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March, 2015

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The largest compilation of beverage alcohol price and brand information.

HOW BEER, WINE
AND SPIRITS
GET TO THE
MARKETPLACE



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PUBLISHER

Gerald P. Slone
gerry@thebeveragejournal.com

EDITOR & ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Dana Slone
dana@thebeveragejournal.com

DIRECTOR OF WHOLESALE SERVICES

Laurie Buick
laurie@thebeveragejournal.com

SUBSCRIPTION/RETAIL SERVICES

Brian Slone
brian@thebeveragejournal.com

DESIGN

Evan Fraser
evan@thebeveragejournal.com

WRITERS

Lauren Daley
Bob Sample

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MARKETPOINT

The March issue offers some much needed spring break thinking. Whiskey, wine and warmer climates.

- It is **Irish whiskey** month, with a focus on the dynamic growth of the category that is leading brown spirits and evolving rapidly with extensions and new products.
- The current **legislative** session offers industry-related bills impacting the industry. We take look at what is in play.
- Association News looks at the hospitality industry's role in state **job** creation.
- What's hot from France today? Simple answer: the **Rhône**. It is out-performing the rest of France in terms of superior value and range of products.



- **Chile's** Sauvignon Blancs are transcending the "value" level and challenging examples from New Zealand, California and France. Move over reds.
- Here's a timeless question of restaurant wine **pricing**: margin vs. volume? Many restaurants are exploring their approach.
- The versatility of **Amaro** is winning new advocates, who are happily spreading the sweet word about bitters.
- Not enough room on your shelves? The month's **beer** column has a few words on ever-increasing SKUs.
- **Local** faces, places and tastes are presented in a recap of Sun WineFest, from happenings "Around Town," inside the store in "Retail Review," at the bar in "Serving Up" and more. Shouldn't your news be here too?



ON THE COVER

Photographed at
Blind Butcher,
Dallas, TX.

By Greg Blomberg

CORRECTION:

In "Cognac: Back on Track" (October 2014), Rémy Martin V was incorrectly referred to as a Cognac; it is classified as an Eau-de-Vie de Vin (Distilled Grape Spirit), imported by Rémy Cointreau USA.

MILLENNIALS DRIVE PREMIUMIZATION IN WINE INDUSTRY

Rabobank published a new report on the role of Millennials and Gen Xers in driving premiumization in the global wine industry, and the divergent channels that wine marketers are using to pursue these important new consumers. The Rabobank Food and Agribusiness Research team writes that Millennials and Generation X consumers are shaping and changing the global wine consumption market. "Wine suppliers and wine retailers have sensed a growing appetite for wines beyond the mainstream," Rabobank analyst Marc Soccio said. "Somewhat paradoxically, the markets are still seeing many premium wine producers struggling for growth and profitability as their capacity to reach out to modern-day consumers has become more limited."



ANHEUSER-BUSCH AND ELYSIAN BREWING ANNOUNCE PURCHASE AGREEMENT

Anheuser-Busch announced it has agreed to purchase Elysian Brewing Company, based in Seattle, Washington. For nearly 20 years, Elysian has brewed an award-winning portfolio of beers, including Immortal IPA and some of the industry's most innovative and sophisticated brands. In addition to the Seattle Airport Way brewery, the acquisition includes the company's four Seattle brewpubs, Elysian Capitol Hill, Elysian Tangletown, Elysian Fields and Elysian BAR. Anheuser-Busch's purchase of Elysian is expected to close by the end of the first quarter of 2015. Terms of the agreement were not disclosed.



CONSTELLATION BRANDS ADDS CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER

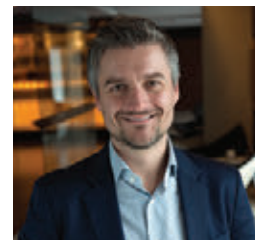
Constellation Brands, Inc. announced that Bill Newlands joined its Executive Management Committee in the newly-created position of Chief Growth Officer, reporting directly to President and CEO Rob Sands. Newlands, who is tasked with managing Constellation's long-term growth strategies, joined the



company effective January 26, 2015. "We are in the midst of a dynamic growth period and we are fully committed to continuing that momentum well into the future, and Bill is the right person to help achieve that," said Rob Sands. A veteran of the beverage alcohol industry, Newlands has 30 years of leadership experience with well-respected companies including Beam Inc., Allied Domecq, Wine.com, LVMH, E. & J. Gallo Winery and Beam North America.

BACARDI LIMITED PROMOTES IVANOV TO DUAL ROLE

Bacardi Limited announced the immediate promotion of Dmitry "Dima" Ivanov, 38, to Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of Bacardi and President of Bacardi Global Brands. In these roles, Ivanov is responsible for the global marketing organization and driving the company's internationally known portfolio of premium spirits brands, including brand equity, architecture, positioning, advertising, packaging and strategic direction on innovation. He will also serve as a member of the Bacardi Global Leadership Team and report to Bacardi Limited Chief Executive Officer Mike Dolan. Ivanov most recently served as the Vice President, Global Category Director of Rums and has 20 years in consumer marketing roles with eight years at Bacardi.



JOSE CUERVO TEQUILA CELEBRATES 220TH ANNIVERSARY WITH LIMITED EDITION BOTTLES

Jose Cuervo® celebrates its 220th year with the launch of commemorative Jose Cuervo Especial Gold and Silver bottles. The occasion marks the release of the first limited edition Jose Cuervo Especial bottle ever produced. The collectable bottles, rolling out at U.S. retailers now, feature striking gold and silver colored metallic coatings and a Day of the Dead-themed skull to honor the brand's Mexican roots. "As the world's oldest and best-selling tequila brands, Jose Cuervo knows how to produce a treasured product. This exclusive packaging perfectly represents that legacy," said a spokesperson for Proximo, the U.S. importer of the brand. The limited edition Jose Cuervo Especial Gold and Silver Tequilas are available in 750 ml bottles.



BREWING + IMPORTS 3 BEARDS 33 EXPORT 8 WIR
NAMS AFFLIGEM AGAINST THE GRAIN AGUILA A
LMAZA AFFLIGEM AGAINST THE GRAIN AMSTEL AN
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UNITED STATES DISTILLED PRODUCTS APPOINTS NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

United States Distilled Products, Co. (USDP) announced the appointment of Mike Duggan as Chief Executive Officer. Duggan, who brings over two decades of experience in the spirits and consumer packaged goods industry, began his appointment January 1, 2015. As CEO, Duggan will oversee the continued growth and expanded distribution of celebrated spirits brands, including the Phillips Distilling Company portfolio, a subsidiary of USDP composed of UV Vodka flavored vodkas, Prairie Organic Spirits, Revel Stoke Whiskies, Phillips Spirits and Sour Puss Liqueurs. Duggan will also be charged with “building upon the company’s legacy of innovation and industry firsts,” ranging from the creation of America’s first schnapps in the 1930s, to flavored vodka in the 1950s, to flavored whiskey in the 1990s.



DIAGEO’S NORWALK, CONNECTICUT OFFICE AWARDED LEED® CERTIFICATION

Diageo’s Connecticut office has been awarded the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Silver certification by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The Norwalk property is the fourth of Diageo’s buildings in North America to be LEED-certified, joining the company’s Chicago and New York offices, and a facility in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The LEED rating system, developed by the USGBC, is the foremost program for buildings, homes and communities that are designed, constructed, maintained and operated for improved environmental and human health performance. “Taking the steps that led to LEED certification was the right thing to do for the environment, and also for our business. Those initiatives enable us to save resources, and also make our employees proud to work in an environmentally-friendly building,” said John Longo, Director of Corporate Real Estate for Diageo North America.



BACARDI PARTNERS WITH RYDER FOR SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING PRACTICES

Bacardi has partnered with Ryder System, Inc. and its fleet of trucks, tractors and trailers for its sustainable logistics and supply-chain solutions through use of intermodal transportation, designed to produce greater efficiencies in shipments. Bacardi’s “Good Spirited” initiative seeks to use fuel-efficient solutions with fewer trucks on the highways leaving from its Jacksonville, Florida facility. Ryder procures all of Bacardi’s U.S. domestic shipments and has helped the company transition more of those shipments from truckload to intermodal transport. “Rail lines carry the product for long distances, and then trucks are at the other end for the shorter haul. The upshot is that there are fewer big rigs on the highway, which can help to lower CO2 emissions,” explained Robert Damon, Bacardi North America Transportation Director. “We are now 65 percent intermodal and 35 percent over the road.”



CONCHA Y TORO OPENS NEW CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Vina Concha y Toro announces the official opening of its new Center for Research and Innovation in Chile’s Maule Valley set. The Center occupies a 16,150-square-foot facility adjoining the 2,700-acre Lourdes estate located less than a mile from Concha y Toro’s state-of-the-art greenhouse and nursery in Rauquen. The undertaking, representing an initial investment of approximately \$5 million U.S., is designed to support viti- and vinicultural research and experimentation on behalf of the entire Chilean wine industry. Research at the Center of Research and Innovation includes alliances with worldwide academic institutions, instituted for the “greater good” of the wine industry in Chile and beyond. One of the facility’s first partners is University of California (Davis), which recently dispatched a team to Chile to establish a Life Sciences and Innovation Center in partnership with Concha y Toro.



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Bills Concerning Alcohol Featured in House and Senate

RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VOTES MID-FEBRUARY

BY LAUREN DALEY

A number of bills concerning alcohol are going before the Rhode Island General Assembly during the 2015 legislative session. Here is a brief rundown of proposals that could impact the state's beverage industry. Feb. 12 is the deadline for lawmakers to submit legislation, with votes scheduled for March 2015. Additional legislation may have been submitted.

HOUSE BILL 5253

This act would amend Section 3-5-16 of the General Laws to remove the prohibition of the town of Barrington from issuing Class A licenses. The act was introduced by Rep. Joy Hearn and Rep. Jan Malik on Jan. 29 and was referred to the House Municipal Government.

HOUSE BILL 5178

This act would permit class A liquor retail license holders to elect on four (4) occasions annually to serve unlimited samples of wine products that are available for purchase from the licensee's outlet. This act would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Rep. John M. Carnevale, Rep. Raymond A. Hull, Rep. William W. O'Brien, Rep. Daniel P. McKiernan and Rep. Joseph S. Almeida on Jan. 21. It was referred to House Corporations Committee.

SENATE BILL 0047

This act would prohibit the use of direct cash assistance funds held on Electronic Benefit Transfer cards for the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, tobacco products and certain other products and services. The act would further provide

for penalties for violations of the act and would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Sen. Louis P. DiPalma, Sen. Daniel DaPonte, Sen. Ryan W. Pearson, Sen. Frank A. Ciccone III and Sen. Christopher Scott Ottiano on Jan. 13. Referred to Senate Finance Committee.

HOUSE BILL 5018

This act would prohibit a recipient of direct cash assistance on electronic benefit cards from utilizing that benefit card at liquor stores, casino gaming facilities, tattoo parlors, firearm dealers and various other adult entertainment establishments, and would establish penalties for violations by recipients.

This act would also prohibit store owners from accepting the benefit card for the purchase of the above items and provides for penalties for violations, and would create a new criminal offense deeming such offenses as "fraud against the department of human services." It would take effect upon passage and was introduced by Rep. Arthur J. Corvese, Rep. Helio Melo, Rep. John G. Edwards, Rep. Samuel A. Azzinaro and Rep. Jan Malik on Jan. 8 and referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

HOUSE BILL 5250

This act would prohibit eligible recipients of direct cash assistance from using direct cash assistance funds for the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, or tobacco products. It further requires eligible recipients of direct cash assistance who make a purchase in violation of



this act to reimburse the department for such purchases. This act would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Rep. Patricia L. Morgan, Rep. Daniel Reilly, Rep. Antonio Giarrusso, Rep. Robert A. Nardolillo and Rep. Sherry Roberts on Jan. 29. Referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

SENATE BILL 0139

This act would permit Class A liquor retail license holders to elect on four (4) occasions annually to serve unlimited samples of wine products that are available for purchase from the licensee's outlet. This act would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Sen. Paul V. Jabour, Sen. Frank S. Lombardi, Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey, Sen. James E. Doyle and Sen. Elizabeth A. Crowley on Jan. 22 and referred to the Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs.

HOUSE BILL 5081

This act would create a Wine Direct Shipper License for licensed producers in this or any state to directly ship a limited amount of wine to residents age 21 or older for personal consumption with oversight by the department of business regulation and/or the division of taxation with any violations punishable as a misdemeanor with a fine of up to \$1,500 and/or imprisonment for a period of up to one year.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

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GROWING JOBS IN RHODE ISLAND AND SERVING-UP CAREERS

BY DALE J. VENTURINI



For far too many years, Rhode Island has been listed on the bottom of any national economy, unemployment or business-friendly list. It seems that sadly, the Ocean State has created a reputation as being one of the most difficult states in which to find work, live or to start a business.

With an unemployment rate continuously hovering in the nation's top three highest, the leaders of the state have their work cut out for them this year, and I know the economy and creation of jobs is at the top of everyone's priority list.

With the election of our new governor, Gina Raimondo, I feel that we're on the right track to wipe away our negative reputation and showcase Rhode Island as the wonderful, unique and special place that it truly is. Governor Raimondo has laid out a comprehensive jobs plan that hits right at the heart of our industry. Her plan offers a strategy for five areas and industries targeted to be instrumental in the state's job revitalization program: Advanced Manufacturing, Workforce Development, Infrastructure, Hospitality & Tourism and Small-business Startups.

As the head of an organization that plays a significant role in workforce development and tourism, this is music to my ears. The RI Hospitality Association Education Foundation (RIHAEF) develops, supports, and promotes career growth opportunities within the hospitality industry through workforce development programs. The focus is providing education to youth, unemployed adults and incumbent employees to meet the growing demand.

Through the RIHAEF Training Academy, we train thousands of students each year, working to close the skills gap through a myriad of programs including: Skills Tasks & Results Training; First Impressions: Exceptional Customer Service; Lasting Impressions: The Core of Communication; Hospitality: the 3rd Language; Skills, Tasks and Results Training; and Manage First, to name a few. I look forward to working closely with Governor Raimondo to see how the RIHAEF training programs can help to support her vision of a well-trained workforce in Rhode Island.

The hospitality industry continues to be one of the few job creators each quarter. Even in the economic downturn, our industry was able to keep folks employed and businesses open by going back to the basics and supporting each other during this difficult time. While the economy has strengthened since then, the rising costs of food and labor have cut profit margins to the bone. However, our industry remains one of the true bright spots in Rhode Island's economy, employing more than 65,000 people and remaining the third-highest revenue generator in the state.

Governor Raimondo's plan seeks to support the hospitality and tourism industry through a four-pronged approach that if successful, will create more than 70,000 new jobs by the year 2020. Her plan aims to make Rhode Island a world-class culinary destination by promoting the restaurants, breweries, vineyards and thriving food industry; foster workforce development efforts that focus on tourism and hospitality industries; improve the state's tourism infrastructure; and invest in a targeted marketing campaign to stimulate hospitality and tourism.

I am heartened and encouraged to see the key role that the Governor sees our industry playing in the renewed economic growth of our state. And, I am further reassured by the leadership in the Rhode Island House and Senate. In order to be truly successful in changing the course of Rhode Island, we all need to work together and in the best interests of the state. The hospitality industry is more than willing to be part of the solution.



*Voice of Rhode Island's Lodging,
Restaurant, and Tourism Industry*

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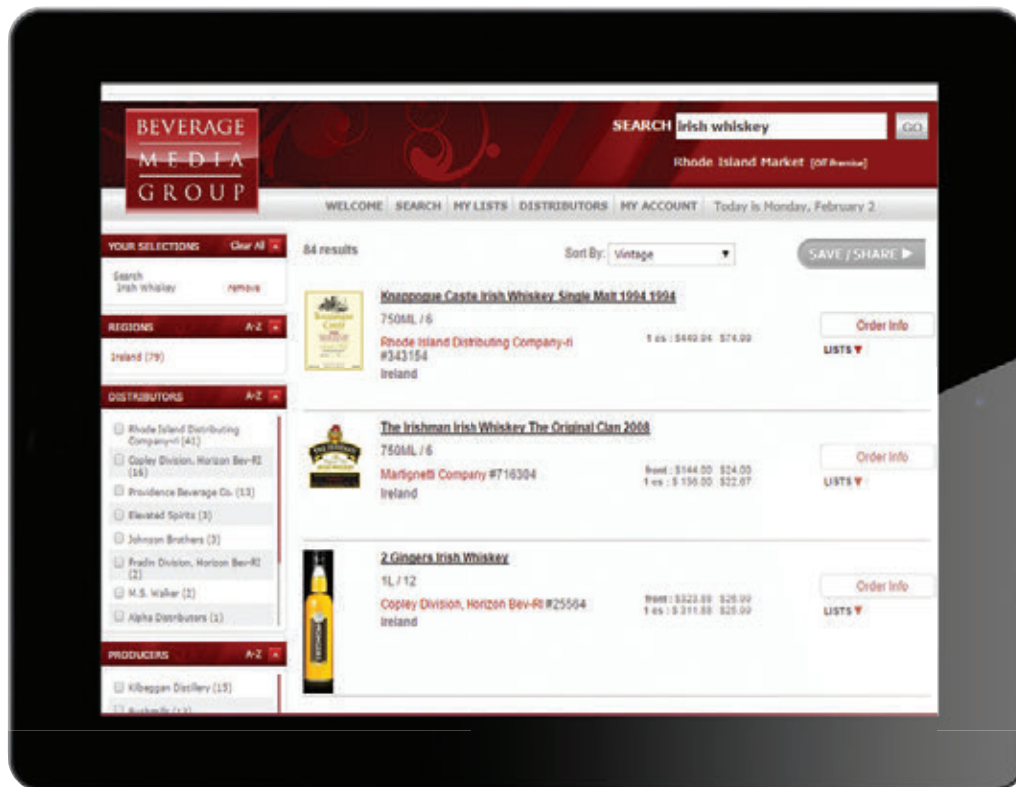
ABOUT

DALE J. VENTURINI, PRESIDENT & CEO, RHODE ISLAND HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION

A veteran of more than 25 years in the hospitality industry, Venturini is considered by many to be the voice of the industry in the state of Rhode Island. She has been instrumental in improving the industry's educational and training programs in the state, as well as enhancing the bottom line of the business she represents. Venturini splits her time between the office and the State House, a constant presence for her membership.

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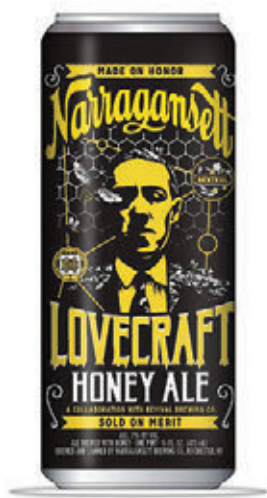
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KEEL VODKA LAUNCHES NEW COCKTAIL IN WARWICK

Keel Vodka teamed up with Buffalo Wild Wings in Warwick to promote Keel’s latest tailgating cocktail, “The Lighthouse.” The Lighthouse is named after Keel co-founder and former New England Patriot Matt Light. Light, along with Keel co-founder Bill Dessel, mingled with the crowd and challenged customers to play Light in a Keel cornhole game to win prizes.

Jon Mason, Sales Representative, M.S. Walker (far left); Bill Dessel, Co-Owner, Keel Vodka (fourth from left); Matt Light, Co-Owner, Keel (center); with the team at Buffalo Wild Wings in Warwick along with Keel contest winners.



NARRAGANSETT OFFERS NEW H.P. LOVECRAFT LINE OF BEERS

Brewed in collaboration with Sean Larkin, Head Brewmaster for Narragansett and owner of Revival Brewing, Lovecraft Honey Ale is made with a base of honey malt and finished with a touch of hops, producing a “bold yet sweet” honey-colored ale. The beer is 7% ABV and 30 IBUs, and will be available in 16-oz. Tall Boys as well as a “very limited run” for tap. Born in 1890, the same year that Narragansett Beer was founded, H.P. Lovecraft spent the majority of his life in Providence as a struggling author, only achieving literary fame posthumously. Commonly referred to as the “Father of Modern Horror,” Lovecraft is often cited as an influence on other notable authors and artists from Stephen King to Metallica to Ridley Scott. The label artwork for Lovecraft Honey Ale was designed by Providence-based artist AJ Paglia.



THOMAS TEW SINGLE BARREL RUM REACHES MILESTONE

Newport Distilling Company’s Thomas Tew Single Barrel has filled it’s 600th barrel, celebrating the milestone on December 19, 2014. The #600 batch Thomas Tew Rum will be aged for several years, bottled and marked with the milestone barrel number.



SONS OF LIBERTY SPIRITS AND HOTEL TANGO DISTILLERY CREATE SPIRITED SUPER BOWL RIVALRY

Rhode Island's Sons of Liberty Spirits and Hotel Tango Distillery out of Indianapolis began a pre-Super Bowl rivalry during the Patriots vs. Colts AFC Championship on January 18, 2015. The losing team's hometown distillery had to provide the winner a case of its finest. Hotel Tango delivered a case of its Golf Gin as a result. Staff of the losing distillery also had to wear the opponent's jerseys on a day of operation close to Super Bowl XLIX, document it with photos and video, and share on its social media platforms, as well as on Super Bowl Sunday.

1. Sons of Liberty Spirits Founder and President, Mike Reppucci and staffer Bryon Ricard, enjoying a taste of victory.
2. The case of Hotel Tango delivered.



Photo by Chris Almeida.

PROVIDENCE WILL HOST UNITED STATES BARTENDER GUILD NATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Providence has been named the site of the United States Bartender Guild (USBG) Leadership Conference this summer. Attending will be members from 44 chapters across the nation. The annual four-day conference will be held mid to late August. "We are really proud and excited to host this event and welcome everyone to Rhode Island," said Rhode Island Chapter President Chris Almeida. The conference enables members of the bar and beverage community an opportunity to connect with suppliers as well as learn, network and exchange ideas.

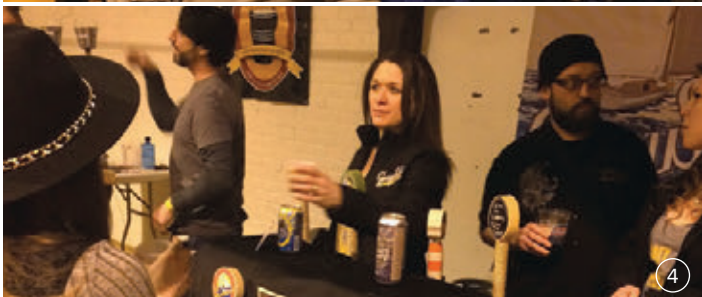


FUNDRAISER FOR INJURED LOCAL BARTENDER HOSTED IN PROVIDENCE

"Maria, Mezcal & Mariachis" was the theme for a fundraiser for Dorrance Bartender Tyler Ayers Scheppe of Providence. Scheppe was injured in 2014 after a car crashed into the San Francisco bar he was visiting and hit him. The Dorrance teamed up with El Rancho Grande, where Chefs Maria Meza and Alberto Lopez cooked specialty fare and drinks were served to raise funds for Scheppe's medical expenses.

1. Providence food and beverage professionals rallied for Scheppe.
2. Working the bar at The Dorrance.





RHODE ISLAND BREW FEST HOSTS HUNDREDS

The third annual Rhode Island Brew Fest was held on January 31, 2015, despite the two feet of snow and chilly winter temperatures. The annual, sold-out event featured more than 55 local, regional and national craft brewers and offered tastes of more than 200 beers in a variety of styles and flavors. Highlights of the festival included the first tasting of such beers as Crooked Current’s Oatmeal Raisin Stout and Proclamation Ale Company’s new sour beer, Harper I. Other local breweries like Revival Brewing Company (Conga Imperial IPA) and Foolproof (Shuckolate) showcased their newest beers.

1. Each attendee left with a Belgian tulip glass depicting the Rhode Island “Brewscape.” The event is produced by Gray Matter Marketing, which purchases all of the beer for the event and donates a portion of the event’s proceeds to the Rhode Island Brewers Guild.
2. Pouring fun.
3. Foolproof Brewing booth.
4. Grey Sail pouring.

LEFT HAND BREWS NOW AVAILABLE IN THE STATE

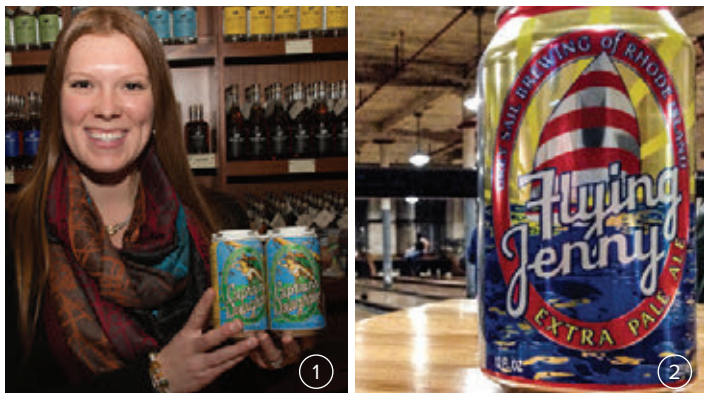
Left Hand Brewing expanded its presence in New England, including Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine and New Hampshire. Warwick’s Craft Beer Guild Distributors is now offering the Colorado-based craft brewery’s line in the Ocean State. Left Hand grew its production by 13 percent, to more than 74,000 barrels. It’s beers in the state include Polestar Pilsner, Nitro Polestar Pilsner, Milk Stout, Nitro Milk Stout, Sawtooth Nitro and Mountain Mixer.

The Left Hand Brewing display, available from Craft Beer Guild Distributors, as shown at Nikki’s Liquors in Providence.



M.S. WALKER TO DISTRIBUTE BATTLE ROAD BEER

For the first time since the 1980s, M.S. Walker will distribute beer, in addition to its extensive portfolio of wine and spirits, throughout Rhode Island. The fifth-generation wholesale distributor based in Somerville, MA, will take on the distribution of Battle Road Brewing Company when the beer brand re-launches in Spring 2015. “After 30 years, we are excited to return to beer distribution with full confidence that M.S. Walker can assist Battle Road in becoming an industry leader,” says Michael Brody, Vice President of Sales for M.S. Walker. “As a family-owned business founded in Massachusetts, not far from the Battle Road, we are intrinsically tied to and inspired by Battle Road Brewing Company’s mission and best-in-class products.”



GREY SAIL RIDES WAVE OF RHODE ISLAND EVENTS

Westerly’s Grey Sail Brewing kept busy during the winter with a host of tastings. Two events on January 9, 2015 gave the local brewery an opportunity to showcase its beer line to on- and off-premise consumers.

1. Tasting at Bottles Fine Wine in Providence where Grey Sail’s Captains Daughter was presented by Cara Lieffers, Rhode Island and Massachusetts Sales Representative.
2. The grand opening of Pawtucket’s Break Time Bowl and Bar, where Grey Sail’s Flying Jenny was a featured beer.



TWIN RIVER’S SHIPYARD PUB HOSTS JAMESON BRAND AMBASSADOR

The Shipyard Pub at Twin River Casino hosted an Irish Pot Still Whiskey Tasting Dinner alongside a presentation by Jameson U.S. Brand Ambassador Jamie Winters on February 3, 2015. The evening featured four whiskies paired with “small plate” dining offerings. Featured selections came from Jameson, Red Breast, Powers and Middleton whiskies from Pernod Ricard.

1. Rick Buckley; Jameson U.S. Brand Ambassador Jamie Winters; Nick Tartaglione; Alexis Forte; John Anthony; and Ray Vezina at The Shipyard Pub at Twin River Casino.
2. The tasting dinner menu and whiskey line up.
3. Winters educated dinner guests on the history of Irish whiskey as well as the presented brands.

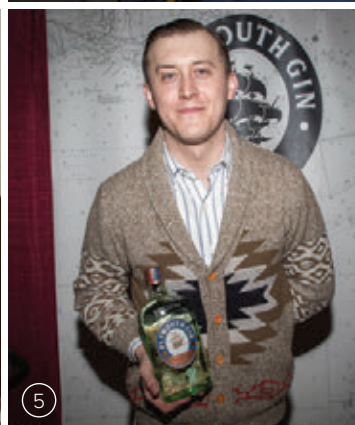
Snow Does Little to Shadow 12th Annual Sun WineFest

The 12th Annual Sun WineFest was held the weekend of January 23, 2015. The annual gathering of thousands featured beer, wine, specialty spirits and dining by some of the region's – and the world's – most highly-rated and renowned chefs. Jim Beam hosted a Bourbon Tasting for ticketholders the first night of the event. Over 9,000 wine and beer enthusiasts enjoyed over 1,000 brands, as well as many specialty sponsor spirits. Regional restaurants offered fare and the Main Culinary Stage served as the backdrop for two days of celebrity chef demonstrations.

Highlights included two Elite Cru tasting sessions, with the “best-of-the-best” vintages from around the world, led by winemakers and principals, and the Grand Tastings sessions. The official charity of the Sun WineFest is Channel 3 Kids Camp. Chefs Georges Mokbel, Sandy Squillante, Betty Fraser and Manovschka Guerriere, as well as a demonstration using Grey Goose, took center stage to raise awareness for the organization. The camp's mission is to provide year-round recreational and educational opportunities to children from Connecticut and throughout New England. It serves 3,000 children each year through a variety of programs.



1. Pernod Ricard USA's Anthony Mannuccia, Retail Account Specialist.
2. J. Lohr's Shauna Troy, New England Sales Manager and Erin Foley, Greater Boston Area Manager.
3. Hope Family Wines presents Liberty School Wines.
4. Jim Beam booth marketers.
5. Presenting Plymouth Gin was Maxwell Britten, Bar Director, Maison Premier.
6. Fishers Island Lemonade co-founder Bronya Shillo and guest.





Photos by Chris Almeida.

- 7. Matunuck Oyster Bar and Farm display. The company's founder, Perry Raso, received an award for "Farm to Fork Excellence in Sustainability" from the Rhode Island Hospitality Association in 2014.
- 8. Goose Island Beer Company, a Chicago craft beer.
- 9. Shock Top beer by Anheuser-Busch InBev.
- 10. The Boston Beer Co.'s Dan Hurley, Brewery Representative.
- 11. Sakonnet Vineyard's Amanda Saccoccio, Events Operations Manager and booth guest.
- 12. Angelini Wine Ltd.'s Julius Angelini.
- 13. Strongbow Cider's Britany Browning, Brand Representative (center).
- 14. The Guinness booth.

PICPOUL DE PINET: THE WINE TO HEAR ABOUT

BY LEN PANAGGIO



As many of you know, I am on a constant search for wines that are not only unique, but are also friendly for restaurateurs and retailers alike. Recently, I have been hearing and reading a lot about the grape, Picpoul. This grape, also known as Piquepoul, Picpoul, or Picapoll is of French decent, and is grown primarily in the Rhode Valley and Languedoc regions.

There is a red and a white version of this grape, both used often for blending, but I want to focus on the white version, 100% Picpoul. Why you ask? First, it pairs very well with a food that seems to be on almost every restaurant's menu these days... oysters! As I've written about in the past, there is an explosion of oyster farms throughout the region and that is definitely something we can all be proud of.

While I have suggested a few varietals to pair with these delectable mollusks, most notably steely Chablis, Muscadet, Vinho Verde and Sauvignon Blanc, I always like to find something different and off the beaten path to suggest. And, Picpoul de Pinet fills the bill.

Pinet is a sub-appellation of the larger Languedoc region in southern France where the grape grows and despite the fact that it is being grown around the world, it seems to do especially well in Pinet. That area of France is enjoying a wine boom with American consumers, as there are many varietals coming out of the region that are being wildly received. This is due largely to the great value offered, taste and ability to work well with so many foods.

With the introduction of better technology to the region, a revived interest in the Picpoul grape has emerged. It is bottled in tall, slim green bottles, bone-dry, medium to full bodied, plenty of citrus notes, good minerality, great acidity and never sees oak! This is a trend I have noted before, as the American

palate seems to be migrating away from oaky wines.

Picpoul de Pinet has a slight green tinge to its color and is a very refreshing wine that pairs well with not only the aforementioned oysters, but also with so many other seafood items that are prevalent on local menus. The Picpoul de Pinet is much like Vinho Verde or Muscadet, and like both these varietals, offers great values to place on your lists.

As we approach summer, this wine deserves a chance to be poured and your guests will enjoy it not only for what it has to offer pairing with foods, but also on its cost. And many of the bottles come with a screw cap, which is an added bonus for bartenders on a busy shift.

Today, you will probably see the wine mostly on retailers shelves, but the restaurateurs that are seeking out wines that offer several benefits for a wine by-the-glass program are ahead of the curve if they have it now. It's is something old but new at the same time, works well pouring, not really hard to pronounce (Pick-Pool de Pee-Nay – odd sound, but easy to say) and the price is right.

After all, our guests are looking to us to provide them with all the hot new items whether as a retailer or a restaurateur. Americans are opening up their eyes to so many good things, and this grape is truly one of them. Santé!



ABOUT

LEN PANAGGIO, BEVERAGE CONSULTANT

Len Panaggio's career in food and wine spans more than three decades as an owner and as a beverage director at some of the top restaurants in Rhode Island. Currently a hospitality consultant, Len is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island and has attended the Culinary Institute of America Master Sommelier program and the Sterling School of Service and Hospitality.



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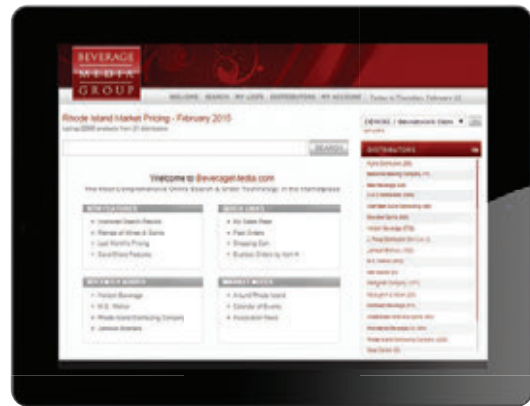
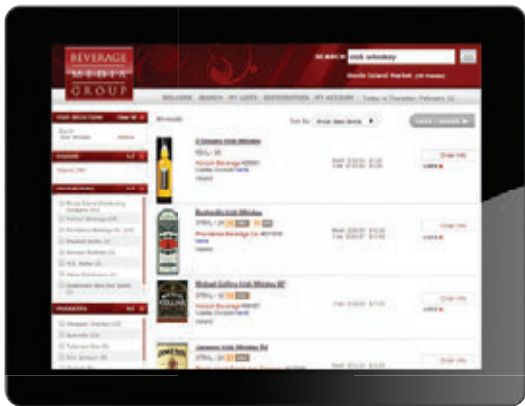
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guest columnist
JONATHAN FEILER

CONNECTING THROUGH EDUCATION WHILE BUILDING YOUR BRAND

BY JONATHAN FEILER

Education is something that we all take seriously; whether it is our own or that of our staff. But how often do we educate our customers? Education is a great way to connect with your guests and it creates an amazingly unique experience, while adding to your bottom line.

Education comes in many forms and most of us educate our guests in some way, every day. It can be as easy as introducing someone to a new wine or spirit to providing a full scale education program. I have found that the one of the successful keys to maintaining guest loyalty, trust and patronage, is not only to teach them about the wine, spirit or beer that they are drinking today, but to also teach them how to be a better consumer in the future.

By basing the core of your beverage program on education, you can create your business as a place of growth and excitement for your guests. Everyone will have a different approach on how they educate their guests. I call my approach the “behind-the-scenes” approach.

There is nothing I enjoy more than watching the behind-the-scenes of a movie: it is fascinating how they made an action scene or how they created a “moment” out of thin air. It makes me appreciate the movie more and gives me the feeling of a connection to the film. I do the same in my education approach; I give my guest intimate details about the topic. Whether, it is a brief history

or fun fact about a wine, or a personal experience that I had with it. I discuss the product to help the guest make a connection, so now they can enjoy their beverage even more and create their own experiences. The goal is to link their experiences to our brand.

As beverage professionals, we provide most of our learning moments during service or on the sales floor. However, I find that creating an intimate setting where you can teach a particular topic that relates to your brand also helps bring guests into your establishment.

I hold a two-day beverage seminar every month. The seminars range from topics that are trending in the industry or subjects that our guests request, such as the differences between old world and new world wines to a specific spirits “101.”

The first day is an hour-long reception that gives our attendees an informal chance to meet me and the other guests in the class. We may serve wines that are outside the box to get the guests out of their comfort zone and open their eyes to something new. The second day consists of a two-hour seminar focusing on basic information of the chosen topic and includes a tasting of four wines, spirits or beers (whatever is appropriate) that have a wide range of flavors and styles.

I include written information, maps and other pertinent information and, of course, personal anecdotes. With that said, less is more. I try not to get caught up in the minutia of it all and try to keep it simple. I just give the “selling points” and if a participant wants

more information, they will almost always ask. I start each session letting the “students” know that the environment is a safe place to ask any questions they wish, whether it is about the topic or not. This relaxes everyone and creates a fun environment.

Now in my third year of holding these “Vine to Wine” seminars, we have gathered a tremendous following. We sell out the class most months at 20 people, a number I find is perfect to keep everyone engaged. We charge a modest fee for the seminars that cover the cost of beverage, food and labor. We utilize the wines or spirits that we sell to showcase the given topic. The revenue dollars come when we create a repeat guest.

By providing an education program we connect our guest with the property and they return to enjoy a similar experience in one of our restaurants, or stay in the hotel. What we find with these classes is that not only do we create a more educated consumer, but we also create a consumer that has intimate knowledge of our brand and connects us with their drinking experiences (whether or not they are actually on our property).

To have a guest connect with your brand when they are discussing wines with their friends, family or colleagues, is priceless.

ABOUT JONATHAN FEILER

Jonathan Feiler is the director of wine education and head sommelier at the award-winning resort, Ocean House, in Watch Hill.



520 MAIN ST., WARREN, RI
79 DORRANCE ST., PROVIDENCE, RI



General Manager
Tom Studer.

Curaçao native Steven Correa operates two Aruba Steve's in Rhode Island. Both offer the vibe and flavor of his native Caribbean home, with island cuisine and hand-crafted cocktail menus.

GENERAL MANAGER:
Tom Studer

COCKTAIL: Steve's Mojito

RECIPE:

Muddle two full mint sprigs. Mix with:

- 2 oz. The Real McCoy 3-Year Aged Rum
- 1/4 oz. fresh lime juice

Pour in a mason jar over ice. Top with soda water and a splash of lemon-lime soda. Garnish with a mint sprig.

"It's light, fresh and extremely refreshing without the heaviness of added sugar or overwhelming citrus," said Studer.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

This act would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Rep. Brian C. Newberry, Rep. Daniel Reilly, Rep. John G. Edwards and Rep. Michael W. Chippendale on Jan. 14 and referred to the House Corporations Committee.

HOUSE BILL 5189

This act would make the possession or sale of powdered alcohol a crime punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment. This act would take effect upon passage. The act was introduced by Rep. Lauren Carson, Rep. Joseph M. McNamara, Rep. John E. Fogarty, Rep. David A. Bennett and Rep. Mia A. Ackerman on Jan. 21 and referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

SENATE BILL 0120

This act would prohibit the use of direct cash assistance funds held on Electronic Benefit Transfer cards for the purchase of alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets, tobacco products and certain other products and services. The act would further provide for penalties for violations of the act. This act would take effect upon passage. Introduced by Sen. Nicholas D. Kettle, Sen. Marc A. Cote, Sen. Elaine J. Morgan, Sen. Dennis L. Algieri and Sen. Christopher Scott Ottiano on Jan. 22 and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

The Beverage Journal will be following these bills. Bills can be tracked via www.rilin.state.ri.us/Pages/Default.aspx. ■

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STILL GOING STRONG

ON THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF WHITE ZIN, ICONIC SUTTER HOME REMAINS MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

BY KRISTEN BIELER

Many historic brands have ridden the wave of America's booming wine consumption, as the U.S. has catapulted its way to first place among all wine-consuming nations in the world. Yet few brands have been as instrumental in creating that boom as Sutter Home.

"It started in 1972," recalls Roger Trincherro, CEO, Trincherro Family Estates. "While trying to make a more intense red Zinfandel, my brother Bob removed some free run juice before fermentation. The almost clear juice was fermented separately and the result was the first White Zinfandel wine." That "stuck fermentation" was poured only at the tasting room at first, where it became a surprise hit; 1975 was the year it went national and was credited with changing the way Americans consume wine.

VITAL & GROWING

Fast-forward four decades and Sutter Home remains one of the best-selling wine brands in the world, with a portfolio of 21 different varieties. "One of the reasons this brand is so strong is that it succeeded in taking some of the mystery out of wine for the consumer," explains Bob Torkelson, President, Trincherro Family Estates. "Sutter Home has enormous power with consumers, who remain very committed to it as a go-to brand."

Some in the trade may seem to detect a softening in Sutter Home, Torkelson admits, yet the reality is quite the opposite: "As categories like White Zinfandel or Moscato become soft, there is a perception that Sutter Home sales are down, but with varieties like Pinot Grigio, Merlot and Chardonnay, we continue to gain share. Across the franchise, we are incredibly strong and growing."

And don't be too quick to dismiss White Zin, he adds; although it's not increasing, it remains a massive category. "The White Zinfandel space is very consolidated as there are just a few players. For those of us still left, it's a very big business," Torkelson says.

STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

While the accidental invention of White Zinfandel might be seen as a lucky break (internally, it's referred to as "the Divine Intervention"), Sutter Home's track record is a testament to over-delivering on quality and quickly responding to the changing needs of the evolving wine consumer.

Sutter Home Moscato kick-started the Moscato craze, and not only was the brand the first-to-market with flavored Moscatos, Sutter Home remains a top-three brand in Moscato, Pink Moscato and Red Moscato. The company helped build the Sweet Red category, and has just released a dry Sutter Home Red Blend with a bold new package. "The red blend category is on fire, growing six times as fast as the wine category overall, up 17% since last year," says Torkelson. "We are hoping to replicate what we have seen with M^{énage à Trois} Midnight for Sutter Home."

The undisputed king of single-serve, Sutter Home pioneered and now dominates the 187ml business with over 50%

On the heels of their success with single-serve 187s, Sutter Home will introduce 500ml Tetra Paks.



The 40th anniversary of the first vintage of Sutter Home White Zinfandel is being honored with a limited-edition label. The winery's red blend launched in December 2014.

market share. "Over time we have seen a shift in the way that people use wine, and a migration towards portability," Torkelson shares. This spring, Sutter Home will unveil its first 500ml in Tetra Pak, which is seen partly as a way to protect the company's 187ml business, as well as open up the category to younger drinkers.

"We help to encourage wine consumption in places or situations where wine isn't typically there," Torkelson says of the brand's underlying strategy. In addition to innovation, this means running relevant programs that help the retailer sell more wine, like tailgating-themed merchandising programs, and the wildly successful Build a Better Burger contest, now in its 25th year.

With sights set firmly on the future, Trincherro will take a moment to look back this summer to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the creation of White Zinfandel. Look for a limited-edition label to commemorate the birthday. "It's important for us to remind the consumer that we are an authentic brand—we are the original," says Torkelson. Brands that can evolve with the times are the ones that will endure, he adds: "We must grow where the consumer is at. If we can do that, and deliver more quality for the dollar, the brand will thrive for many decades to come." ■

- INTRODUCING SUTTER HOME RED BLEND -

91
POINTS

“Juicy red berries and
sun-ripened cherries...
silky vanilla notes.”

—THE TASTING PANEL



BEER BLUES: TOO MANY SKUS

BY JACK KENNY



We have a serious First World Problem. Too much beer, not enough space. It started with the rise of craft beer and it's getting worse. America loves beer, all kinds of beer, and now we have 2,500 breweries from sea to shining sea. They are harvesting the amber waves of grain and hops from the fruited plain and putting the noble liquid into packages in such quantities and varieties that we struggle to find space for them in our coolers and on our shelves.

I've written about customers who come into stores weekly and ask, "What's new?" It used to be that the new brews came out occasionally, but that's no longer the case. Lately, the retailer can give specific answers. Hundreds of breweries are represented in Connecticut and Rhode Island today, and they are rolling out the new stuff like there's no tomorrow.

Shelf space at on-premise establishments has always been finite. The number of taps is limited, as is the amount of square footage for bottles. Taps, be they five or 50, are fixed or rotated, and bottle menus are designed around customer preferences. If a bar doesn't pour City Steam's Naughty Nurse, nobody's going to pout and demand "Why not?" That's not the case on the off-premise side. Retailers want to satisfy their customers, even the occasional Rodenbach Grand Cru drinker. Shoppers are aggressive. But the stock boys are having issues these days, issues identified by the initials SKU.

Retailers can't invent shelf space. With that axiom in mind, let's take a look at Samuel Adams, Goose Island, Founders, Sierra Nevada, Dogfish Head, and Lagunitas. Those six, all national craft brewers, each can have up to 10 SKUs at a time on store shelves. Sam recently came out with two new additions to the Rebel IPA line. Sierra Nevada's new Hop Hunter IPA was en route here at press time. Four of the five routinely ship two seasonal beers. Consumers want these beers (most of them). Wholesalers promote them. They bring profit to the store.

Let's add local beers to the mix. We have Two Roads, Half Full, Back East, Grey Sail, New England Brewing, Stony Creek, Charter Oak, Thimble Islands, Newport Storm. Let's find space for them. And for their seasonals and special releases. Cisco, Wachusett, Harpoon, Captain Lawrence, River Horse, Southern Tier. Them, too.

Retailers can't invent shelf space.

One retail company owner learned recently that his beer managers were turning six-packs sideways on the shelves, reducing three-bottle facings to two. "I don't like that," he said. Neither do we, his people said, but that's the way it is.

This is not just a craft beer problem. We used to have Budweiser and Michelob. Now we have Bud in cans and bottles and aluminum cans in quantities of six, 12, 15, 18, 20, 24, and 30 (Don't hold me to that; I lose track.). We have Bud Light in the same bunch. We have Bud Ice, Bud Select, Bud Black Crown, Select 55, Bud Light Lime, Bud Light Lime-A-Rita (and its siblings), Bud Light Platinum, Budweiser Chelada (and Picante), Michelob Amber Bock, Light, Ultra, Ultra Amber. Don't look now, but Bud is resurrecting Tequila (remember?) under the name Oculito, due for launch in the spring. Excuse me while I invent some shelf space. Let's not forget imports. Some markets in our region have healthy ethnic populations. Modelo and Dos Equis are surging these days, particularly the former. So far they have only a couple of SKUs each, but that will change. (And Anheuser-Bush will introduce Montejo, a Mexican lager, this year.) Eastern Europeans have strong beer preferences and those compete for shelf space. Haitians like Prestige, Dominicans Presidente, Jamaicans Red Stripe. Those can be accommodated. Please don't brew varieties.

Oh yes, the other specialty beers: Ommegang, Victory, Unibroue. You know them. They make four-packs and six-packs and bombers and 750s. Let's find space for them. And Stone. I forgot to mention Stone, and Rogue, both of which produce beer in several formats and countless SKUs, all good, all clamoring for space on the warm shelf and in the cooler.

You know and I know that this First World Problem isn't going to get any easier. I don't have a solution, but I'll welcome your feedback. Send your thoughts and ideas to me at thebeercolumn@gmail.com. Maybe it's worth a follow-up.



ABOUT

JACK KENNY

Jack Kenny has been writing The Beer Column for *The Connecticut Beverage Journal* since 1995.



WRITE TO HIM
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IRISH SPRING

The Wind Continues to be at Irish Whiskey's Back

BY JEFF CIOLETTI



There's no denying that whiskey has been on a tear as of late, but the fastest-growing segment of the category tends not to get as much attention as its Scottish and Kentuckian cousins.

Overall, whiskey already accounts for more spirits revenue than vodka and it's poised to overtake it in volume soon enough. That's due in large part to the surge in demand for high-end, straight American whiskeys—including the bourbon, rye and Tennessee segments—as well as the top price tier of the Scotch segment, single malt.

However, the real MVP, in terms of percent growth, has been Irish whiskey, which has been growing in the mid teens to low 20% range for the past several years. Irish represents about 2.5 million 9-liter case equivalents, or just under 5% of total U.S. whiskey volume, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS). In revenue terms, Irish accounts for about \$500 million of the \$7 billion whiskey category, or about 7% of total dollars. For 2014, Irish volume increased 9.1%, while revenue increased 10.7% to \$553 million, according to Nielsen.

Segment leader Jameson has had a great deal to do with Irish whiskey's overall trajectory, as brand owner Pernod Ricard reported its revenue growth in the U.S. market slightly outpaced that of the brand's overall global business, surging 13%. Those numbers seem even more impressive when considering the fact that Jameson commands nearly two-thirds of the global market for Irish whiskey.

"There's obviously good marketing behind the brand, thanks to Pernod Ricard," says Heidi Donelon, internationally renowned Irish whiskey expert and the driving force behind the Ireland Whiskey Trail. "But at the end of the day, you could throw all the money behind a product and if it's not good, it's not going to be a massive success." Jameson's signature smoothness and approachability, she says, has been helping consumers discover or rediscover the category.

Shifting drinker demographics have also played a role, says Jameson brand director Sona Bajaria. "Whiskey drinkers are different than they were 10 years ago; consumers are changing and becoming more savvy," Bajaria says. "Whiskey drinking occasions are evolving—straight, mixed, cocktails, etc. Additionally, more women are entering the category."

HALO EFFECT

Pernod Ricard expects Jameson to be a billion-dollar brand before the end of the decade, and its momentum is a welcome development not only for the parent company, but other brand owners competing in the space.

The category, Bajaria says, will continue to welcome new entrants offering not just new trademarks, but also further segmentation within the category



like small-batch offerings and flavored options. "In the context of this category, Jameson will continue to build upon its current advocacy by remaining relevant with its current offering, innovation and application to multiple usage occasions."

For the new and smaller players in the category, Jameson is that proverbial rising tide, and they hope that some of the spotlight the dominant brand is enjoying might spill on to their contenders.

"The other brands are capitalizing on the growth of Jameson," says Alejandra Peña, senior vice president of marketing for Castle Brands, known for its Clontarf brand and the more premium Irish single-malt Knappogue Castle, available in 12-, 14- and 16-year-old expressions, as well as some limited-release bottlings.

A key growth driver for the overall Irish whiskey segment has been its approachable taste profile, which tends to be a bit milder than the more flavor-forward bourbon and Scotch. "Irish whiskey, compared to other whiskeys is much easier to drink," Peña notes.

Castle has been able to play in that space, given the familiar flavor characteristics consumers may initially have encountered with Jameson. "We have Clontarf, which is a blend and basically we are a value brand, priced a bit below Jameson," Peña explains. "And we have been growing quite nicely in the U.S., as well as Europe. But it's hard to compete against the giant; we don't have the same resources. Consumers like Jameson, but at some point they're ready to try something new. That's why smaller brands see the benefits of what Jameson is doing."

The modern tale of Irish whiskey in the U.S. is rife with activity, outpacing whiskey overall.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE: Among important developments: the rise of smaller brands, such as Kennedy (**top, left**), made possible by the halo effect of Irish category leader Jameson. Anticipating increased tourism, Tullamore D.E.W. recently completed a \$40 million facility. Kilbeggan is one of a scant few Irish whiskeys that is double-distilled; most are triple-distilled.

THIS PAGE: The Jameson Visitor Experience in Midleton (**top**). **Right:** The Irishman uses distilling techniques from Irish whiskey's heyday 200 years ago.



IRISH WHISKEY

In that respect, Irish often acts as a bridge for regular vodka drinkers who want to transition to a spirit with a bit more flavor. “Irish whiskey is a perfect fit, as opposed to going straight to Scotch,” Peña explains.

There’s also rising interest among those already drinking whiskey who are looking to broaden their palates across all of its diverse styles and expressions. Social media certainly has made the consumer base more well-rounded and better informed.

“I think the category is seeing such growth because many consumers are looking for an alternative to standard whiskeys,” offers Mara Melamed, the senior brand manager for Beam Suntory’s Irish whiskey portfolio. “There is a certain appreciation for Irish whiskey that is evolving along with today’s whiskey drinkers. Consumers are now more educated and are looking for new options with distinct flavors.”

EXTENDING OUT & UP

Once consumers participate in the category on the sub-premium level, the time may come when they’re ready to trade up. “There’s room for premium brands like in the vodka segment with Grey Goose and in tequila with Patrón,” Peña notes. “Premiumization hasn’t really happened yet, but [Knappogue Castle] is the brand we have to compete in that segment.”

Peña says she hopes to woo a few Scotch drinkers to the Irish side, especially since those consumers tend to have an affinity for history and heritage. “They like to explore,” she says. “Maybe not the

super hardcore single-malt drinkers who like products that are very smoky. We’re much more delicate in taste profile.”

Meanwhile, Beam Suntory plays across most of the price tiers, starting with 2 Gingers, which retails for \$19.99 and whose smoothness and slightly sweet profile is designed to appeal to a new generation of whiskey drinkers of both genders. “We’ve introduced 2 Gingers as the ‘converter,’ as it’s meant to convert consumers who typically drink beer or vodka into whiskey drinkers,” says Beam Suntory’s Melamed, calling the brand “genderless, seasonless, mixable and accessible.” It’s also double-distilled, which goes against the grain of the typically triple-distilled Irish whiskeys and is more in the Scotch tradition.

Also twice-distilled is Kilbeggan, Beam’s premium-blended brand, produced in a 180-year-old pot still and selling at a suggested price of \$23.99. Tyrconnell, which retails for around \$34.99, is positioned as an ideal introduction to the world of single malt Irish whiskey. Those looking for a more smoky, peaty profile akin to an Islay Scotch are the target for Beam Suntory’s Connemara brand, selling at a suggested \$44.99. Finally, Greenore, with a price tag of \$49.99 gives consumers a chance to try one of the few single grain Irish whiskeys on the market.

NO DRAM, YES DRAMA

Beam Suntory’s enhanced presence in the category hasn’t been without its controversies. In 2011, Beam acquired the Cooley Distillery, which had produced

the whiskey for Sidney Frank Importing Co.’s Michael Collins brand. In a lawsuit filed two years ago and still ongoing, Sidney Frank’s legal team asserted that its contract with Cooley was “wrongfully” terminated by its new owner, which effectively cut off supplies for Michael Collins and pushed it off the market. A Sidney Frank spokesperson confirmed that the brand has been discontinued “due to lack of supply.” As a result of its absence, Michael Collins, whose line included a blend and a lightly peated single malt, has become something of a collector’s item.

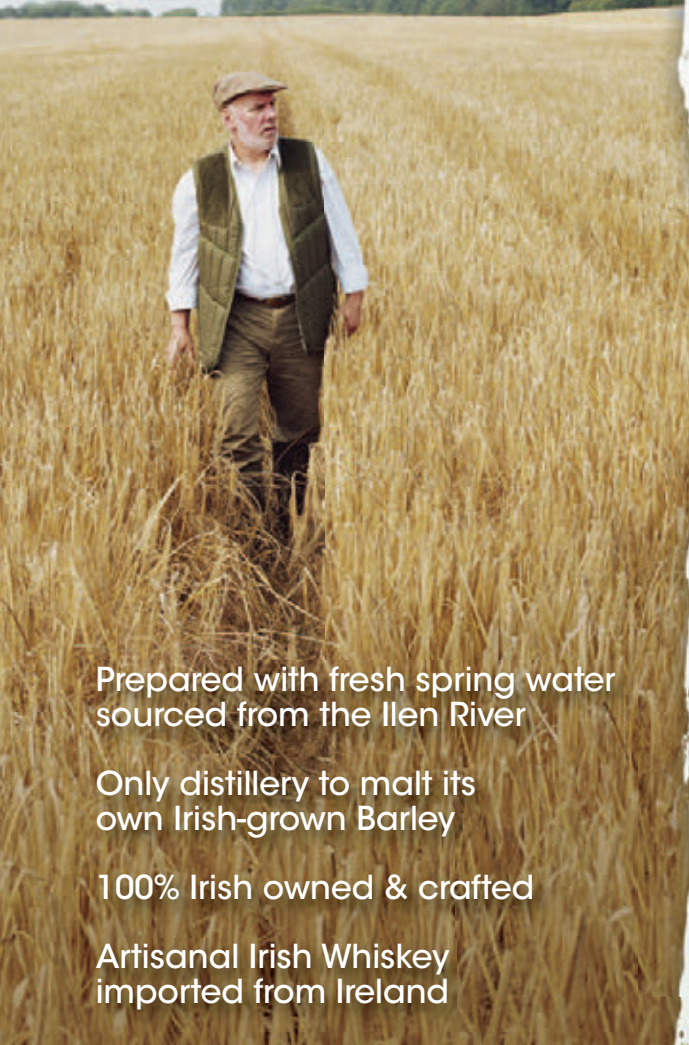
While Beam Suntory has made a conscious effort to step up its profile in the category, Pernod Ricard has continued to apply full support to its Jameson franchise. Of special interest: Black Barrel, introduced two years ago, pushing Jameson in a similar direction—namely special barrel finishes—as other whiskeys of late. Not to be forgotten, Pernod Ricard’s hand in the Irish segment is broadened significantly with smaller-scale Powers (with a substantial pot still component) and upscale, aged expressions of the pure pot-still Redbreast.

On the other hand, another large global spirits marketer, Diageo, announced it effectively was getting out of the Irish whiskey business, at least for now. Last year Diageo traded the brand Bushmills to Jose Cuervo for full ownership of Don Julio Tequila. Though Bushmills performed well, the global drinks giant wanted a bigger piece of the high-end tequila market. Bushmills

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IRISH WHISKEY

should make Cuervo a credible player across most price tiers in the category; its offerings range from its flagship blend to more specialty offerings like Black Bush, which gets its signature deep amber hue from seven-plus years in Oloroso Sherry casks and sweet bourbon barrels. Others in its range include the honey-infused Irish Honey and 10-year-old, 16-year-old and 21-year-old single malt expressions.

VARIATIONS EMERGE

While single malt and single pot still Irish whiskeys are satisfying consumers' desire to trade up, West Cork Distillers' Kennedy range speaks to another trend that spans most whiskey segments: a bit o' flavor. In addition to its original blend, Kennedy offers Spiced, Honey, Lime and Chili varieties. M.S. Walker, which imports Kennedy, also introduced the distillery's West Cork Irish Whiskey brand last year, available in its Original Classic Blend and 10-Year-Old Single Malt.

Another relative newcomer to the U.S. market is Donegal Estates, which importer Star Industries introduced about a year ago. The blend gets its characteristic sweet nose and smooth taste from the four years it spends maturing in bourbon barrels.

Also popular on the market is William Grant USA's The Knot, which technically isn't an Irish whiskey—it's considered a whiskey liqueur, along the lines of a Drambuie or Southern Comfort. The company is clear about whom they are targeting. Marketing material describes it as "a shot drink"

Tullamore D.E.W.'s new facility brought distilling back to the town of Tullamore. The portfolio includes the original, aged in Sherry and bourbon casks; a 10-year-old Single Malt and 12-year-old Special Reserve; and the 110 proof Phoenix.

and "a real man's drink that respects the sacred code of real manhood."

With so much consumer demand for new products and line extensions, the industry has been in a race to ensure that production and logistical infrastructure are up to date. Among Ireland's new distillery projects, the Walsh family's facility—slated for completion in 2016—is notable in that all three types of whiskey (malt, pot and grain) will be made under the same roof for the first time. Their brand, The Irishman, imported by Palm Bay, uses methods from Irish whiskey's heyday 200 years ago and boasts a diverse array of styles. Expressions in the portfolio include the bargain-priced Founder's Reserve (SRP \$33) and a high-end Cask Strength (108 proof, \$150).

Last fall, William Grant & Sons brought distilling back to the town of Tullamore for the first time in six decades when it opened the new \$40 million facility to produce its Tullamore D.E.W. brand. The site will help keep up with demand for the Tullamore D.E.W. range, which includes its sherry and bourbon cask-aged original, its 12-year-old Special Reserve; 10-year-old Single Malt; and Phoenix at 55% ABV with a high concentration of pure pot still whiskey.



And, this year, the Teeling Whiskey Company officially will bring whiskey making back to Dublin for the first time in more than 125 years when it opens its newly constructed distillery.

"More exciting things are going to happen because you have more brands investing," says Castle's Peña. "The category's a lot more dynamic than it used to be. It used to be one player, Jameson, but now you have Beam and new brands and new distilleries being opened. Competition is going to be a bit tougher, but I think that's going to be good for the whole category to get more consumers to switch or to try Irish whiskey." ■

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RHÔNE REVIVAL

**POWERED BY TERROIR, STYLE AND VALUE, RHÔNE WINES
ARE LEADING THE WAY IN FRANCE**

BY DAVID LINCOLN ROSS

Not often does wind get credit for winemaking, but in France's Rhône Valley, the Mistral deserves some respect. Sending cool air down the Rhône River as many as 100 days in the year, the beneficent breeze chills hot summer days, mitigating intense heat in the vineyards. It also scrubs vineyards of diseases from humidity, rain and fog. Purists also boast that the wind works like a virtual conveyor belt, infusing the region's leading red grapes—Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre—with spicy dollops of the aromatic shrubby garrigue.

While the wind certainly plays a role, Rhône reds (nearly 80% of the region's wine) draw on much more en route to their ultimate fruity, spicy style—diverse grapes (ten red and nine white are permitted); challenging stony soils; the art of blending. What matters most, of course, is that factors both stylistic and economic have converged to boost Rhône wines tangibly ahead of the rest of France in the current American wine arena. Rhône wine exports to the U.S.

doubled in the last decade, hitting 1.2 million 9L cases in 2014, according to French Customs data. In 2014, Rhône red, white and rosé sales gained 6% in the U.S., reports Nielsen.

Perhaps most importantly, the buzz about the Rhône is spread across both on- and off-premise, and North and South. Michael Madrigale, Wine Director at Boulud Sud in New York City, says, "When I became sommelier ten years ago, customers knew about Southern Rhône, and especially

ABOVE: Costières de Nîmes—an official AOC since 1986 and the southernmost of the Rhône Valley wine-growing areas—is also notable for implementation of the Costières de Nîmes Landscape and Environmental Charter, an innovative concept to protect and promote sustainability in winegrowing areas.

Châteauneuf-du-Pape. While these wines are popular, everyone is interested in Côte-Rôtie and all Northern Rhône wines now."

Alan Sack, Wine Consultant at Warehouse Wines in New York City, notes: "There is more willingness and interest among customers to explore Rhône wines. In our store, you can find a Côte-Rôtie for \$20."

Success has also spread across sub-regions and price points. "When you look at 2014 trends in French wines, it's the \$15-\$20 (+8.5% growth by volume) and Core Luxury \$20+ (+15.1% by volume) categories driving growth, according to Nielsen," explains Bill Terlato, President of Terlato Wines International, importer

RHÔNE REVIVAL



ABOVE: The Rhône region overall is known for red wines, but Nielsen reports that in 2014 fully a third (36%) of all Rhône wines sold were rosés. **RIGHT:** The view from Jean-Luc Colombo's Les Ruchets vineyard in Cornas, in the Northern Rhône. The steep parcel is only 5.4 acres, planted with 90+-year-old vines on steep granite slopes; all work in the vineyards is done manually. As in other northern sub-regions, Syrah is the only red variety grown in Cornas, yielding dark, robust wine.

of Chapoutier wines from the Rhône. "Nielsen also reports that Core Luxury Rhône growth of +30% is outpacing the overall French category, in the 52 weeks ending 12/06/14. When it comes to Rhône wines, it's quality, not quantity, that is resonating more and more with consumers today."

Peter Deutsch, President of Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits, importer of Vidal-Fleury wines, points out that one of the Rhône's strengths is offering well-made options at a variety of price points, not unlike cars and other products. What Deutsch finds most surprising is the sudden rise of rosés from the Rhône over the last few years. In 2014, Deutsch cited Nielsen data that reports fully a third (36%) of all Rhône wines sold were rosés. It's a phenomenon he attributes to the growing popularity of rosés in general, including those from Rhône's neighbor—Provence.

Summing up the prevailing optimism for these versatile wines, Martin Sinkoff,

VP and Director of Marketing at Frederick Wildman and Sons, Ltd., importer of the Paul Jaboulet Aîné and the popular Jaboulet Parallèle 45 line, says, "We are bullish on the Rhône as a category. The wines fit the market, offering lots of variety, lots of flavor, rich textures and great value. White wines and rosé wines will continue to grow, though red wines will continue to drive the category."

With or without a boost from the Mistral, Rhône wines appear poised to achieve still greater heights for America's merchants and restaurateurs.

Lionel de Ravel, U.S. Director, Gabriel Meffre, a wine producer based in Gigondas and marketed by Vision Wine & Spirits, emphasizes that the region's momentum seems to have been picking up: "In just the last three years, American consumers have truly discovered the fantastic value Rhône wines offer."

Perhaps some credit is due to the region's generic ad campaign—"Côtes-du-Rhône: Always Right."—which started back in 2009 and emphasizes the wine's more versatile, accessible and contemporary identity, relative to other French wines. Eschewing traditional vineyard and grape visuals, the ads tapped common contexts and images that portrayed the flagship red's ability to swing from casual to formal settings—e.g., jeans to tuxedo, pizza to haute cuisine.

CHURCH & STATE



At Church & State, a French restaurant in Los Angeles, Joy Cushing, Wine Buyer and Sommelier says: "Rhône



has vaulted into the third most-requested wine. From Syrah wines in the North to Grenache blends in the South, they're perfect wines for Pinot and Cab lovers. I give them a taste of a Côtes-du-Rhône, they love it and become instant converts." She adds, "We sell Côtes-du-Rhône by the glass for \$12, and Jean-Luc Colombo's Cornas for \$95, and both sell well."



Vacqueyras is among a group of Rhône AOCs that began as a “Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages” but was then deemed worthy of its own Cru status; 97% of production is red. **RIGHT:** Bottles on display at Chelsea Wine Vault in Manhattan. Rhône wines range naturally from basic table wines to pair with *coq au vin* to cellar-worthy collectibles.

Story-telling helps, too. Mel Dick, Senior Vice President and President of the Wine Division, Southern Wine & Spirits of America, which distributes several top Rhône producers, says: “People love to learn the stories associated with wines like Châteauneuf-du-Pape; it’s the Pope’s wine. So when retailers and restaurateurs share these stories, customers recall these wines.”

Here are some tips to keep your customers’ Rhône crush going as strong as the Mistral wind:

Take the opportunity to educate. United by the river Rhône, the Rhône Valley overall must be viewed as two very distinct parts. In the rugged, mountainous Northern Rhône, Syrah is the only red planted; in the southern part, red blends rule (comprised typically of mostly Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan).

Remember to cross-sell. The Rhône’s grape-variety tool kit and propensity for blending help maintain a family resemblance across appellations that encourages experimentation. If a customer likes Côtes-du-Rhône, suggest similarly styled and priced wines from Ventoux. For those who enjoy Gigondas, Vacqueyras is likely to be a favorite as well. And for custom-

ers tiring of overripe Syrahs, a peppery Northern Rhône might be just the ticket.

Tap into bigger trends. Not entirely by coincidence, the Rhône revival echoes several major trends in wine today. Red blends, for example, are red-hot in the U.S. market; Rhône blends are as old as the vine-covered hills. Grenache/Garnacha has been pegged as a candidate for the next big grape; the Rhône is loaded with Grenache. And as rosé and organic wines continue to gain attention, the Rhône is well-positioned.

Remember the sweet side. Some 2,000 years ago, Roman Pliny the Elder wrote in his Natural History: “The Muscat grape has been grown for a long time in Beaumes and its wine is remarkable.” For sweet wine lovers, do not forget the Vins Doux Naturels of Muscat de Beaumes-de-Vénise (sweet, vivid and appley); and dark, rich Rasteau, based on Grenache Noir. ■

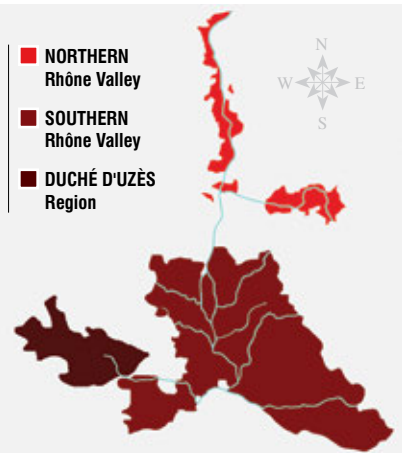


Syrah: Solo grape in the North, blending partner in the South.

France Rhône Valley



- NORTHERN Rhône Valley
- SOUTHERN Rhône Valley
- DUCHÉ D'UZÈS Region



Though united by the same river, the Rhône Valley is really two very distinct parts. In the Northern Rhône, key red appellations in the Northern Rhône are: Côte-Rôtie, Hermitage, Cornas, Crozes-Hermitage, St. Joseph and St. Péray; and the white variety Viognier arguably reaches its earthly pinnacle of quality in tiny Condrieu.

In the Southern Rhône, the principal appellations are: Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas, Vacqueyras, Tavel, Lirac and Côtes-du-Rhône. New to the map is the recently minted AOC of Duché d’Uzès; cultivated since the 6th century BC, Duché d’Uzès gained AOC status in July 2012, and is notable in that white wine is the area’s rising star.

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BLANC PAGE

AS AMERICANS DIVERSIFY THEIR PREFERENCES IN WHITE WINE, CHILEAN SAUVIGNON BLANC PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY

BY ROGER MORRIS

“Chilean Sauvignon Blanc can be just as crisp as those from New Zealand, but with the elegance of Sauvignon Blanc from Loire in France,” says Alex Guarachi, CEO and founder of California-based TGIC Importers. “And Chile is capable of doing so many things with Sauvignon Blanc because of the varied terroirs and growing conditions throughout the country.”

Most wine regions pride themselves on producing a distinctive style of wine, something they can heavily market as a brand—Napa Valley Cabernet, Mendoza Malbec, South African Chenin Blanc. But when it comes to their Sauvignon Blancs, Chilean wine producers love to flaunt their diversity. If a consumer likes the Sauvignon style of Sancerre, Marlborough, Graves or California’s North Coast, Chile thinks it can match those styles and improve on them, and at a discount.

In fact, Chilean winemakers think so highly of Sauvignon Blanc that they are touting it in the American market as the companion white to go along with the country’s iconic red, Cabernet Sauvignon, rather than the traditional Chardonnay. “The quality of Sauvignon Blanc in Chile has improved over the past few years more

than Chardonnay,” claims Viña Tarapaca winemaker Ed Flaherty, and plantings have increased dramatically.

GEOGRAPHY SPAWNS DIVERSITY

A look at a map of Chile helps explain its huge capacity for diversity. The country’s average width from the Pacific Ocean to the crest of its Andes Mountains and its border with Bolivia and Argentina is only 110 miles, about the driving distance from downtown New York City to Philadelphia. However, it stretches some 2,653 miles from the tropics in the north almost to the Antarctic in the south, about the distance between Los Angeles and Washington, DC.

That north-south span alone encompasses the range of climate possibilities—from hottest to coldest, wettest to

driest—needed to grow practically any grape variety. Even its narrow east-west corridor provides a huge range of climates from humid, foggy coastal areas to temperate interior valleys to chilly mountainside venues. For Sauvignon Blanc, a grape that loves to change style according to where it’s planted, the clone used and winemaking practices, Chile is a virtual Noah’s Ark of viticulture.

In short, Sauvignon Blanc from Chile may all taste like the same variety, but with distinctive differences, according to Evan Goldstein, sommelier, consultant and author of the recently published *Wines of South America: The Essential Guide*. “For example, SBs from Casablanca have a cleaner, brighter perfume and the definitive Sauvignon characters of herbs, grass, lemon, and olive,” Goldstein explains. “I believe that the western,

TOP, LEFT: Chile’s variety of microclimates from north to south makes it a veritable Noah’s Ark of viticulture. **RIGHT:** Recent advances in quality and targeted promotions are helping raise the profile of Chilean Sauvignon Blanc above the “bargain wine” level. Here, revelers at last summer’s #WineBarWars in NYC enjoy Sauvignon Blancs picked by sommeliers competing to develop interesting wine lists strictly from Chilean wines.

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Phil Bernstein (far left) at MacArthur Beverages in Washington, DC, thinks Chilean Sauvignon Blancs could benefit from more marketing attention. In New York City, Chris Raftery thinks SB is becoming the Malbec of white wines by the glass. Aurelio Montes believes respect for Chilean bottlings over \$20 is just around the corner.

cooler-climate area of Casablanca produces zippier elderflower versions, while farther east, the wines tend to evoke pink grapefruit, hard candy, and green melon.”

Goldstein suggests keeping an eye on Limarí, where the wines are mineral-driven; San Antonio, with a spicy character, and its more concentrated sub-regions Leyda and Lo Abarca; and Bío-Bío, whose wines are “elegant with quince aromas.”

As evidence of Chile’s potential for both quality and diversity in Sauvignon Blanc, consider Undurraga’s “T.H.” (for Terroir Hunter) program—dedicated to finding the best terroirs for various grapes all over Chile. Acclaimed enologist Rafael Urrejola has pinpointed 30+ parcels, each no more than 12 acres. As part of this program, he makes three separate T.H. Sauvignon Blancs, from Leyda, Casablanca and Lo Abarca, each vivid and balanced yet distinct. The 2011 Lo Abarca was named best New World white wine at the ExpoVinis in São Paulo, Brazil, among entries from more than 25 countries.

TRADE, CONSUMERS TAKING NOTICE

While American drinkers grew fonder of Sauvignon Blanc over the past decade, particularly by-the-glass offerings, trade professionals say they now are demanding different, distinct styles, much as an earlier generation split preferences on types of Chardonnay.

And while Chardonnay is still the most popular varietal wine in the United States, Sauvignon Blanc continues to make inroads. “Sauvignon Blanc is becoming the Malbec of white wines by the glass,” says Chris Raftery, sommelier at CorkBuzz in New York City. “Chilean Sauvignons are popular in part because they tend to have a nice salinity to them.”

One ongoing challenge: with fine Sauvignon Blancs made all over the world, it’s harder for Chile to stand out.

“People are moving away from New Zealand’s grapefruit tastes to Sauvignon Blancs that have more lemon-lime flavors like those from Chile,” adds Andy Gesell, VP and South American Manager for Alabama-based Vineyard Brands, importer of Cono Sur.

One issue that Chile faces is standing out in a crowded marketplace. Sauvignon Blanc, either 100% varietal or blended, is produced around the world, and the U.S. is generally producers’ primary target. Phil Bernstein of MacArthur Beverages in Washington, D.C., notes the attractiveness of Chile’s wines, but feels that the country needs to give its Sauvignon Blancs the same marketing attention that New Zealand and France do theirs. “The Chileans Sauvignons sell steadily as they are in an attractive price point,” he says, “but I don’t really have anyone beating down our door for them. In general, Chile is dragging its heels a bit as a category overall.”

Furthermore, Sauvignon Blanc seems to be positioned in consumers’ minds at only one price level. “It’s difficult to break that \$20 a bottle price barrier with American drinkers,” concedes Aurelio Montes, International Vice President for Wines of Chile and himself an exporter of Chilean Sauvignon Blancs under his eponymous label. Respect at higher price points may be just around the corner, though, based on quality evident in recent vintages.

Goldstein concludes: “There are very good price values, especially at the top end, when compared to those emanating from France, New Zealand and California.”

Selling diversity is a tempting marketing strategy—but only as long as each consumer can sort out producers offering their preferred style. Otherwise, Chile’s “blanc page” can suddenly have so many images that the consumer turns it and moves to the next one. ■

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Before Manhattan's Meatpacking District became the destination it is today—before the jam-packed Highline elevated park, the swank hotels, the high-end retail explosion, and the steady stream of supermodels—there was Brass Monkey.

As owner of the tri-level bar—one of the longest-running in the area—Sean Cunningham has been in the unique position of witnessing a neighborhood transform, and drinking patterns along with it. The Meatpacking club scene came and went, for example, and today there is a thriving post-work scene, lots more women, and a big increase in daytime drinking. >>

MARGIN VS. VOLUME

**THE CLASSIC SEE-SAW
DYNAMIC OF RESTAURANT
WINE PRICING DESERVES
TO BE RE-EXAMINED**

BY JEFF SIEGEL



Every evening, is it any wonder that half the tables at Toronto's Le Paradis Bistro on any night have wine on them? Many of the diners don't even order it. Instead, says manager Jascha Baraness, "they ask us what they should have. And they do that because they trust us to bring them something that is quality and not expensive."

And why not? The markup on the wines on the Le Paradis list averages two times wholesale, and the restaurant has used that multiple for much of its 28-year existence. Yes, some wines are marked up more than that, but Le Paradis is famous among consumers and the trade for its wine pricing. Many of the wines on the list cost \$40 or less, impressive given Ontario's taxes and highly regulated distribution system.

Is it any wonder that half the tables at Le Paradis on any night are drinking wine?

"Our business model is based on volume," says Baraness, who recently returned to Le Paradis after a seven-year absence. "That's why our food is priced in line with our wine. We want our customers to be able to have dinner for two with a glass of wine each for \$35 a person."

Is this almost three-decades-long practice a fluke, or can other restaurants change the way they price wine and make more money in the process? Or is traditional restaurant wine pricing, the three to four times wholesale that

has endured for what seems like forever, with us—for better or worse?

The answer may not be what you think.

"This is real ancient history, and usually imposed by people who are afraid to price more fairly because they're afraid of the bean counters," says Dallas wine consultant Diane Teitelbaum, who has been working with restaurants and wine pricing for more than 30 years. "But it's starting to move away from that theory, and it seems that more and more restaurants are getting the message. You can make money charging less than three and four times."

PRICE HISTORY

Restaurant wine pricing has a long and infamous history—\$10 for a glass of house wine that the distributor charges a couple of bucks for, or \$25 for a bottle of \$6 wholesale White Zinfandel. So it shouldn't be surprising that a CNN survey a couple of years ago claimed that markups of as much as 500% wasn't unusual, or that a Cornell University

report around the same time found that these too-high wine prices hurt sales.

That's because, for most restaurants, the goal is not volume, but profit, says James Tidwell, MS CWE, the master sommelier and beverage manager at the Four Seasons Resort and Club in suburban Dallas. Use too-low pricing over time and too many loss leaders, he says, and the law of diminishing returns kicks in. Low pricing becomes permanent, and margin never returns.

Still, for every restaurant that does wine the right way—fair pricing combined with quality glassware and trained employees—there are the rest, which see wine as inventory that needs to be expensed instead of an asset that needs to be sold. Restaurant bosses would never treat a chicken breast the way so many treat a bottle of wine, because no one would eat an overpriced piece of poor quality chicken that has gone off. But wine? How often does it seem that the attitude is: "How much can we mark that bottle up, and I don't care if we leave it open on the bar for two days to get rid of the entire bottle?"

"There is sort of this infrequently spoken gripe from consumers: 'Why are we paying these kinds of markups?'" says Stan Frankenthaler, chief officer of food, beverage and strategic supply for CraftWorks, which operates about 200

Interestingly, the Meatpacking District, like Jameson, has deep historic roots but earned its street-cred fashionability relatively recently. Jameson's modern turning point was 1975, when parent company Irish Distillers Ltd. opened a new facility in Midleton, which promptly began producing the light, easy-to-love pot-still blend that set the stage for Irish whiskey's comeback stateside. The Meatpacking District turned its corner in the 1990s; founded in 2004, Brass Monkey is actually one of the neighborhood veterans.

"We've seen a movement away from just shots, particularly when it comes to Irish whiskey," Cunningham observes. While he is adamant he doesn't want Brass Monkey to be a "traditional Irish bar," the Dublin-born Cunningham is a passionate ambassador for Irish whiskey. Perhaps surprisingly, a growing percentage of the Irish whiskey at Brass Monkey is consumed in cocktails. "Jameson Ginger is a fall-back drink for so many," he reports.



JAMESON SMASH



BRINGING IRISH TO THE MIX

Cunningham's go-to pour for mixology is Jameson Black Barrel, which delivers "a little more intensity, slightly stronger flavors" to cocktails than Jameson original, he thinks.

Brass Monkey's cocktail program is heavily seasonal, relying on maple syrup and chocolate bitters in the wintertime, citrus and ginger in warmer months. "Our Moscow Mule with Jameson Black Barrel instead of vodka is one of our best sellers all summer," he says. "The whisky is brilliant with the lime and ginger." Another house favorite is the Black Irish. Again, Jameson Black Barrel is the foundation, and the cocktail is built up with ginger ale, chocolate bitters and lime.

On the day we visited, Cunningham and his team assembled a Sazerac with Jameson Black Barrel, which showed beautifully alongside the fragrant anise lift of Pernod. An Irish bar it may not be, but I challenge any other establishment to make a more delicious Irish Coffee than Brass Monkey's. "The key is dissolving the sugar in the coffee first, so the cream won't sink," Cunningham explains. "When one person orders one, it's like an avalanche of other orders follow." ■

Sean Cunningham is a Meatpacking District veteran, having opened Brass Monkey in 2004.



JAMESON COCKTAILS

■ IRISH BLACK SAZERAC

2 oz Jameson Black Barrel
½ oz Simple Syrup
½ oz Ricard or Pernod
2 dashes Aztec Chocolate Bitters
2 dashes Angostura Bitters

Combine syrup, Jameson and bitters with ice and stir. Strain over ice in a rocks glass. Chill Ricard or Pernod and float on top. Garnish with Lemon Twist and Orange Twist.

■ JAMESON SMASH

1½ oz Jameson
½ oz Simple Syrup
4 Lemon wedges
5 Mint leaves

Muddle lemons, mint and simple syrup. Add Jameson and ice and shake. Strain over fresh ice in a rocks glass garnish with mint leaves.

■ THE REAL IRISH COFFEE

1½ oz Jameson
1 cube Comptoir du Sud natural sugar
Real Whipped Cream

Pour boiling hot water into a glass coffee mug and set aside for a few seconds to heat glass. Pour out hot water (or into an additional mug if making more than one drink). Add Jameson and sugar and stir until sugar is dissolved. Top with coffee until about 1 inch from rim of glass. With a hot spoon, add dollop of fresh cream to float on top of coffee and serve.



après YOGA

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TOP: At Le Paradis in Toronto, wines have been priced at twice their wholesale cost for nearly three decades, which manager Jascha Baraness says has developed a loyal clientele who often trust the staff to make wine choices for the table.

BOTTOM: Stan Frankenthaler believes that consumers are more aware of markups today than ever—and are apt to see a \$50 list price for a \$15 retail wine as “greedy.”



restaurants under 11 brands, including the Old Chicago and Rock Bottom concepts. “Are you delivering a special experience with wine to the guest, or is it the same experience they can have at home? Because then they are going to be cynical about your wine program.”

At the most basic level, cutting wine prices sells more wine, though many people don’t want to believe this, says Lyle Beaugard, a certified sommelier and wine consultant in suburban Toronto.

“Consumers know prices,” he says, “and when you charge \$50 for a \$15 wine, they know it and they think you’re too greedy. So they don’t buy anything, and you’ve lost a sale.”

Teitelbaum’s theory: “You can sell a \$100 bottle once a day, or you can sell \$20 bottles of wine all day and all night. It’s your choice.” Mark wine up two-and-a-half times, she says, and you reduce spoilage; increase turnover, which will please the distributor who may then be willing to offer better deals or more interesting wine; and increase cash flow from something that may have barely flowed before.



Treat your wine program as part of the overall customer experience, not something that is separate from the rest of the restaurant.

WHAT’S THE NEXT STEP?

But the discussion can become even more sophisticated than that, says Frankenthaler, whose company’s wine program at its Chop House and Gordon Biersch concepts is about more than just margins. It’s about value vs. cost, something that not enough operators and owners understand. They see wine pricing from the cost perspective, he says, and don’t see how including value can boost a wine program without focusing solely on margins.

“But value doesn’t mean rock bottom pricing,” he says. “It’s the best equation. It’s like coffee. Why do people pay \$3 for a cup of coffee when they can drink it at home for free? You have to give them a quality product that also gives them something different than they can get at home.”

In other words, treat your wine program as part of the overall customer experience, and not as something that is

separate from the rest of the restaurant. After all, who complains about the price of restaurant coffee?

TIPS TO SELL BY:

- ✳️ **Price wine using the same approach that you price food, and not differently just because it’s wine.** Markups like 2½ times wholesale make more sense for most of the wines on the list, just as a \$5 appetizer makes more sense than a \$10 one.
- ✳️ **Consider pricing tiers, like 4 times wholesale, 2½ and 2, based on quality and availability.** If the wine is difficult to find, for instance, or offers exceptional value, the 4 times markup is not outrageous. “Let the higher priced wines make up the difference in margin,” Frankenthaler says.
- ✳️ **Look for unique wines for the highest pricing tier.** Again, it’s a question of availability, he says. If you can offer someone something they can’t get anywhere else, price is less of a barrier to purchase.

This approach, say those who have tried it, is more work than letting the distributor pick the wine (while throwing in free glasses and table toppers), but the payoff is worth the effort. The results, as Le Paradis’ history can attest, can be more profitable than imaginable.

And can make customers happier than they thought they could be. ■



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BITTER TURNS SWEET

AMARO—THE OFFBEAT, ANCIENT ELIXIR—GOES MAINSTREAM

BY W. BLAKE GRAY



BLACK ROCK CHILLER

Branca Menta, Suze,
Reposado tequila

Amor y Amargo,
NYC

Recipes on
BeverageMedia.com

China's Mao Zedong used to say that everyone should "eat bitterness." Mao would probably look favorably upon a burgeoning trend in the spirits industry: the growth of amaros*.

Amaro means "bitter" in Italian. It's also the name for a type of spirit usually taken at the end of a meal in Italy. Amaros are meant to help the digestion, and perhaps that's the reason that some taste downright medicinal.

Amaros are old: many have formulas that haven't changed since the 1800s. They have always been available in the U.S., but aside from the affection that San Francisco bartenders have for Fernet Branca, until the last decade they reached only a very niche market.

Not anymore. While overall sales figures are hard to come by, anecdotal evidence suggests a growing wave. Restaurants that used to have one amaro now offer a list; Locanda in San Francisco offers an amaro flight. Some restaurants, like The Partisan in Washington, DC, carry multiple amaros on tap.

Tony Terlato, who knows something about booms in the business (he created the behemoth that is Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio), says that Terlato Wines International's Amaro, Nonino was up 33% in depletions in 2014.

Banfi Vintners, which has never imported an amaro, plans to

*NOTE: The plural form of *amaro*, technically, is *amari*; however, given the category's relative obscurity, we believe that "amaros" are more immediately grasped by people accustomed to English language structure.

“Mysterious yet versatile, Amaro is a classic after-dinner digestif, but it is also a great mixer and even works as a shot, appealing to the Fireball crowd.”

bring in one from Florio starting in 2015. Reversing the usual model of imports from Europe, Banfi has asked the producer to make an amaro that is less sweet, specifically for the modern American market. “It may well be amaro’s moment,” says Joe Janish, Banfi’s director of public relations.

The trend started in restaurants, but it is spreading to retailers. Terlato says 38% of Amaro Nonino is now sold off-premise. “We started working with the Nonino family in 1996. For the first six or seven years, it was almost all on-premise,” Terlato notes. “But now off-premise is really taking off. People learn to drink it in restaurants, and then they want to have it at home.”

BOLTING THE BAR

Amaros got into restaurants through the bar. With the explosion of craft cocktails, bartenders discovered that the complex formulas of amaros make them a powerful ingredient to play with. Bartenders brought amaros into fine restaurants, and now sommeliers and servers are bringing them to the dinner table.



“It’s becoming more a part of the mainstream,” says Matthew Wohlab, sommelier at Phoenix’s Nook restaurant, which carries amaros on tap. “I have two types who order a lot. If I get traditional, actual Italians, they order amaro and soda. And I get a lot of bar managers and restaurant people. It’s big with them.”

Wohlab says it’s surprisingly easy to sell a glass of amaro after dinner to people who have never tried it. “A lot of it has to do with price point,” he says. “If a brand doesn’t cost a lot of money, you can sell shots of it for \$5 or \$6. It becomes like a Fireball thing. If somebody sits at my bar and they ask, ‘What do you like?’ I can say, ‘I like amaro.’ It costs \$5, it’s easy for them to try. It’s more daunting for somebody to order a \$22 grappa.”

As a category, amaro can be challenging because they’re all so different from each other. For the previous generation of drinkers, this might have been a turnoff. However, millennials like variety, so what was once a negative is now a marketing plus.

Retailers can consider what Bi-Rite Market in San Francisco has done. The

ABOVE: At Amor y Amago, an intimate bar in NYC’s East Village whose names means “love and bitters,” diners can explore amaros via tasting flights or creative cocktails.

BELOW: Amaro Lucano goes through a seven-stage production process; the completely automated bottling phase can produce up to 30,000 bottles a day. Testing for quality control is carried out in each phase.

store picks an “amaro of the month” for an end cap display, with a card describing its tasting notes. “You have to give people some kind of entry point,” says Rachel Gepner, Bi Rite’s spirits buyer. “And people need to touch them, to read the bottles.” She says she loves working with amaro because “they’re very much products of where they’re from. It’s a different kind of terroir. It’s not just the climate; it’s the ecosystem. The plants. The history.”

Here are some fine amaros in the U.S. today, with tasting notes.

Amaro Nonino is unusual in that it doesn’t actually taste particularly bitter, and that’s by design. “Some mixed drinks work with Nonino that don’t work with the herbal amaros,” Tony Terlato says. Unlike many amaros that start with grain neutral spirits, it’s made from grape brandy. It has a pretty, fruit-and-mint-driven character, with notes of orange peel, clove and



BITTER SWEET



Friulian mountain herbs. Imported by Terlato Wines International.

Santa Maria al Monte was created in 1892 and at 40% alcohol is one of the stronger amaros. It's also potent in flavor: woody, spicy and complex, with a long finish. It really benefits from an ice cube. Imported by Vias Imports.



Suze is from France, was invented in 1889 and was featured in a Pablo Picasso painting, "Verre et bouteille de Suze." It's one of the most basic amaros, but that doesn't mean it's not intense: it's a blast of severely bitter yet floral yellow gentian leavened with a necessary, but still large, dose of sugar; 20% ABV. Imported by Domaine Select Wine Estates.



Braulio is the spirit that got this writer into amaro in the first place when it was recommended by a waiter in northern Italy. With plenty of alpine herbs, it's one of the most complex and elegant (21% ABV). Unfortunately Braulio



lost its importer last year and as of this writing doesn't have a replacement.

Averna was created by Benedictine monks who gave the recipe to a monastery patron in 1859. It's one of the most widely found amaros for good reason: with its rich, full-bodied character of cola, cinnamon and citrus, it's a great introduction for beginners (32% ABV). Imported by Campari America.



Ramazotti celebrates its 200th anniversary this year. It's a dense, slightly sweet amaro with coffee and citrus notes. At 30% ABV, it is popular in Milan as a "correction" for espresso. Imported by Evaton Inc.

Varnelli Dell'Erborista is an amaro for your purest wine-geek clients. The roots and herbs that flavor it come from Sibillini mountains, as does the honey used to sweeten it (most amaros use sugar). It's produced over a wood fire and bottled unfiltered, giving it a cloudiness and some sediment (21% ABV). Most unique of all, it lists all of the ingredients on the back label. Imported by Domaine Select Wine Estates.

Many amaros are still based on ancient, secret recipes using on exotic (or at least obscure) natural ingredients.

ABOVE LEFT: some of the 27 different herbs and spices taken from four continents to make Fernet Branca. Among the known ingredients are gentian root, rhubarb, gum myrrh, red cinchona bark, galanga and zedoary.

ABOVE RIGHT: Lucano, created in 1894, uses more than 30 herbs; among them: wormwood, clary sage, musk yarrow, holy thistle, angelica, aloe and elderberry.

Fernet Branca is an odd standard-bearer for amaros as it's the most extreme. It's too potent for most cocktails, and hard to love on first taste. But the spirits world is unpredictable: if Jagermeister could be a hit, why not Fernet Branca? In Argentina they mix it with Coke; wait 'til Americans discover that. Imported by Infnum Spirits (Wilson Daniels).



Lucano was created in 1894 by a pastry chef. Just six years later, it became the official amaro of the last royal family of Italy. Smooth and initially a little sweet, its complex herbs unfold on the finish; 28% ABV. It's easy to imagine sipping this and thinking "Damn that Mussolini!" Imported by Domaine Select Wine Estates. ■



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All Roads Lead to Green

Verde Vineyards grows from its owner's hobby

BY NANCY KIRSCH

Some 60 decades of exposure to winemaking – and a visit to a vineyard – led Giacomo (Jim) Verde to open Verde Vineyards in Johnston, Rhode Island, in 2013. “It’s one thing to make wine, it’s another thing to grow grapes,” explained Verde, whose immigrant grandparents and other relatives routinely made wine each fall, using grapes purchased from California.

“About 12 years ago, I got cuttings from Sharpe Hill Vineyards in Pomfret, Connecticut; they were very gracious,” recalled Verde. The evolution from making wine to making and selling wine occurred because, quite simply, Verde planted too many grapes. “I was obsessed with new varieties and planting new grapes; I realized I had to sell some of them. I also began to win awards, so I was encouraged by that,” he said.

Verde, whose name means “green” in Italian, never set out to have a vineyard;

it just evolved, says Verde, who learned gardening from his grandmother. “Everything’s green in my life, I make all my own electricity with two separate photovoltaic [systems] for the home and the winery. With geothermic heating and cooling, my heating bill is really zero. I’m really proud of that.”

Verde came to grape growing and wine making after decades as a community college biology professor. Asked whether Verde Vineyards is a business or a hobby, Verde describes himself oenologically: “I myself am a hybrid; I’m between a hobbyist and a business.”

From some 1,000 vines on two acres, Verde Vineyards produces award-winning wines. One red, a St. Croix, is a French American

hybrid. Another red, a blend of St. Croix and viniferous, is called Surveyor, named to honor Verde’s late father, Nicholas, who had been a land surveyor.

With no staff, Verde Vineyards relies on volunteers, including some 60 or so who help harvest and crush grapes. “The pickers get treated to a big Italian lunch and we sit under the oaks on a beautiful September day; they drink the wine from the grapes they picked two years ago,” explained Verde. “It’s almost like being in Italy.” Verde identifies two particularly dedicated volunteers: his cousin’s son, Ron Ruggiero, a vineyard regular since childhood, and Dan Gingras, a former student and dear friend. “I can’t do this without them.”



Giacomo (Jim) Verde at Verde Vineyards in Johnston, Rhode Island.



Does Verde, 76, find the work physically laborious? “No; it’s very pleasurable to work and move about,” he said. “I love to be in the vineyard at dusk. The day’s labor is done, the grapes say ‘thank you for taking care of me,’ and we’re ready for our repose.”

Even now, Verde, who peppers his conversation with Latin and Italian phrases, looks to the future: He might plant a new grape varietal and wants to promote Verde Vineyards and other inland wineries to visitors. ■



Vineyard View will be published quarterly as part of our continuing local focus. Contact dana@thebeveragejournal.com to be featured.



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Washington Hill Liquors

BY BOB SAMPLE

When Kent Maurice and a business partner bought Lincoln's Washington Hill Liquors in 2006, they immediately increased their SKUs – adding a better selection of wines and certain spirits, such as tequila, that weren't heavily emphasized. The strategy paid off. "[Since] that time, the store's sales have increased 30 percent," said Maurice, whose partner is in the process of selling him his share of the business.

The store's sales are almost evenly divided between wine, beer and spirits, with a small percentage made up by accessories and other goods. While the previous owner had emphasized low-cost and boxed wines, Washington Hill has since moved up the scale. Top sellers are bottles in the \$12 to \$20 range. The spirits section has seen the most dramatic changes of late.

"Brown goods are hot, and we've recently added more new Scotches and bourbons," said Maurice. "For instance, we've gone from offering about six or seven varieties



Brian Whyte of Washington Hill Liquors helps a customer.



LOCATION

616 GEORGE WASHINGTON HWY
LINCOLN, RI

FACTS

SQUARE FOOTAGE: 2,000
YEARS IN OPERATION: 26

of bourbon to more than 30. And they're all selling."

One factor that greatly influences the store's selection is the proximity of several large colleges and universities. Rounding out the customer mix are area residents and people who work in the many large office complexes nearby.

While the craft beer section is growing, standard American beers are still the best sellers, owing largely to student purchasing habits. "In contrast, foreign exchange students tend to come from wealthy backgrounds and they usually favor much higher-cost wines, specialty liqueurs, and high-end Scotch," he noted. "So we make sure we offer a good selection of these as well."

Maurice schedules product tastings every two weeks at the store, which are run by both company representatives and his own staff of 15 employees. The store gets the word out via its website and Facebook page. "We look upon our demos as an opportunity to get our loyal customers to try new things, and they've really worked well for us," said Maurice.

Maurice admitted that he embarked on



store ownership with his fingers crossed. He previously worked in management for a company that runs food services at colleges and other institutions. "I grew up here and I knew the previous owner of Washington Hill," he recalled. "He was looking for someone to buy the store, and I was looking to do something different. I was very nervous at first. For two years, I worked at the store and kept my old job."

His job requires constant research to stay on top of imbibing trends, and his store is a frequent stop for salespeople with new product offerings. "It's totally cool to taste what the salespeople have to offer," said Maurice. "The growing variety of products makes everything very, very different, which makes this an interesting, fun job to have." ■



If you own a small, medium or megastore and would like to be featured, email: dana@thebeveragejournal.com

NEW PRODUCTS & PROMOTIONS

MALIBU INTRODUCES SUMMER-READY PEACHES & CREAM

The newest line extension from Malibu's confectionary flavor offerings introduces the juicy and fresh taste of Peaches & Cream to Malibu Coconut. The flavor was developed to inspire fun-filled drinking experiences, and to provide a sweet treat for adults that allows them to channel the enjoyment of summer at any time.



\$ SRP: \$14.99
maliburumdrinks.com
[Facebook.com/MalibuRum](https://www.facebook.com/MalibuRum)

ANCHOR DISTILLING COMPANY BRINGS MEZCAL AMARÁS TO U.S.

Translated as "you will love" in Spanish, Mezcal Amarás is made from 100% Espadín agave and distilled twice in copper pot stills, a process which removes impurities and produces a soft, smooth flavor with a slightly smoked, citric aroma. The palate is balanced and rich with a surprising sweetness reminiscent of tropical fruits. 82 proof.



\$ SRP: \$49.99
mezcalamaras.com
[Facebook.com/MezcalAmaras](https://www.facebook.com/MezcalAmaras)

BEDELL CELLARS COLLABORATES TO RELEASE LIMITED-EDITION LABEL

Following the successful launch of First Crush Red 2013, Bedell Cellars has collaborated with artist and filmmaker Mickalene Thomas to release a limited edition label for the white wine counterpart, First Crush White 2014 this spring. For the label, Mickalene selected a collage from her 2014 series, Tête de Femme, portraying abstracted female faces constructed from abstracted geometric cutouts. Available in NY, MD, VA, GA, IL and DC.



\$ SRP: \$25
bedellcellars.com
[Facebook.com/BedellCellars](https://www.facebook.com/BedellCellars)

KICK OFF ROSÉ SEASON: LA PETITE PERRIERE ROSÉ 2014

Rosé season is here. Brand new to the scene: La Petite Perriere Rosé 2014 from Loire producer Saget La Perriere. Building off of the success of their Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, this new rosé is 100% Pinot Noir that is straightforward and fresh, with aromas of raspberries, strawberries, red currants and violets.



\$ SRP: \$13.99 each
pasternakwines.com
[Facebook.com/pasternakwine](https://www.facebook.com/pasternakwine)

BLUE MOON OFFERS NEW TWIST ON IPA

Blue Moon Brewing Company has unveiled their own twist on an IPA with the Blue Moon White IPA. The IPA has flavors of hop citrus and orange peel that complement the wheat and malts for a balanced IPA bitterness and crisp finish. Medium-bodied, the white IPA pairs well with flavorful seafood dishes, spicy Mexican food, and strong cheeses such as sharp cheddar and blue.



\$ SRP: \$8.99/six-pack
bluemoonbrewingcompany.com
[Facebook.com/BlueMoon](https://www.facebook.com/BlueMoon)

FOX BROOK LAUNCHES NEW MOSCATO

Crafted from over 100 years of family tradition, the Fox Brook Moscato is light in color with floral aromas including notes of orange blossom, jasmine and honeysuckle. Flavors include peach, melon and spice. Perfectly in sync with today's tastes. Best enjoyed chilled. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.



\$ SRP: \$4.99
broncowine.com
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NEW PRODUCTS & PROMOTIONS

TÙSAIL: GLENMORANGIE'S LATEST PRIVATE EDITION

Glenmorangie Tùsail, the sixth release in the award-winning Private Edition collection, draws on the unique taste of Maris Otter barley, almost lost to the world if not for the efforts of a few loyal proponents. Tùsail is a non-chill filtered, bright ochre whisky with rich, rustic flavors of nut toffee, sweet barley malt, ginger, cinnamon, molasses and dates. 92 proof.



\$ SRP: \$99
glenmorangie.com
[Facebook.com/glenmorangieusa](https://www.facebook.com/glenmorangieusa)

SKINNYGIRL LAUNCHES NEW LADY IN RED

Skinnygirl has launched the newest low-calorie expression in their wine collection, Skinnygirl Pinot Noir. At 100 calories per 5 oz. serving, Skinnygirl Pinot Noir has a long, silky finish with juicy acidity, and contains flavors of dark cherry, toasted oak and vanilla. The Pinot Noir joins a Skinnygirl franchise that also includes eight wines, six vodkas and nine bottled cocktails. 10% ABV.



\$ SRP: \$11.99
skinnygirlcocktails.com/lpa
[Facebook.com/skinnygirl](https://www.facebook.com/skinnygirl)

OPICI LAUNCHES MELETTI 1870, A NEW ITALIAN APERITIVO

Meletti 1870 is a traditional Italian aperitivo made with three separate distillates: sweet orange, bitter orange and a spice and herb infusion. The three are blended with pure spirits to create a mildly bitter yet refreshing aperitivo. The flavor profile starts with sweet citrus, moves through a bitter middle, and finishes with gentian, coriander, cinnamon and clove notes.



\$ SRP: \$26
opiciwines.com
[Facebook.com/OpiciWines](https://www.facebook.com/OpiciWines)

CAVIT 'SELECTS' A NEW RED BLEND

Cavit has announced the addition of a Select Red Blend to their versatile Italian wine portfolio. The 40% Teroldego, 35% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Syrah blend has a deep, ruby red color with aromas of violets and red cherries. The palate is smooth with full, intense flavors of blackberry and plum, complemented by velvety tannins and a well-balanced structure.



\$ SRP: \$8.99
palmbay.com/cavit
[Facebook.com/cavitwines](https://www.facebook.com/cavitwines)

THATCHERS GOLD CIDER DEBUTS IN THE U.S.

America's blossoming cider category is being joined by a veteran UK brand. Thatchers Gold, made from more than 10 varieties of specially selected tart and sweet apple varieties in Somerset, England, is bright and crisp, with true apple flavors and a smooth texture. Best enjoyed chilled or over ice. Distribution begins on the East Coast, then will expand. Available in both 330ml four-packs and 500ml.



\$ SRP: \$8.99/4-pack, \$3.99/500ml
thatcherscider.co.uk
[Facebook.com/ThatchersCiderCompany](https://www.facebook.com/ThatchersCiderCompany)

GLORIOSO LAUNCHES NEW RIOJA FROM SPAIN

Glorioso's new Rioja Reserva encapsulates all the tradition of a winery founded over a century ago, in 1894, from the prestigious Rioja Alavesa region. This Rioja is produced with the greatest of care, using the best selected grapes and French oak barrels, and earned 91 points from *Wine Spectator*. Glorioso is a H.A. Barcelos company wine brand. Marketed by Bronco Wine Co.



\$ SRP: \$19
bruncowine.com
[Facebook.com/BroncoWineCompany](https://www.facebook.com/BroncoWineCompany)



LEFT: American consumers typically don't consider food-pairing when they think spirits, but shochu is common on the Japanese table, and can be enjoyed on ice, with water, even hot water. **RIGHT:** Where all saké is rice-based, shochu can be distilled from not only that grain, but also barley, sugar cane, buckwheat (aka soba) sweet potatoes and sesame. Each has a distinctive flavor evocative of its base ingredient and alcohol is usually around 25%.

FROM KANPAI TO GANBEI

A FRESH TOAST TO ASIAN SPIRITS: JAPANESE SHOCHU AND CHINESE BAIJIU

BY JEFF CIOLETTI

Consumer education is often a hurdle for marketers within most spirits segments. But when a particular beverage's presence in the U.S. is miniscule, the task is tougher. And it gets tougher still if consumers aren't sure how to even pronounce the name of the drink, much less know what it is.

Importers of Japan's native spirit, shochu, and China's national beverage, baijiu (pronounced "bye-joe"), are quite familiar with that dynamic and have been actively demystifying their respective liquids as they strive to gain traction beyond their home markets.

SHOCHU: JAPAN'S WILD CARD

While far from mainstream, shochu is arguably the better-known of the two Asian spirits, partly thanks to the steady embrace of Japanese cuisine over the past decade and a half. It has also, to some extent, ridden the coattails of saké, which is still a niche product stateside but has opened curious consumers' eyes to other beverages from Japan.

That's not to say the average drinker isn't confused about the difference between saké and shochu; most have yet to grasp that saké is fermented, not distilled (though it often, erroneously, gets lumped in with spirits), and is actually closer to beer in its

production method. Shochu is distilled, but frequently gets incorrectly compared with vodka. The only trait shochu and vodka share, beyond the fact that they're both spirits, is their clear color. It also doesn't help that "shochu" sounds similar to the Korean "soju," which actually is a lot closer to vodka.

"Shochu still faces a significant education gap," admits Kristoffer Miller, Business Development Director at the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO).

Cuisine pairing is the logical entry point for consumers. American consumers typically don't consider food-pairing when they think spirits, but in the Japanese izakaya setting, food often accompanies shochu.

Most of JETRO's shochu-related events center around meal pairing, which ultimately helps drive the concept home. "People are very appreciative once they do start to learn what makes it interesting, how to pair with food, and the different ways to drink it—on ice, with water, hot water, a lot of other ways of course," says Miller.

Where all saké is rice-based, shochu can be distilled not only from grain, but also barley, sugar cane, buckwheat (soba) sweet potatoes and sesame. Each has a distinctive flavor evocative of its base ingredient. It helps that the alcohol content tends to be on the low side, usually hovering around 25%; the flavor complexity asserts itself, as its aroma is not overwhelmed by ethanol. Barley shochu had been the most common form, but the sweet potato variety has given it a run for its money in recent years.

BAIJIU: THE GREAT UNKNOWN

Baijiu enjoys the distinction of being the highest-volume spirit style in the world, despite the fact that most of the rest of the world hasn't even heard of it. According

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to research conducted by Bloomberg and McKinsey & Co., baijiu accounts for 31% of spirits volume in the world—significantly ahead of vodka, which represents about 19%. Naturally, that's thanks to China's population size. Until recently it barely made it out of the country.

Where shochu uses one base ingredient per style, China's baijiu most often is a blend of several. The dominant grain is sorghum, but, depending on the region, it's combined with starchy fermentables like standard rice and/or glutinous ("sticky") rice, corn and wheat, in varying proportions. It's markedly higher in alcohol content than shochu—frequently upwards of 50%—though no less at home on the dinner table. In fact, drinking it with meals historically had been nearly universal. (The whole notion of a bar is a relatively new concept in China, going back only about a quarter-century; before then nearly all drinking outside the home took place in restaurants.)

CNS Imports, which markets nearly 30 baijiu brands, is making a big, education-centric push to broaden consumers' exposure to the mostly unknown beverage,

which, though clear in appearance, is categorized as a brown spirit.

"In the past we've primarily imported to serve Asian markets, to Asian people who know the products and know the category and brands," says CNS Imports principal Steaven Chen, whose parents founded the company about three decades ago. CNS partnered with Private Cask Imports, whose president and CEO, Manny Burnichon, brings extensive experience with high-end wine and spirits, particularly Cognac.

CNS is focusing on five key brands to target consumers beyond traditional Asian communities: Kweichow Moutai, the biggest brand in China; Luzhho Laojiao; Jian Nan Chun; Mianzhu Daqu; and a brand of which Diageo owns a majority stake, Shui Jing Fang, renamed "Wellbay" for U.S. consumers.

The partnership already has tested the waters with upscale accounts, particularly high-end Chinese eatery and lounge Hakkasan's locations in New York, San Francisco, Beverly Hills and Las Vegas.

Consumers experiencing baijiu for the first time often are struck by how difficult it is to compare to any others they've tasted before. The closest descriptors for various forms of baijiu would be, perhaps, "mushroomy" or "earthy," and with some brands even "sour pineapple."

Those sipping it may be at a loss for words to describe what they're tasting, but few would say the spirits didn't make a lasting impression on them. The key to winning new fans is simple: Get a glass in front of them and nudge them out of their comfort zones. ■

After focusing for many years on Asian markets, there is now a broad, education-centric push for baijiu to reach the general market.



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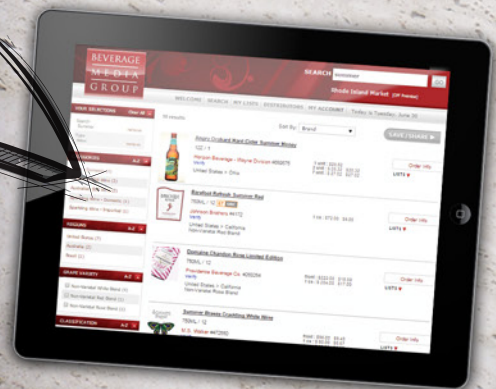
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