

FLAVOR & THE MENU

ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF FLAVOR

TOP 10 TRENDS



INFLUENCING FLAVOR & MENU DEVELOPMENT

BOOZE-FREE

buzz

Sales and flavor opportunities
abound in signature nonalcoholic
beverages for all age groups

IN THE RUSH TO REVIVE PROHIBITION-ERA COCKTAILS AND introduce signature, contemporary bar programs, nonalcoholic specialty drinks could easily get lost in the shuffle. That would be a big mistake. Beverages sans alcohol represent an opportunity for significant sales and customer satisfaction — from healthful juices and flavorful, house-made sodas to indulgent smoothies and sophisticated “mocktails” — to say nothing of ready-to-serve energy drinks and regional specialties.

“There are a lot of reasons customers would want to avoid alcohol but still drink something interesting and flavorful,” says Jackson Cannon, bar manager at Boston’s Eastern Standard Kitchen & Drinks. “Mocktails and other nonalcoholic specialty drinks can be every bit as interesting as alcoholic beverages, and sometimes even more of a challenge to create.”

Nothing Childish

At Eastern Standard, the cocktail program runs an ambitious gamut, from “Standards” and “Heritage” drinks like the Fifty Fifty and the Sazerac to such specialties as the ES Gin Flip, made with raw egg, and the Strawberry Cobbler, infused with fresh berries and mint.

Cannon and his staff have gone to extra lengths to create “nonalcoholic delights” that are both sophisticated and sippable. These include the Stormy Monday, with lime, bitters and nonalcoholic ginger beer; the Sophisticated Lady, muddling cucumber with cranberry and fresh lime juices; and Abbey’s Punch, which resembles a fruity Rum Runner without rum. Each is garnished and presented like a real cocktail.

“We were very clear that we did not want to set non-drinkers apart by serving a dull or childish-looking beverage,” says Cannon.

“Offer something that’s not just a refresher, but also a way to take part in the experience and in the social event of coming to a place like Eastern Standard,” he advises.



Made with carefully considered ingredients, the perfect ice size for proper melting and sprigs of fresh herbs, today's zero-proof drinks are as finely crafted as spirited cocktails.



TIPS FOR MAKING **THE BOOZE-FREE BUZZ** WORK FOR YOU**FLAVOR PAYOFF**

I recently had a client dinner at the The Herbfarm restaurant in Woodinville, Wash., where Sommelier Michael Kaminski made a flight of nonalcoholic drinks that were out of this world. First was a peppermint-jasmine tea with elderflower-Gewürztraminer soda with rhubarb and lemon. Next was rose-petal-chamomile tea with fresh-strawberry-and-ginger syrup, followed by a sparkler of sweet Genovese and black-opal basil and black elderberry. Not only were these refreshing, but the wonderful pairings with components of the dinner also were unbelievable.

Some quick tips to elevate beverage menus:

- ▶ **THE MORE, THE MERRIER:** Make non-drinkers feel included with thoughtful, complex beverages. They spend as much as or more for their drinks and, normally, with better margins. This is a huge market with very, very good margins.
- ▶ **GROUP EFFORT:** Get bartenders, waitstaff and sommeliers on board. Train with a bar chef. Do not hesitate to get chefs involved. Step up and use the vast resources out there.
- ▶ **COMBINE FLAVORS:** Simply adding peach to a tea with a little chocolate mint is unexpected and delicious. A lemon-balm tea with orange zest adds an extra layer of flavor. Utilize fruit in many forms, from purees to IQF to syrups. Companies are making fruit more user-friendly than ever.
- ▶ **THINK BUBBLES:** Creating your own favorite sodas and soda waters with herbs or fruit is a low-cost, little-labor endeavor, or consider using some regional bottlers.

— RICK PEREZ

Flavor — not just sweetness — is at the root of every Eastern Standard mocktail. For the best-selling Sophisticated Lady, the bartender muddles two slices of cucumber, peel intact — a touch that adds “that pleasantly vegetal bitterness” — with a pinch of salt in a mixing glass. He then adds 2 ounces of cranberry juice and an ounce each of fresh lime juice and house-made simple syrup to shake over ice and strain into an “up” martini glass with a cucumber garnish. The result is a beautiful, well-balanced drink that looks like a classic Cosmopolitan and has enough of a culinary profile to pair with food.

A lot of thought went into the creation of such mocktails, where something must replace the astringency, flavor heft and volume of the alcohol. Even the ice is handled differently when there’s no alcohol.

“The vodka in a Cosmo causes the ice to melt, and ‘melt’ is a technical issue when crafting a drink; it’s a tool for getting a desirable amount of water into a drink,” explains Cannon. “So we had to play around with proportions [in the Sophisticated Lady] until we got the result we wanted.”

TAKE-AWAY: *neatly sweet*

I am seeing more flavors and fruits incorporated into alcohol-free offerings. The sweetness is different, too. Sweet is more likely to come in natural forms and even from esoteric sweeteners like Demerara sugar, agave nectar, honey, rock candy and maple syrup. This fits with artisanal and boutique trends, with nostalgia, and also has a hand-crafted feel. Creating interesting variations of simple syrup or sweeteners is an easy way to get some interesting flavor, too.

DAVID COMMER

Cheffy Drinks

Nonalcoholic specialty drinks clearly have become a “cheffy” concern. At Hugo’s and Duckfat, both in Portland, Maine, James-Beard-award-winning chef/owner Rob Evans created “adult” sodas using soda water and such food-friendly flavors as lemon verbena, mint, lime and tonka bean. At Hugo’s, the sodas comprise special tasting menus, served as shots with both savory and dessert items and finished tableside with a soda siphon. On a regular basis,

This blackberry-and-black-pepper lemonade created by chef Robin Schempp proves that drinks can be sophisticated without booze.

three to six versions are on the menu at the more-casual, lunch-oriented Duckfat.

"The bottled-beverage industry is getting so huge, with so many different, interesting options, that it's tempting to order just a couple of cases and forget about it," says Evans. "But as a chef, I enjoy working with different flavors and figuring out how to do it properly."

His sodas are made by hand with siphons and chargers, at a ratio of four parts carbonated water to one part homemade syrup. "You can use just about any flavoring, including herbs and spices like cinnamon or star anise and extracts like birch beer or vanilla," explains Evans.

"You can also add orange juice or even cream. The important thing is adding a little citric acid to the syrup to produce the right balance of sweet and sour. That's what makes our sodas savory enough to pair with food."

Paradise on Ice

A nonalcoholic, specialty-beverage program has been a hit for several reasons for Cheeseburger in Paradise, an island-themed casual concept based in Florida.

"When we first opened in 2002, the concept was dinner-only," explains Monica Tary, director of beverage and training for the 34-unit chain. "Adding lunch gave us an opportunity to look at this category and really make it work, and at a time when sales of carbonated beverages were beginning to trend downward."

Nonalcoholic signature drinks like Mouthwatering Milk Shakes, house-brewed teas in peach, mango, pomegranate, raspberry and blueberry flavors and one-of-a-kind specialties like Island Paradise, Jamaican Root Beer Float and Fresh Strawberry Lemonade help capture premium prices and please customers.

Like many chains, Cheeseburger in Paradise works with its vendors for support. Sprite and Fresca figure prominently in the best-selling Island Paradise, featuring pineapple, coconut, grenadine and a splash of Sprite, and in the endlessly refillable Surfside Sodas, which pair Fresca with a choice of Ruby Red grapefruit, pomegranate or peach flavors.



TAKE-AWAY: *create drama*

Consider the experiential side of presentation. Use appropriate glassware to exude confidence to diners and to make their increased spending worthwhile. Seasonal sodas made with natural sweeteners and fruit purees, along with hand-dipped and spun shakes and freezes can make a differentiated dining experience worth repeating.

STEVEN GOLDSTEIN

Tea stands in for spirits in many sophisticated mocktails, where its tannic edge helps balance sweetness.



APRILITA

"It's important to introduce clean, fresh flavors into these kinds of drinks, so they're not just sweet and cloying," says Tary. The best-selling Island Paradise is a case in point.

"It's got a piña-type flavor but not the heavy creaminess, and it's served on the rocks, so it's very light and refreshing," she explains. "It really speaks to the 'paradise' part of our concept." Quality is also important to help justify prices and create pleasing alternatives to bottled beverages.

"That's one of the reasons we brew all of our iced tea in-house, even when it's served as-is, and add flavors," explains Tary. "We're working on some products that will have the flavor brewed right into them, and we expect this to continue to be a hugely important category for us."

One of the biggest surprises about the custom, nonalcoholic options, adds Tary, is how well they sell as part of a takeout order. "People have soda or water at home, but when you offer something that's considered a special treat, they'll order it."

Between the third quarters of 2007 and 2009, Mintel recorded a **32 percent increase** in nonalcoholic cocktails, and major chains like Hard Rock Cafe, Claim Jumper and O'Charley's are adding whole menus of these drinks.

Maria Caranfa, Mintel Menu Insights

Fluid Lines

"Nonalcoholic cocktails have become an extremely important category, elevated way beyond beverages like iced tea and juices," notes Brad Horner, corporate mixologist for MarkeTeam, a Mission Viejo, Calif., consulting company specializing in food and

Fruit Favorites

Ten Most-Appealing Fruit Flavors for Carbonated Drinks

- Lime
- Lemon
- Cherry
- Orange
- Strawberry
- Berry
- Raspberry
- Cranberry
- Tangerine
- Peach

Passionfruit was a close runner-up at 11

Technomic

beverage programs for national chains. Horner makes a clear distinction between cocktails for non-drinkers and mere nonalcoholic beverages like iced teas.

"The category is now being targeted to grownups, not just the drink itself but also the presentation and even the glassware," says Horner. "Treating these items like high-end products allows you to charge more for them, and the premium experience is worth it to the non-drinking consumer."

The MarkeTeam-trademarked Zero Proof program speaks to the growing importance of the category. "You're providing comfort and an alternative to people who don't want to drink, for whatever reason."

Horner points to several trends within the nonalcoholic-cocktail universe, including high-end iced teas, complete with fresh fruit garnishes, and flavorings like mint sprigs, as the early adaptations into booze-free mixed-drink potential. When served in big wine glasses, as with sangria, tea and embellished, fresh-squeezed lemonades are easy entry points into the category.

"Energy drinks like Red Bull and Monster also have a great potential market as ingredients in specialty nonalcoholic cocktails," notes Horner. "There's a huge caffeine craze going on, especially among consumers in their teens, 20s and early 30s, and many operators are bringing these beverages in anyway."

Other potential hits include nonalcoholic versions of popular cocktails like mojitos, margaritas and other "sour" drinks, such as ESPN Zone's Sangria Mojito N/A, made with nonalcoholic sangria mix. The chain also featured a Strawberry Cucumber Agua Fresca in its Zero Proof menu section.

Drinks to Differentiate

O'Charley's is another chain that takes its beverage programs, both with and without alcohol, seriously.

"We've worked pretty tirelessly to create craveable nonalcoholic specialties, where others might have taken their eyes off the ball," says Director of Beverage Operations

Stuart Melia, noting that O'Charley's Inc. Enterprise — parent company of O'Charley's and 99 concepts, as well as Stoney River Legendary Steaks — is one of the few organizations its size to maintain a dedicated, corporate beverage-development and marketing function. "Even if they're not the most-profitable offerings, from a margin point of view, particularly when we offer free refills, they do contribute to dollar sales, and they also provide a point of differentiation."

At a time when industry traffic is off and many consumers have backed away from the \$8 or \$9 margarita,

In the hands of savvy beverage developers, house-made sodas, infusions and ades can be a snap, and bring instant distinction to the drink menu.

LYONS MAGNUS





Each nonalcoholic delight at Eastern Standard in Boston is garnished and presented like a real cocktail. Here, a cayenne-spiked mocha drink is topped with freshly grated ginger.

TAKE-AWAY: *get help*

Top-nonalcoholic trend for 2010: Think agave! Blended avocado in drinks is another big trend. Larger multi-unit operators can consider working with their vendors to create unique flavoring ingredients. Feature a section on your menu or a drink menu that calls out nonalcoholic drinks, and don't be afraid to charge for them if they are unique and high quality. Examples: Hibiscus Lime Fizz, Strawberry Yuzu Citrus-Ade, Mango Rose Mint Frappe.

KATHY CASEY

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for more on the Booze-Free Buzz trend

you have to look for hot buttons that represent alternatives to expensive alcoholic beverages, and you can't afford for that alternative to be water." ☺

says Melia, O'Charley's signature nonalcoholic offerings still represent a premium-priced option for healthful adult beverages and fun alternatives for kids.

When the industry recovers, Melia is betting that O'Charley's will have kept its loyal fan-base intact by offering nonalcoholic beverages that help tip the scale over other casual, family-style-chain competitors.

Cool Drinks, Hot Buttons

In the meantime, says Melia, O'Charley's isn't thinking about alcoholic versus nonalcoholic, but rather how the company can create craveable beverages that will keep customers coming back.

"A lot of our most-successful beverage options are familiar beverages taken up a notch," adds Melia, citing the top-selling strawberry lemonade, made from scratch with fresh lemon juice and strawberry puree and slices.

And then there's the one-of-a-kind \$2.99 Cotton Candy Shirley Temple, a unique offering that actually provides an interactive experience for kids. A fluff of cotton candy is presented in the glass, and the server brings the drink itself in a shaker, to be shaken and poured tableside.

"The drink makes the cotton candy dissolve, and you can see the deeper red emerging," says Melia, who reasoned that the same principle could apply to a classic Shirley Temple. Here, Sierra Mist and grenadine syrup are poured over cotton candy that perches on a straw at the top of the glass. Kids can eat it as-is or see what happens when they dunk the candy.

"And when one of those beautiful pink drinks goes through the dining room," Melia says, "everyone wants to know what it is."

Another popular round is the Red Bull-fueled Razz or Cherry Boost options. The latter offers an effective second usage, not only for the energy beverage, but also for the chain's retro-popular Cherry Limeade.

"It's a brilliant partnership with Red Bull, and very on-target with the trends," Melia notes. "In this type of economy, especially,