If you're in a smaller market, how do you find those opportunities? Competitions [and other events] help you build a community, so when you decide to go somewhere else, you already have potential contacts and relationships."

"The way I got to where I am was by just being seen," says Glendon Hartley, the cofounder of Washington D.C.'s Service Bar. "I was going to Bartenders' Guild events. I made sure that people—the brand ambassadors, the tastemakers in the city—saw me, and saw that I was seeking education. Go to the events to network and educate yourself, not to party."

Participation in competitions is less about winning, and more about this

invaluable visibility and access to industry decision-makers. "Being in competitions is a great way to showcase your style to people," says Hartley. "[As a judge] I've hired people even when they lost a competition because I really liked the way that their drink was balanced."

Attendance at major industry events, such as Bar Convent Brooklyn, Portland Cocktail Week, and Bar 5-Day, can both signal seriousness of purpose and be a learning and networking opportunity. Tales of the Cocktail (TOTC) offers its annual Cocktail Apprentice Program (CAP)—a mentorship and networking opportunity where apprentices support conference sessions and events, which helps subsidize their attendance at the conference.

"The CAP program was one of the most pivotal things that I've done in my career," says Sofia. "The people that I was admiring, that I was YouTube-ing to see their seminars, I was suddenly working



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Meghan Oleson, Gin & Luck; Josh Harris, Trick Dog; and Natasha Sofia, Mijenta Tequila.

with, and learning from them directly." Fellow CAP mentees can also become resources in markets other than your own. "The people that I met were the ones that helped me get jobs," she says. "They were the ones that became my community."

SEEK ACTIVE AND PASSIVE MENTORSHIP

If it's not logistically or financially possible to travel for bar education and networking opportunities, senior staff members and industry leaders can help elevate the careers of junior bartenders or barbacks through mentorship.

"Mentorship is foundational as a cornerstone of this industry," says Colin Asare-Appiah, the trade director of culture and lifestyle for Bacardi and the Tales of the Cocktail 2025's Best U.S. Bar Mentor. Asare-Appiah founded "Letters to a Young Bartender," an annual panel at TOTC, inviting experienced barpros to write letters to their younger selves to act as guideposts and inspiration for those just starting out. Peer mentorship is also available, as with Lucia Creed's recently launched Raise The Bar Mentorship Alliance.

Marrero also believes in passive mentorship—taking cues and following the lead of someone's career you admire

LEFT: Glendon Hartley, the cofounder of Service Bar, encourages aspiring bartenders to make themselves visible to the industry's tastemakers through networking and seeking education.

without them necessarily taking an active role in mentoring you. “Julie Reiner didn’t directly mentor me, but within her system I saw how she ran her businesses, such as doing her own PR,” says Marrero. “That was a way of watching someone and learning from them in mentorship that’s not active, but you’re learning it by osmosis.”

CULTIVATE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILE CAREFULLY

With the transition of Millennial bartenders into leadership positions, your social media presence will likely be considered as part of your application, according to many interviewees in hiring roles.

If you’ve positioned yourself as a cocktail influencer, this might signal to a prospective employer that you have other priorities. “People with a very high social media following are going to want to do their own thing,” says Hartley, “not necessarily what is best for your program.”

However, for those with the right experience and approach, social media can also be a benefit or a service that you provide in addition to your bartending skill. Andrea Gurjic was hired at New York City’s Sip & Guzzle as both a bartender and social media manager. With extensive



ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Andrea Gurjic, Sip & Guzzle; Leishla Maldonado, Loma.

experience in both categories, “I kind of became a package deal, and this duality of my identity is something that I used as my strength,” she says. For those who want to grow their social media platform, “maybe a bar that is trying to [deemphasize social media] isn’t the right fit for you,” she says.

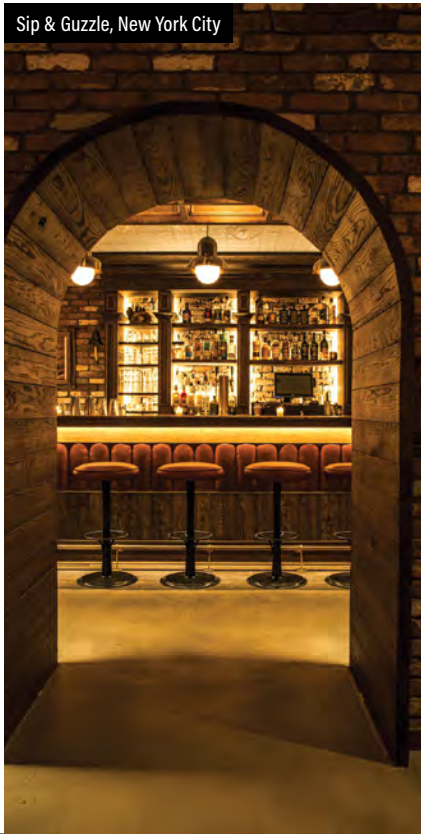
PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

Everyone interviewed asserted that while anyone can be taught to make cocktails, attitude, personality, and a hospitality-minded ethos are crucial—and harder to teach. “One of the hardest things for people to internalize is that the job isn’t about you,” says Clark, “it’s about the person sitting across from you. I’m looking for people who can show someone a good time, and especially turn someone’s bad time into a good time.”

Innate hospitality skills may be measured in an interview, or observed in a trial setting by how you interact with guests or teammates, or even while you work at your current bar. Anyone in a hiring position is going to ask questions in an interview that suss out your commitment to both the guest experience and the team. “I can tell when someone’s just sort of reciting a script about hospitality,” says Morgenthaler, “and I can tell when they’re truly passionate about it.”

While bar managers may not be looking to teach hospitality, as a bartender in any

environment, hospitality can be practiced. “Start tapping in to how you want to feel when you go out, and make sure you’re doing that in small ways behind the bar unprompted,” says Leishla Maldonado, the beverage director of Loma in Providence, Rhode Island, whether that’s making sure to greet every guest with a smile who approaches the bar, making people feel comfortable no matter their drink order, and not using service bar as an excuse to avoid having conversations with guests. “Bars and restaurants are communal and we need to build our programs to have that at the forefront,” she says. “These spaces aren’t just about getting intoxicated but how we connect with each other.” ■



LEFT: Bacardi's Colin Asare-Appiah believes mentorship is foundational to moving up in the industry.