

FSR™

Published on *FSR magazine* (<http://www.fsrmagazine.com>)

[Home](#) > A Toast to Excellence

// **CONNIE GENTRY** // **SEPTEMBER 2014**



Dina Avila

Nominated by FSR readers, these beverage programs have more to them than the wine, beer, and spirits on the menu.

Expatriate

Editor's choice for best cocktail bar experience in a one-year-old concept.

Portland, Oregon Duke Ellington, '60s British rock, or something more contemporary? Kyle Linden Webster, owner and creator of Expatriate, makes those choices every night as he spontaneously selects LPs to queue on the turntable. Nights start softly, perhaps with the hint of jazz or an acoustical medley humming in the background, but as the energy changes, the musical ambiance shifts to match the mood of Expatriate guests.

The original idea for the bar, which celebrated its first anniversary in July, was to create a space "that transported people out of their usual mode of existence," Webster says. "I thought it would be good for guests to be a little unsure of where they were, to feel pleasantly disoriented."

The music, always from vinyl, never digital, helps set that stage, as does the name, Latin in origin and meaning out of one's own country.

Webster, whose passions include bartending, literature, and music, spent time creating musical playlists for restaurants that would reflect the overall tone of the concepts. He also spent years working in the well at various bars, something he misses now that his primary function is to serve as decision-maker and chief hospitality director at Expatriate.

"I'm not in motion in the well as much as I'd like, and while I still have to be able to gather a fun crowd and create a drinking culture, I have to be in touch with my principles of hospitality in a different way," Webster says. "That's been a huge challenge and opportunity for developing skills to make the team work well and, to some degree, it's been a process of letting go and trusting people."

What he most hopes to accomplish with hospitality at Expatriate is for guests to leave "thinking of the overall experience. That has been my priority because I strongly believe the overall experience is what people value and return for," Webster explains. "There is a necessary and ideal interconnection between all the things happening in the course of service at Expatriate, and I hope that is apparent."

[pagebreak]

Certainly that's readily evident in the food and beverage offerings. The symbiotic relationship Expatriate shares with Beast—owned and operated by James Beard Award winning chef Naomi Pomeroy, who happens to be married to Webster—goes a long way toward making sure the food is top notch.

Not only does Chef Pomeroy create all the dishes and train the kitchen staff at Expatriate, the concepts face one another on the same street—enabling an easy exchange of talent between the two as well as making it convenient for Beast's guests to enjoy before or after drinks at Expatriate.

While the sum is surely greater than all the parts, fundamentally the biggest attraction is the cocktail list. "I love being able to offer the best drink of its sort in Portland," Webster says, as was the case with the summer favorite the Royal Hawaiian, named for an iconic hotel on Oahu. Priced \$15, the Royal Hawaiian combines Martin Miller's Westbourne Strength Gin, fresh lemon and orange, pineapple gomme syrup, fresh orgeat, and Angostura Bitters.

"Inspiration comes from all the people around me, and the Royal Hawaiian is from one of our bartenders who moved here from L.A., and for the most part his drinks are much brighter and fruitier than what I would think of," continues Webster. "I asked him to make something with gin, and this drink he came up with is very tropical but boozy—it's superlative, one of the best combinations of [flavors] that I've ever had."

Wine and, to a lesser extent, beer are also offered, and Webster says he consciously works to offer high-quality wines at a value, adding, “Not everyone wants to drop more than \$10 or \$12 for a glass of good wine.”

Moving into the second year, Webster expects to see more refinement and focus on the physical space, although he acknowledges, “A place with a life of its own will never be finished.” A total of about 1,000 square feet, with no more than 750 square feet allocated to guest seating and the bar, makes for some “cozy” nights when the space fills to capacity with around 45 people. That’s happening more frequently as the word gets out, even in a hot F&B town like Portland, where cocktail and culinary connoisseurs abound.

As Webster intended, it is more than likely the overall experience that keeps attracting newcomers and loyal regulars to Expatriate—an experience that includes intellectual and introspective conversations not found in every neighborhood haunt. Books dot the tables and join bottles along the bar back, including novels by Webster’s favorite author, Haruki Murakami, whom he says provided the inspiration for Expatriate. “I would never have wanted to open a bar, if not for reading his books,” Webster says. “I’ve read all the books in the bar, and I love to discuss them with our guests. It’s always good to connect on that level.”

Honorable Mention Parallel 38

Charlottesville, Virginia High on the bucket list of places to visit, Parallel 38 has more than 100 wines by the glass and six wines on tap, and all wines selling for more than \$100 per bottle are available in ounce-pours. Additionally, Parallel 38 touts a farm-to-table cocktail program and an eclectic mix of beer ranging from cult classics to craft breweries to seasonal specials.

[pagebreak]



Bardenay In-house distillery creates premium liquors.

Boise, Idaho Faces don't lie at the bar. If a guest grimaces when he takes a sip of a cocktail, something's got to give. That was the initial litmus test that Kevin Settles, owner, president, and CEO of Bardenay, used to judge the success of his in-house distillery when he opened Bardenay in 2000. At that time, an in-house distillery was a first for a full-service restaurant, and certainly the first in Idaho, where Settles says he lobbied successfully in 1999 to have a law changed that prohibited operators from having a restaurant license with a distillery.

From the start, Settles has carried only premium spirits in his restaurant, named after a friend's sailboat, a tribute to the custom of dropping anchor at 5 o'clock to celebrate the Bardenay hour with cocktails. Those premium spirits include well-known labels like Beefeater Gin as well as the hard liquors—also branded Bardenay—that are distilled in the restaurant.

But, it took some experimenting to perfect those homemade alcohols, and Settles says he spent a lot of time watching customer reactions: "If a guest made a face when they tasted a drink made with one of our liquors, I'd instantly replace it with a drink made with one of the premium liquors we stock."

Those days of trial and error are long gone, and now the house-made Bardenay spirits account for 70 percent of the hard liquor served in the restaurant, and Settles estimates that overall 35-40 percent of the restaurant's revenues are generated by alcoholic beverages.

Bardenay makes gin, rum, vodka, and strawberry liquor in-house, but because Idaho is a controlled state, everything that Bardenay makes in its distillery must be sold to the state and then bought back by the restaurant to serve. Learning the necessary legalities and logistics was worth it to Settles, who previously owned a hard cider company and always wanted to enter the distillery business. Initially, he planned to focus on the distillery side of the business and leave restaurant operations to former partners. However, he acquired their interests in the business after just a couple of years, and has since become enthralled with operating both the restaurant and in-house distillery, ultimately opening two additional Bardenay locations.

Honorable Mention Extra Virgin

Kansas City, Missouri Bar manager Berto Santoro barrel-ages bourbons in-house, cooks his own syrups and tincture, and brings in small-batch mezcal.

[pagebreak]

canon Lasting impressions and tableside showmanship.

Seattle There's no denying the star factor at canon, Seattle's premier whiskey and bitters

emporium, which won World's Best Drinks Selection at last year's Tales of the Cocktail and returns to the *FSR* roster of Best Beverage Programs for a second straight year.



Proprietor Jamie Boudreau says, “The one thing we’ve started to change at canon is finding ways to bring the theater to the table. Now, we have many drinks finished tableside or drinks that make a big impression due to being smoked at the table, served with liquid nitrogen, shaken tableside in large vintage shakers, or served in fancy packaging.”

He points to one of the newer cocktails, the Milk ‘n Cookies, a Scotch and cognac-based drink, served in a vintage lunch pail with Fernet Branca “Oreo” cookies and an Archie comic book.

By bringing a theatrical element to the table, Boudreau says, “It enables our guests at tables to see as much of the show as people at the bar, and it makes them more aware of the effort that goes into the drinks ... possibly letting them justify taking a touch longer than making a vodka soda.”

Other favorites include the Fighattan, canon’s twist on a Manhattan, with fresh and dried figs for a depth of flavor that Boudreau says “Blows the original away.” Another that he says is in high demand and little supply is a Truffled Old Fashioned, “easily one of our better-received cocktails,” garnished with winter truffles.

Honorable Mention Red Robin

The national chain returns to *FSR*’s best beverage list a second year, thanks in part to its expansive, value-priced selection of 79 drink options under \$5 each—plus the company shook up the wine menu, introducing the Mango Moscato Wine Shake.

[pagebreak]

Hopdoddy Burger Bar

Hybrid business model introducing new cocktails every two weeks.

Austin, Texas If restaurants received Grammy awards, Hopdoddy would have to be a contender for best rap artist. It's not just the hip-sounding name—which actually makes a lot of culinary sense when you think about the focus on craft beer (hops) and premium proteins (*doddy* being the Scottish nickname for black angus cattle)—it's also the hip vibe of the hybrid business model.



In the bar, guests can opt for traditional full-service ordering from the menu, but guests who sit in the dining room or patio area are treated to a different protocol. As in a full-service restaurant, guests do not order food until a table is available for them to be seated. When there's a wait, servers take orders for beverages and snacks, which are brought to the guests while they are waiting. Once a table has opened, the guests place a food order—at a counter—and then the food is served at their table, where all subsequent orders for drinks, dessert, whatever, are given to the server. Not your typical full-serve venue, but a concept that is gaining traction: Five locations in Texas and Arizona will soon be joined by a third unit in the Lone Star State plus one in Denver and another in Los Angeles.

Dan Mesches, COO and president of Hopdoddy, says there are 12 to 18 beers on tap at each location, “and the beers are all mindfully sourced from local breweries, so the selection varies from one location to another.”

The wine menus are carefully crafted as well. “For instance, everything on the wine list in Arizona is either sustainable or organic,” Mesches says, and other locations also have a selection of sustainable and organic wines.

But the real craft is in the cocktail menu, which introduces a new specialty cocktail every two weeks at all locations in addition to maintaining a vibrant core menu. “We love to stage contests

among all our bartenders; they create new drinks and compete with their cocktails for various prizes,” Mesches continues. Among his personal favorites is the Little Larry, a 4-ounce mini-Margarita topped with Grand Marnier and named for one of the company’s founders who “only likes to have a sip, or very small drink,” according to Mesches.

He’s also partial to the Black Cherry Hard Limeade, made with the guest’s choice of gin or vodka, plus lime and Black Cherry Fizz. Another hit is the Lil’ Prick, described as a “sassy prickly pear martini, with Silver Tequila and fresh-squeezed lime juice.”

Honorable Mention

CUCINA urbana from Urban Kitchen Group

San Diego, California Italian restaurant meets wine retail with more than 250 wines available for guests to take home or enjoy with their meal while dining in the restaurant.

[pagebreak]

Johnny’s Italian Steakhouse

Inside Job: Promoting from within via a training program that focuses on building confidence, communication, and creativity.

Des Moines, Iowa For bootleggers running beverages at Johnny’s Italian Steakhouse, a lively, upscale-casual steakhouse concept in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, personality is the primary prerequisite.

All the floor’s a stage in Johnny’s culture, where staff positions are given theatrical titles—a message to employees from day one that every service moment begs a stellar performance. Servers start as “performers,” and most of the bootleggers (i.e., bartenders) have been promoted from within, after proving they have what Pamela Cooper, vice president of marketing and staff development, describes as the “it factor.”



“We want the bar experience to be led by people who are comfortable and confident,” Cooper says. “It’s mostly about personality, polish, and the ability to communicate well with guests while handling pressure with a smile.”

In some cases, it is quickly apparent when a server has what it takes—like one performer who moved to a bootlegger position in just five days. Other times, it’s an acquired confidence and skill set that leads to a promotion after months.

Of course, the ability to craft a mean cocktail comes into play as well, and Johnny’s bootleggers are allowed to operate autonomously and with passionate creativity.

“We encourage our bootleggers to develop drinks for their locations and to participate in off-site events and contests in the community,” Cooper adds. “There is a core beverage menu so that guests who visit different locations will find some consistency, but we also understand the importance of regional preferences. Daily and weekly beverage features are driven by the bootleggers.”

Honorable Mention

Eastern Standard Kitchen & Drinks and The Hawthorne

Boston At Eastern Standard, bar director Jackson Cannon has developed a strong team of like-minded bartender/beverage managers whose passion for education, guest service, and training is a compelling combination. He has traveled the world, bringing firsthand knowledge from places such as Jalisco, Cognac, Oaxaca, Sweden, Jerez, and Peru to elevate the level of understanding that the barbacks, servers, and bartenders bring to guests. At his second concept, The Hawthorne, Cannon raises the bar even a notch higher.

[pagebreak]

Lotus Pad

Destination dining and drinks with menus that source local, think global.

Big Sky, Montana Skiers, travelers, and locals journey to Lotus Pad for its Thai-inspired cuisine that looks to Montana ingredients for flavorful inspirations. Chef and co-owner Alexandra Hoeksema says tourists often make a side trip to visit Lotus Pad when they travel to Yellowstone National Park, 45 minutes away. Although Big Sky—with its fast-growing ski industry—is best known as a winter destination, she and her husband, Scott, operate Lotus Pad year-round and say the restaurant, voted best in town three years running, is always crowded.

Acclaimed for its originality in both food and beverage, Chef Hoeksema describes playfully innovative cocktails that are created to complement the spicy Thai dishes. “This summer, we’ve been playing with our version of a Moscow Mule,” she says. The Bangkok Mule has ginger beer, coconut rum, and lime for a refreshing summer sipper.



Another warm-weather favorite is the Green Dragon, which features house-infused ginger vodka, basil, mint, lime, simple syrup, and lemon juice topped with a gingered rim. “The top-selling beverage summer and winter,” Chef Hoeksema says, “is the Spicy Samurai,” with house-infused Thai chili vodka, mango juice, soda, and lime.

Lotus Pad has also introduced a sake menu, which Chef Hoeksema says is a new experience for many Montana residents. “The sparkling sake is perhaps my favorite because it cuts through the spice of the food,” she explains, adding the Snow Maiden sake is the most popular, likely because guests respond to the name, especially during ski season.

A number of chef specialties are on the food menu, but the most popular include locally sourced meats: Crying Tiger features a 10-ounce Wagyu steak from the Montana Wagyu Cattle Company, with a Thai chili spice rub, tomato, cucumber, baby spinach, and mint vinaigrette, priced at \$24. The Rendang Curry with Bison is another big hit, with bison braised in coconut milk, yams,

carrots, green beans, peanuts, and a house-made Rendang curry paste, also \$24.

Open daily during ski season, Lotus Pad cuts back to six days a week during the summer, not because there aren't enough diners clamoring to visit, but, Chef Hoeksema says, simply because staffing is a challenge during off-season in the resort town.

Honorable Mention

Drunken Jack's Lounge

Murrells Inlet, South Carolina Celebrated its 35th year of operation in July, still under the leadership of the three original owners, and house favorites include Goat Island Tea and Pina Coladas made with Madagascar vanilla ice cream.

[pagebreak]

Matt the Miller's Tavern

Outstanding beer program with rotating craft beer selections tailored to guest preferences in each location.

Columbus, Ohio Craft beer mania has reinvigorated the neighborhood bar scene, prompting the development of upscale-casual restaurants—often dubbed gastropubs—in cities and suburbs, small towns and landmark arenas. Too many to count, and certainly too many to rank—but Matt the Miller's Tavern, in the American heartland, stands as a poster child of what a great craft beer program and pub ought to provide.

Obviously there's the beer list, and Matt the Miller's Tavern boasts 80-plus bottles in every location and 26 taps of draft beer, in an ever-evolving rotation of craft and local brews, at three of its four locations. The original location in Dublin, Ohio, was opened with 14 tap lines, but subsequent units were built to accommodate 26 lines.

Christina Meehan, operations manager and beverage manager, personally evaluates the beer list for each Matt the Miller's location every Monday. "In the last couple of years, there are some great local breweries opening in Ohio; the craftsmanship and artistry is so exciting," she says. "They are always introducing something new, and our ever-revolving list is specific to consumers in each location."

In fact, Meehan keeps a list of guest preferences at each location. For instance, she knows the Dublin crowd is "very hops-driven; we can't do anything but hoppy beers there. But in other locations, guests are willing to experiment more, so we may bring in some sweet or sour beers."

She also personally writes all of the tasting notes, which are provided to guests along with food-pairing suggestions and shared in training sessions with servers, most of whom are over 21.

"Matt the Miller's is an upscale tavern experience, so we need maturity in the server staff and we definitely look for people who are over 21—you have to taste the beer to truly know it,"

Meehan continues, adding they are all passionate beer geeks, not beer snobs.

Her personal favorite? “Every beer is my favorite,” she laughs. “But I’m really loving Sunshine Daydream, a session IPA from Fat Heads Brewery that has just 5 percent ABV. There are some wonderful beers in the 7.5 percent to 8 percent range, but I’m not comfortable having two of those and then operating a car.”

Responsible service is another focal point for Matt the Miller’s Tavern, and any beer with an ABV of more than 8.5 percent is served in a 10-ounce glass. “It’s a message to our guests that the beer has a higher alcohol content, so to drink responsibly,” Meehan says.

It’s not all about the beer: Wine and craft cocktails are popular as well, and Meehan, who started as a bartender, still mixes some menu headliners. The best-selling Blueberry Basil Limoncello is one she created at home, initially using basil from her garden. Blueberry vodka, Fabrizia limoncello, fresh basil, lemon juice, and simple syrup combine to make the signature cocktail.

Food, which accounts for 65 percent of the restaurant’s revenue, is as important as beverage in the upscale tavern environment, with popular selections including the restaurant’s original flatbreads, fresh seafood, and steaks. Of the 35 percent of sales attributed to beverage, Meehan estimates 15 percent comes from beer.

CLB Restaurants, which owns Matt the Miller’s Tavern, says the restaurant is not actually an Irish pub, but rather is intended to embody the warmth and hospitality of the original restaurant in Kilkenny, Ireland, that bears the same name and served as inspiration.

Honorable Mention Publik Draft House

Atlanta In addition to its extensive cocktail selection and expansive beer list, Publik Draft House also launched the Great Southern Beer Competition, a contest for homebrewers, fully demonstrating its commitment to the craft beer community.

[pagebreak]

Ripple Outstanding wine program including 50 wines by the glass.

Washington, D.C. Religion, politics, and, now, wine: topics about which people are so passionately opinionated it may make for difficult dinner conversations. Unless, of course, you happen to be served by Danny Fisher, who lives to share intimate stories of wines, wineries, and the people who make wine. The only thing Fisher, general manager and sommelier at Ripple, likes better than telling wine stories is helping guests overcome their preconceived notions of wines.

“I want people to experience a sense of place and a true representation of what is happening in the earth when they taste a wine,” says Fisher, who works diligently to build personal relationships with wineries around the world—particularly with boutique growers and small production wineries that employ sustainable, organic, and biodynamic viticulture practices.



The wine list at Ripple is focused on value and diversity: Fifty wines are available by the glass and 75 wines sell for under \$50 a bottle. Fisher prides himself on bringing a far-reaching range of options to the wine list. “Not everyone wants to experiment,” he acknowledges, “so there will always be a Cabernet from Washington state, but I also love having small-production wines that may only be available in two or three cases.”

The variety seems to have resonated with Ripple’s regulars and the D.C. crowd, and servers are coached so they are well equipped to suggest food and wine pairings. “Sometimes the best wine to pair with a dish is expensive—not everyone wants to spend \$20 on a glass of wine—so I like all of the servers to be able to recommend at least two options,” Fisher explains.

On a positive note, he believes the wine audience is becoming more open-minded. “I think people’s eyes are opening to what else is out there; they’re willing to look beyond all the household names that are sold at Costco.”

In addition to its expansive and dynamic wine list, Ripple has a constantly rotating selection of local craft beers and an inventive offering of craft cocktails, such as the Cytrus Hystrix, \$13, with kaffir lime-infused vodka, cardamom-ginger soda, and elderflower, or the popular Negative Calories, \$14, which mixes gins, celery juice, lemon, egg whites, and celery shrub bitters for a vegetable-infused cocktail.

Honorable Mention
The St. Paul Grill

This establishment in Saint Paul, Minnesota, boasts more than 200 bottles of wine from highly allocated wineries. Its wine-by-the-glass program, meanwhile, offers 25 sips that change seasonally.

[pagebreak]

Swift's Attic

Outstanding bar program with inventive cocktails and weekly staff briefings.

Austin, Texas At Swift's Attic, bar manager Jeff Hammett works in a setting steeped in character and colorful ambiance—the historic building in downtown Austin, Texas, that housed Swift Premium Food Company in 1905—but, what he enjoys most about his job is watching how guests react to the restaurant's exotic and inventive cocktails. "I love seeing how people react when they expect one thing, and then the drink proves to be something totally unexpected," he says.

The Coin Trick, priced \$10, is the one he most likes to watch guests experience. "It tricks the senses completely," Hammett explains. The drink consists of Cointreau, Citadelle gin, fresh-squeezed lime juice, and soda—all siphoned together, then served with fresh grated nutmeg sprinkled on top and micro-flamed tableside, a sensory experience from the artistic visual production to the drink's palate-teasing twists.

As for what guests like most, the best-selling cocktail at Swift's Attic is also Hammett's personal favorite: the New Fashioned, \$12, is a ginger-infused 40 Creek Copper Pot Whiskey muddled with grapefruit zest, Angostura bitters, and tarragon syrup.

"The New Fashioned has great flavor combinations, but another of my favorites, the Je ne Sais Quoi, is also very interesting," Hammett says. Priced \$18, more than the other cocktail selections at Swift's Attic, it doesn't sell quite as prolifically but it has a compelling profile: "The Je ne Sais Quoi is aged in a charred barrel with a Sacred Rosehip Cup liquor, Hennessy Cognac VSOP, Carpano Punt E Mes [a sweet vermouth], and apple bitters. The flavors change week to week as the barrel ages."

In addition to the creative cocktail lineup, Swift's Attic has 14 draft beers, 24 wines served by the glass, and an ice tap with four liquors that pour out at a refreshing 19 degrees. "The ice tap is a great feature because the drinks don't get diluted by [melting ice] and you don't have to shake or stir, just pour and serve," Hammett says.

To keep servers readily informed of beverage additions and seasonal selections, Hammett conducts training sessions every Saturday afternoon. Topics change weekly, and the focus shifts from beer to wine to cocktails depending on what is new, and what servers need to understand about food pairings. Beverages account for an estimated 45 percent of the restaurant's revenues, and the bar often serves long past the restaurant—routinely staying open until midnight and, on many nights, running until the 2 a.m. curfew.

Honorable Mention Tamo Bar

Boston Located in the Seaport Hotel, Tamo is the only venue to serve the Seaport Honey Ginger IPA, developed by Long Trail Brewing Company. The beer incorporates 300 pounds of honey from the hotel's 11 rooftop hives, making for a pale ale nicely balanced with sweet honey and a ginger kick.

[pagebreak]



TWOKOI

Outstanding sake program led by Level One Certified Sake Sommelier.

Tacoma, Washington If Tacoma, Washington, seems an unlikely home for one of the leading sake programs in the U.S., think again. Jeannie Han, manager of TWOKOI and a Level One Certified Sake Sommelier, suggests the open-minded, inquisitive nature of most Tacoma residents is one reason the program at TWOKOI has flourished. In fact, Han says, “We have the largest sake selection in the Northwest, and it was easy to introduce sake in Tacoma because the people here are so open to new experiences; [the culture] is a little hippie.”

An expansive sake list and receptive audience are just part of the success story; Han's expertise and leadership are contributing factors as well. A native of Seoul, South Korea, she spent much of her childhood at her uncle's brewery, and her unsupervised sampling of Kasu—a potent, sweet crumbling that remains after filtering sake mash and that touts up to 15 percent alcohol content—led to her first Sake buzz and a temporary restriction from the brewery. Only 11 years old at the time, it was the start of her lifelong passion for sake.

After graduating from University of Washington, Seattle, she worked in another Japanese restaurant before coming to TWOKOI soon after it opened in 2006.

“We serve three kinds of sake—hot sake, cold sake, and cloudy sake—and we have over 40 premium sakes on the menu,” Han says. “The sake world is like the wine world; new sake comes out every season. We stay on top of those new sakes and rotate our list every couple of months to keep it fresh.”

She works closely with executive chef and co-owner Jackie Young-Koh to pair the perfect sake with the dishes on the menu. “Sake pairs best with Japanese food and especially fish,” Han explains. “But TWOKOI is a fusion restaurant. Chef Jackie’s background includes French cuisine as well, so we’re not 100 percent Japanese. Still, it is very easy to make wonderful pairings with sake.”

The restaurant is open to serve lunch and dinner Wednesday through Sunday, but Monday and Tuesday are reserved for private functions, which often include sake dinners. “We frequently host an omakase, which is a multi-course Japanese meal, and includes sake pairings,” Han says, adding that these dinners are very much like the wine-pairing events hosted in other restaurants.

TWOKOI also uses its sake collection to enhance and personalize the cocktail menu. Han explains, “When you add sake to a cocktail—like a Cosmopolitan, Mojito, or Appletini—it gives the drink subtle flavor and the cocktail tends to be sweeter, a nice contrast to the spicy food.”

Honorable Mention El Centro Georgetown

Washington, D.C. Serving more than 250 Blue Agave Tequilas, Mezcals, and Sotos, the bar cost holds steady at around 14 percent on an inventory of \$100,000.

[pagebreak]

Walt Disney Parks & Resorts

Outstanding beverage program including family-friendly non-alcoholic drinks and engaging cocktails, wine, and beer offerings.

Burbank, California Do it like Disney. That would be the message in a class on how to build a brand. And lesson one from the iconic brand messenger is that every product, every detail, every magical moment is an opportunity to tell a story and engage a guest. That strategy holds true across the company’s food and beverage offerings, as well.

Stuart McGuire, food and beverage concept development director at Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, describes one example of the engaging stories that continuously unfold in Disney settings: “Marriage proposals are a regular occurrence at Disney restaurants and our bartenders are routinely called upon to participate in the surprise, often through strategic placement and delivery of an engagement ring in a glass of champagne.”



Beverage options in Disney’s 123 full-service restaurants within the U.S. include a vast offering of alcohol-free selections and adult-inspired alcohol-free cocktails as well as a broad range of alcohol drinks, including premium spirits, signature and classic cocktails, more than 1,000 wines, and a beer program that spans international and domestic labels, with a focus on American craft beer.

Approximately 35 percent of sales in the full-service restaurants are attributed to beverage, and of those sales that fall within alcohol categories, beer represents 40 percent of revenues, wine is 35 percent, and spirits account for 25 percent.

“Strong trends at the moment include non-alcoholic specialty beverages; expanded craft beer offerings and beer pairings with food; signature, location-specific cocktails; and [premium] wines by the glass as well as sweeter fruit-forward wines such as sangria or moscato,” McGuire says. “Sangria appeals to a wide demographic range and, excluding beer, has become the top-selling single item on our domestic beverage menu.”

Disney restaurants attract guests from around the world, and part of the challenge is communicating what the various beverages entail. “Adding pictures to our beverage menus has proved to be critical in providing our guests with the information needed to make their choices,” McGuire explains. “Pictures help tell the story of the offerings and are especially helpful for our non-English-speaking guests.”

Telling the story, for the most part, still falls to Disney cast members, i.e. servers, who participate in new-hire service training as well as ongoing beverage training. Additionally, many cast members take advantage of Disney’s wine education program to become sommeliers through a special arrangement with the Court of Master Sommeliers. For cast members who qualify, Disney offers a complimentary seat at the Court of Master Sommeliers introductory level exam—an incentive to continue their wine education. “Over 700 cast members have been

awarded the first level sommelier certification from the Court of Master Sommeliers, and over 300 cast members are sommeliers, thanks to the program,” McGuire says, speculating that perhaps Disney has more sommeliers than any other restaurant group in the world.

Disney also encourages cast members to participate in the Cicerone certification program, which covers beer storage techniques and proper service, as well as beer styles and culture. McGuire notes, “More than 190 U.S.-based Disney beverage leaders, servers, and bartenders are now Cicerone Certified Beer Servers.”

Honorable Mention Hard Rock Café

Hard Rock is known for its souvenir glasses and branded drinks like the Hurricane, but it has recently stepped up its game with a menu redesign. The brand spent six months researching trends both domestic and international, and developed more than 150 drinks in key areas, including coffee, dessert, multi-liquor teas, and lemonades.

Source URL: <http://www.fsrmagazine.com/bar-management/toast-excellence>

Copyright © 2014 Journalistic Inc. All rights reserved. FSR is a trademark of Journalistic, Inc. Please read our [Privacy Policy](#) before submitting data on this web site. Submission of data is acknowledgement of acceptance of our [Privacy Policy](#).