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January / February 2026

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#294

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Rituals shaping
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Ingredients.



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#BTSTAFFIES

Welcome.



And we're back! Welcome to 2026, shakers and stirrers,

It feels great to be back after a short break where I perfected (for a domestic setting mind you) a significant number of cocktails, which required many many attempts. Good times.

In this issue we look at what is shaping bars in 2026. I am still ruminating on information shared at Suntory Oceania's Rituals event at the end of last year, and much of that has made its way into this story. I also caught up with Grey Goose global director of Brand Experience, Joe McCanta, when he was in Australia for the brand's Australian Open activation. His thoughts echoed a lot of what Suntory's team discussed – that rituals now drive what consumers drink rather than beverage type.

In a sense, that is not entirely new – think champagne at weddings – but after years of seriousness and uncertainty, bars have the opportunity to tap into consumers growing desire for fun that they are attaching to specific times and events in their lives.

It is very easy to make grand statements when looking at trends in any sector, but a reminder that we are not static creatures and our motivations are far more emotional than we'd care to admit, can be a handy nudge to try something new or mix things up.

Our cover story (how hectic is this issue's cover) is heralding the arrival of Espolón Tequila Cocktail Fights to Australia. It sounds absolutely bonkers and quite frankly, I am here for it. Head to page 22 for all the details.

Brad Wright from the Single Malt Whisky Club provides a history lesson on the evolution of world whisky, while Alessandro Nardini gives us the lowdown on what working in a hospitality consultancy really looks like.

A new addition to the magazine is our quiz – The Bar Exam. Ten questions to test your knowledge and sharpen your skills, it will also come in handy if you're thinking about entering Bartender of the Year this year...

Enjoy!

Kim Berry, Editor

On this month's cover:

Espolón Tequila Cocktail Fights is coming to Australia. The high-energy, bartender royale features fight camps, regionals, and a national final to crown the Australian champion.

BARTENDER

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SAVE THE DATE

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coming soon

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SYDNEY
BARWEEK
.COM.AU 



The Rail.

The Rev

Ravenspur, Enmore
@ravenspur.bar

The Rev is Ravenspur's gateway drink, and bar owner Taran James' go-to recommendation for first-time visitors. A rye-led cocktail that leans into dark, rich and quiet indulgence, it's stirred down and served over a single block of ice, balancing dry spice with cacao depth and a subtle hit of banana. Finished with chocolate bitters and a maraschino cherry, it best captures the mood of the venue itself: considered, not pretentious, and built to linger.

The Rev

- 30ml rye whisky
- 15ml banana liqueur
- 10ml cacao liqueur
- Few dashes of chocolate bitters

1. Combine, stir down and strain into a chilled rocks glass with a large block of ice
2. Garnished with a Maraschino cherry



Headlines & Stuff



Fever-Tree launches G&T Cup

Fever-Tree has launched the first ever Fever-Tree G&T Week – running from 18-24 May – and inaugural Fever-Tree G&T Cup to crown Australia's best gin and tonic.

The week-long on-premise celebration is set to showcase curated G&T menus, recommended pairings, and events designed to drive foot traffic, encourage discovery, and lift gin and tonic sales, while spotlighting both established and emerging distillers. Fever-Tree is inviting bars, hotels and cellar doors to register interest in hosting activations as part of the week.

For the Fever-Tree G&T Cup, entries are officially open for distillers across Australia and New Zealand to submit their gin and tonic pairings online at ginandtonicweek.com.

Created to recognise both distillation excellence and the art of the long serve, the Fever-Tree G&T Cup will see each gin judged alongside its recommended Fever-Tree mixer. All entries will be assessed under consistent conditions, served over a single optimally formed block of ice, allowing judges to focus on balance, flavour and serve execution.

Distillers may enter multiple gins and multiple pairings, selecting from the Fever-Tree tonic range when submitting online.

Judging will take place in Sydney in early May, and will be chaired by award-winning bar operator and gin expert Mikey Enright, supported by an expert panel and trained stewards.

Five finalists will be announced and reassessed at a closed industry presentation on 18 May 2026 at The Barber Shop, Sydney, where the inaugural Fever-Tree G&T Cup winner will be revealed and Fever-Tree G&T Week officially launched.

Finalists will compete for prizes valued at over \$25,000. The prize pool includes a Singapore holiday, a Tasmanian getaway, \$3000 in RTD East Coast canning and printing services, a Breville coffee machine with a six-month supply of Schibello Coffee, and a cash prize of \$2000!

Visit ginandtonicweek.com or contact alex@ginevents.com.au for more information.

Major milestone for Connections Nightclub

Perth nightclub, Connections, has marked its 50th anniversary of creating a safe, celebratory space for the LGBTQIA+ community and its allies. Founded in 1975 by James Philips, Dennis Marshall and Walter Furlong, Connections has played a role shaping Perth's cultural and community landscape against a backdrop of social, cultural, and political change.

It has hosted thousands of unforgettable events, and championed generations of DJs and performers. In December, it celebrated with an all-star showcase of DJs, drag royalty and performers paying tribute to the club's legendary past, present and future.

Connections has not only endured but thrived – a rare achievement in an industry where venues come and go. It stands as a testament to survival through Perth's ever-changing social and business landscape," it said.

"It has always been a home for those who live and love authentically. A place where individuality is celebrated, community thrives, and every night tells stories of joy and resilience."



Headlines & Stuff



Summer collab with bar tilda, Caretaker's

Melbourne bartender Darren Leaney (Caretaker's Cottage) created a limited-edition Great Australian Cocktails collection this summer, which is available at bar tilda in the Sofitel Sydney Wentworth until the end of February.

Known for popularising the clarified milk punch with his cult tiramisu creation, Leaney's latest drinks are a tribute to Aussie desserts through a contemporary, high-craft lens.

There's a Lamington (\$25) laced with vodka, chocolate ganache, rye and coconut; a Pavlova (\$25) built on Four Pillars yuzu gin with passionfruit, mango and elderflower; and a Peach Melba (\$25) with gin, peach liqueur, raspberry and vanilla.

Each arrives clarified, chilled, and topped with a nostalgic nibble (think meringue, raspberry, or chocolate ganache), striking the balance between cheeky and elegant.

These cocktails sit alongside bar tilda's regular menu, but the focus is firmly on after-dark sipping. They're also appearing on rotation in Nightcap Club, the bar's nightly ritual of handing out free mini dessert cocktails to every guest at 9.30pm, Monday to Friday. If you swing by on Thursday or Friday from 4pm, there's a live DJ setting the tone for whatever kind of night you're chasing.

Surfing legends launch premium tequila

Five Australian surfing legends – who also happen to be lifelong friends – have launched a premium tequila, Cinca. The “Cinca 5” – World Champion, Steph Gilmore, and professional surfers, Laura Enever, Nikki Van Dijk, Dimity Stoye, and Macy Callaghan – said the tequila reflected the values that drive their surfing careers – connection, celebration, and excellence.

There are two expressions of the tequila, Cinca Blanco and Cinca Coco, the world's first premium tequila infused with organic coconut. Both are made with 100% Blue Weber agave, aged 5-7 years, slow-cooked for 30 hours, fermented with native wild and cultivated yeast strains, and double-distilled in traditional copper pot stills using deep well water sourced from 232 metres beneath the highlands.

The tequila is crafted by the fourth-generation Camarena family – women-led agave farmers and distillers – in the highlands of Jalisco, Mexico.

Cinca Blanco has a smooth and peppery finish with floral top notes and citrus zest. Cinca Coco shares Blanco's base profile with added coconut cream and toasted coconut richness balanced by bright citrus in the finish. This category-first expression is infused with organic coconut rather than artificial flavouring.

The Cinca 5 said their goal was to capture significant market share in Australia's premium tequila segment. Statista projects the Australian tequila market to grow by 1.9% from 2025-2029, reaching a market volume of around \$515 million by 2029.

Cinca is distributed by Iconic Beverages.



Headlines & Stuff

Vic Distilled's flagship campaign

Vic Distilled is proud to announce the launch of its flagship campaign, Serves of the State, a celebration of the passion, innovation and excellence that defines Victorian spirits and distilling. Showcasing local producers in some of the state's most beloved venues, the campaign will feature 15 venues, 45 cocktails and two flavour-packed weeks of discovery.

Vic Distilled is the new brand developed by industry body Spirits Victoria Association, created to champion Victorian spirits and distilleries to locals, Australians and international visitors alike, because everyone can Find Their Spirit in Victoria.

With 45 of Victoria's leading distilleries taking the spotlight, drinkers will see why



the state has become the country's most exciting spirits playground and get a taste of the passion and ingenuity driving its makers.

Spirits Vic Association industry development officer, Seb Costello, said, "From innovative gins and new-world whiskies to local amaros and absinthe, the breadth of Victorian craft is as impressive as the delicious creations they'll be shaken, stirred and built into."

Venues were paired with three spirits from three different distilleries and given complete creative freedom to craft a trio of cocktails that hero the Victorian products.

D has deep historical roots in Victoria, but the latest boom is young, with more than half of all distilleries established since 2020, and only a handful operating for more than a decade. Collectively, these

makers contribute \$2.98 billion to the Victorian economy, support over 23,000 full-time jobs, welcome 230,000 visitors to distilleries annually, and deliver \$41 million in exports to the world.

Visit [@vicdistilled](https://www.vicdistilled.com.au) or [distilled.com.au](https://www.distilled.com.au) to see the cocktail creations and which one consumers voted Serve of the State.



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Headlines & Stuff



Lark reopens Davey Street Cellar Door

After a major refurbishment, Lark Distillery has reopened its Davey Street Cellar Door in the heart of Hobart, in tribute to the birthplace of Tasmania's whisky industry.

Bill and Lyn Lark ignited the modern Australian distilling movement at 14 Davey Street, and the refurb has reimagined the site into an immersive brand experience that celebrates its pioneering legacy.

Designed to bring a heightened sense of place and luxury to the space, the fitout has been inspired by Tasmania's mystical landscape, blending layered textures, earthy tones and atmospheric storytelling to reflect the island's beauty and Lark's character.

Visitors can explore the full spectrum of whiskies, including rare and cellar-door-exclusive releases, while engaging with the brand's heritage through guided tastings, whisky flights, masterclasses and a curated LARK museum experience.

Open seven days a week from 11am to 7pm, the venue is designed for walk-ins, group bookings, and private events.

Spirits Platform new distributor for Cinzano

Spirits Platform is the new distributor for the Cinzano Vermouth range in Australia. It follows Caffo Group acquiring the brand from Campari Group for 100 million euro earlier this year.

Campari had been distributing the label since it acquired it in 1999. Cinzano was founded in 1757 in Turin and its range includes Cinzano Rosso, Bianco and Extra Dry.

Spirits Platform CEO, Ian Atherton, said it was another step in strengthening the company's aperitivo and vermouth offering in Australia.

"This is a globally renowned brand with deep heritage and authenticity, perfectly complementing our existing premium aperitivo range.

"Cinzano embodies the Italian spirit of celebration and discovery, and we look forward to building on its strong equity with new energy, trade partnerships and consumer engagement in Australia," Atherton said.

Caffo 1915 was founded in 1915 in Calabria by master distiller Giuseppe

Caffo. Today, the fourth-generation family business is known for its craftsmanship, authenticity and Italian excellence.

The group unites some of Italy's most heritage brands, including Vecchio Amaro del Capo, Borsci S. Marzano, Petrus Boonekamp and now Cinzano, under one roof.

Caffo 1915 Export Area sales director, Gabriele Langella, said, "We're proud to bring Cinzano into the Caffo family – a brand that represents the same Italian heritage, craftsmanship and convivial spirit that define our own.

"Partnering with Spirits Platform allows us to strengthen Cinzano's legacy in Australia and share our passion for authentic Italian aperitivo culture with a new generation of consumers."

The transition is now in place, with Spirits Platform taking full responsibility for sales, marketing and distribution. All trade partners have been notified, with both companies working closely to ensure a smooth handover.



Headlines & Stuff



Woodford Reserve extends Global Bar Exchange

Woodford Reserve has confirmed the second phase of its 2025–2026 Global Bar Exchange (GBE), expanding the international bartender exchange program into 2026 with activations across seven major global cities.

The next leg of the program will run from January to April 2026, with exchanges taking place in Berlin, Hong Kong, Tokyo, São Paulo, Naples, Dubai and Mexico City. The Global Bar Exchange is designed to connect leading bars and bartenders through immersive cultural experiences, culminating in collaborative bar takeovers featuring Bourbon-forward cocktails inspired by local flavour and technique.

The announcement follows a successful first phase in late 2025, which included Australia's Death & Taxes participating in an exchange with London's Nightjar. The Brisbane team travelled to London before hosting the UK bar in return, alongside parallel exchanges between venues in Seoul and Amsterdam.

Death & Taxes Brisbane bartender, Matt Baker, said the exchange delivered

long-term professional and personal benefits.

"The series of events, lunches and dinners we got to experience was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Baker said. "The bonds and friendships formed are still going strong, and despite the distance I still keep in touch with the legends I met," Baker said.

Each Global Bar Exchange stop sees visiting bartenders immersed in the host city's hospitality scene, exploring regional ingredients, culinary traditions and local bar culture before collaborating on guest shifts and events.

Woodford Reserve said the program is designed by and for the bartending community, with a focus on skill development, cultural exchange and strengthening global industry connections.

The 2026 exchange schedule includes reciprocal pairings between Guarita and Bar Basta (Berlin and São Paulo), Bar Mauro and The Aubrey (Hong Kong and Mexico City), Bar Snack and Bar Orchard (Tokyo), and Salmon Guru Dubai with L'Antiquario in Naples.

Sydney bar Kittyhawk to close after 10 years

Sydney cocktail institution, Kittyhawk, is closing its doors at the end of January, citing issues with a new lease agreement. It has been at 15 Phillip Lane for 10 years, and underwent a major refurbishment and rebrand at the beginning of last year.

The venue, which first opened in January 2016, announced its closure following the end of its current lease, saying market conditions prevented securing a new agreement for the site.

"Back in January 2016 when we began building Kittyhawk we knew that the space was going to be something amazing and it hasn't disappointed.



"We have had the opportunity to host 348 weddings, 606 birthday celebrations, and countless other milestones with our loyal customers," the team said.

Last year, Kittyhawk evolved from its Parisian-inspired cocktail bar beginnings into Kittyhawk New York, a live music venue built around the energy, music and food of the city that never sleeps.

Owner, Jared Merlino, had said it was time to bring "more energy into the venue. We want music and entertainment at the core".

He is hoping to find a new location for Kittyhawk to continue. Its final shift at the Phillip Lane site is 24 January.

Headlines & Stuff

The golden era of flair

It took Marco Canova and Tom Dyer four years of meticulous research, writing and collaboration to deliver the first full history of the flair bartending artform. Over more than 500 pages, *Flair Bartending: The Origins – The Golden Era – The Untold*, tells the story of an art form that blends speed,

precision, performance, and creativity.

The book takes readers on a journey through the humble origins of the discipline, its golden years, and its evolution into a global cultural movement. Illustrated with rare archival imagery, exclusive interviews, and personal stories, it reveals the hidden world behind the bottles, the bars, and the legends of Flair.

Canova and Dyer are known as two of the most respected names in the field, having performed in more than 90 countries and won multiple championships.

Canova said the pair wanted the book to build a legacy, combining history, education, culture, and entertainment into one definitive work.

“Flair Bartending has given us unforgettable experiences and a global family, yet its history had never truly been documented. With this book, we preserve its roots,

celebrate its golden era, and inspire the future of this art,” Canova said

The book also features contributions from some of the most renowned global influencers in the bartending, hospitality, and beverage industry, providing diverse perspectives from around the world.

The book’s design was by the international beverage agency, Liquid-Hub, delivering a premium visual identity and graphic standard.

Dyer said the book is about more than throwing bottles.

“It’s about creativity, confidence, and connection. This book is a tribute to everyone who had the courage to step behind a bar and perform. I’m proud that, together with Marco, we’ve created something that honours the past while motivating the next generation of bartenders,” Dyer said.

For more information and to purchase, email info@flairbartendingbook.com or visit flairbartendingbook.com



New bar team at Rosewood Hong Kong

Rosewood Hong Kong has announced a new line-up for its bar team, with Marco Maiorano appointed bar manager for the jazz and cocktail parlour, DarkSide. Maiorano is joined by assistant bar manager, Ian Lui, and senior bartender, Cynthia Wong.

Maiorano honed his skills at London’s The Connaught Hotel and Scarfes Bar, both on The World’s 50 Best Bars list. He then moved to Asia to take the reins at Koma, Marina Bay Sands.

Maiorano said his mission is to deliver genuine hospitality and a unique experience for every guest. He is committed to developing a bar program that champions social impact, using cocktails as a medium to inspire and foster positive change within the community. Each drink is thoughtfully crafted to delight guests while serving a greater purpose, ensuring that each visit is both memorable and meaningful.

Lui joins the team from Rosewood Bangkok, bringing a global perspective

shaped by extensive experience across some of the world’s most dynamic bar scenes. His skill set is balancing flavour, technique, and innovation, as well as a commitment to personalised service to ensure every cocktail reflects the unique tastes of each guest.

Wong began her career in Hong Kong and Australia, before joining the opening team at Shady Acres. In 2022, she followed her mentor, Anne-Sophie Cros, to Dubai to launch Resonance by Heston Blumenthal at Atlantis The Royal, before moving to London as a bartender at the acclaimed Scarfes Bar. On returning home, she took on the role of Whisky Bartender at fine wine and dining members club Club Bâtard, overseeing the OBE Bar, where she further honed her love of Scotch.

Maiorano said, “I’m absolutely delighted to be returning to the Rosewood family, once again, and to have the opportunity to contribute my own mark on a bar as prestigious as DarkSide.

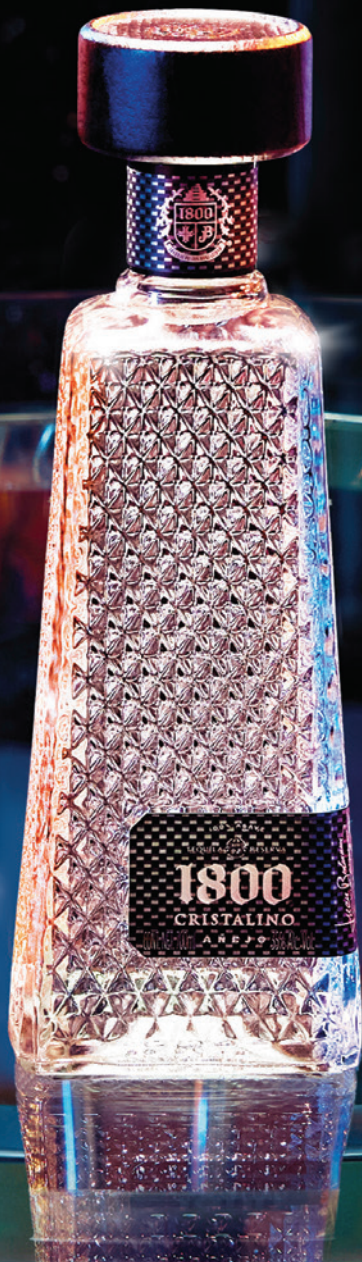
It’s a place where history, creativity, and craftsmanship converge, and I’m excited to help shape its next chapter.”



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Opens



Acapulco El Vista

61 Macquarie St, Sydney
@acapulcoelvista

The second collaboration between Accor's Table For and The Maybe Group, El Vista has officially opened at Sydney's Circular Quay. Taking over where Hacienda Bar was, the venue pulls its cues from 1960s Acapulco glamour, with a focus on food, drinks, and music.

The cocktail program pays homage to Latin America, with margaritas, daiquiris, reworked palomas, mojitos and Cuba Libres, plus a "Colada" section with strawberry and pandan-mint versions. Two new signatures stand out – a dulce de leche espresso martini and a cold milky rum sour.

For The Maybe Group co-founder and director, Stefano Catino, said the brief was clear – don't recreate the past, recapture its spirit.

"Acapulco in the 1960s was electric: effortless glamour, late nights, big energy, and a culture built on rhythm and connection. El Vista distils that feeling and brings it to Sydney's harbour, with food, music and cocktails that feel alive with story and soul," Catino said.

Chef Giovanni Pilu leads the kitchen



with a menu built on Mexican and South American coastal flavours. Plates are bright, generous, and made for sharing, with dishes such as: aguachile de seriola, torita de cangrejo, golden corn dough cheese empanadas, yellowfin tuna crispy tacos, and chorizo hot dogs.

The venue shifts throughout the week, with Latin jazz playing through until sunset, global grooves on Thursdays, disco and funk on Fridays, soulful Saturdays, and acoustic brunches that roll into Latin nights on Sundays.

Table For sees El Vista as a continuation of its new venue pipeline.

"We're thrilled to unveil El Vista in partnership with The Maybe Group and Giovanni Pilu. This collaboration captures exactly what Table For was created to do: unite visionary hospitality talent to create beautifully executed, culturally relevant, guest-led experiences. Bar Allora set the stage, and El Vista continues that story, an evolution of style, flavour, and celebration. And with Flaminia opening just upstairs, this is only the beginning" says Ben Creek, Head of Table For.

El Vista is part of Table For's three-venue summer rollout, alongside Bar Allora on Bond Street and Flaminia.

On Top at The StandardX

62 Rose St, Fitzroy
@thestandardxmelbourne

With summer upon us, rooftop bars come into their own, and at The StandardX hotel in Fitzroy, On Top is the latest addition to its ever-evolving landscape – bringing a new, sunset experience to the area.

The hotel opened back in August 2024, marking the Australian debut for Standard International, an established global hotel group.

The StandardX is a younger iteration of the brand, offering a minimalist but tech-forward experience aimed at modern travellers.

The newly opened rooftop bar, previously an exclusive spot for hotel patrons only, On Top has been reimagined, offering an open invitation to the public, whether you're a Fitzroy local or an out-of-towner looking to unwind with some sunset cocktails.

The bar's cocktail menu takes inspiration from classics while putting a modern twist on things. If you're after something light and refreshing, the Cloud Cover – made with apricot brandy, Aperol, Lillet Blanc, ginger, and lemon, will hit the spot. For something with a little more bite try the Nude & Rude – a smoky mezcal cocktail with amaro, lemon, agave, and bitters. Or, for something tropical, the Last Dance mixes vodka, Aperol, lemon, and passionfruit.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Melbourne rooftop without a well-curated wine list. Partnering with Lo-Fi, a Melbourne-based wine importer and distributor, the wine list highlights local Victorian producers who focus on low-intervention and sustainable practices. And for something a bit more interactive, there's the Japanese-style vending machine stocked with pre-batched cocktails, wines, and non-alcoholic options.

For those who prefer a more classic drink, they can always grab an Aperol Spritz or a Yuzu Margarita or even opt for a cold lager on tap.



But it's not all about the drinks. The all-day menu offers a selection of bite-sized American-inspired dishes. From the smoky flavours of smoked ocean trout with creme fraiche, chive, and flatbreads to rich Wagyu sliders, the food menu is designed to satisfy.

The interior of On Top complements the food and drinks with its industrial-meets-modern aesthetic.

With a rotation of local DJs setting the tone on Friday and Saturday evenings – think '90s Brooklyn, Lagos beach parties, or the golden hour atmosphere of downtown LA.

The bar accommodates up to 60 patrons, the interior is inviting and laid-back, with a warm colour palette, arid plantings, and a design that feels like it could only belong to Fitzroy. The architecture, designed by Woods Bagot and Hecker Guthrie, balances old and new. Bar ledges and stools hug the edges of the space, offering sweeping views across Fitzroy and the city skyline. Despite Melbourne's unpredictable weather, the rooftop is fully weatherproof with a retractable roof and a heating system, making sure guests can enjoy it all year round.



Moondrop

Level 1/150-156 Gertrude St,
Fitzroy
@moondropbar

The team behind Sleepy's Café & Wine Bar are stepping into the late night scene, with the opening of Moondrop. The new Fitzroy bar brings together co-directors Steve Chan, Jesse Kourmouzis and Jacob Muoio, and leans into Chan's Chinese heritage with a clear vision – Shanghai glamour, Chinese spirits, and a tight menu of bar snacks.

"I started in this industry because I love sharing experiences... I've really been leaning into my Chinese identity, using food and drink as a way to connect with my culture and share it with others," said Chan.

Moondrop takes over the former Everleigh space on Gertrude Street. Patrons step off the street and into a low-lit room framed by white drapery, a glowing moon-like orb overhead, and a long red mosaic bar finished with hand-painted tiles. Custom Mahjong tables are built into the original bluestone walls, and Chinese knick-knacks scatter the shelves.

Behind the bar, Co-Director and Head of Beverage Kourmouzis builds a

cocktail list anchored in lesser-known Chinese spirits and flavours, nodding to Shanghai's east-meets-west era.

The menu includes the Me & Ube, a clarified oat milk punch riffing on bubble tea with tapioca, pineapple, ube, Licor 43 and three rums; the M.S.Gibson, a gin-based, baijiu-laced martini served either half or full; the Chanhattan with NIKKA From The Barrel, lapsang souchong vermouth, crème de cacao and



a chocolate tuile; the Moondrop Negroni built on tangerine peel vermouth, Campari and Mandarin Napoleon with a stamped ice cube; The 5-Spice Girls mixing rum, Umeshu, pineapple, lime, sesame and foam; and the Sichuan Slipper, which uses Muoio's house hot sauce alongside Midori, Cointreau, Anchos Reyes Verde and lemon, finished with a slice of radish.

The team is clear about the intention behind the menu: "Chinese flavours in cocktails aren't often seen, and we're doing a lot of innovation with these ingredients... the moon rabbit emblem, steeped in Chinese folklore, is interwoven into the fabric of the venue."

In the kitchen, Muoio keeps things tight with Chinese-Australian bar snacks and a rotating dumpling menu. Dishes include prawn crackers, cheddar tartlets with quince and osmanthus, BBQ mushroom bao, pork and chrysanthemum dumplings. There's charcuterie, cheese, a caviar service with scallion pikelets and crème fraîche, and a snowskin mooncake filled with vanilla and red bean ice cream. Muoio's pastry background also feeds into the cocktail program, with delicate edible garnishes made in-house.

For Chan, the heart of the venue is straightforward: "I want people to remember the hospitable part of hospitality... Whilst Moondrop is an elevated offering, we welcome everybody and want to be approachable, because everyone deserves to have an elevated experience."





Sweethearts Terraza

Level 3/33-35 Darlinghurst Rd,
Potts Point
[@sweetheartsterraza](#)

Sweethearts Terraza has officially opened in Potts Point with a clear brief – good views, balanced drinks, and a sharp food menu. The rooftop is open and breezy, dressed in terracotta tiles, soft peach tones, woven textures, and plenty of greenery. It feels coastal without trying too hard – relaxed, sunlit, and made for drifting from late afternoon into the night.

The space itself is designed for lingering. Long communal tables invite slow afternoons that turn into spontaneous dinners, while curved banquettes and low lighting ease the shift from sun-soaked aperitivo hour into late-night cocktails.

It's the kind of rooftop that encourages one more round, one more dish, and a few more stories before heading back down to street level.

Behind the bar, Neilson Braid runs a

tight cocktail list built around what he calls “a contrast of citrus, bright tropical fruits, and hot, smoky flavours – it’s that interplay that sets your taste buds alight”. His drinks follow through. The Sol Fuego blends cilantro-infused tequila with a chipotle fat-wash for a clean start and smoky finish. La Resurrección nudges the Bloody Maria into Yucatán territory with achiote and chipotle, while El Claro pulls a Tommy’s Margarita into a clarified, balanced version built for warm weather.

The food keeps pace without overworking the brief. Chef Roberto García describes the Yucatán as “fire, citrus, and celebration”, and his menu mirrors that energy.

Ceviche Yucateco comes bright with coconut, passionfruit and habanero, while a slow-braised beef short rib glazed with sour orange and honey lands over pumpkin purée. “I wanted to bring those flavours to Sydney – not as a postcard, but as something alive and contemporary,” he says.



Disuko

Level 3/59-63 Bourke St,
Melbourne
@disuko.melbourne

The Group behind Hochi Mama 3000, Kiss & Tell, Windsor Wine Room, and Suzie Q have opened their seventh venue in Melbourne's CBD – Disuko, a Japanese day-to-night restaurant and cocktail bar built around an '80s Tokyo disco aesthetic.

CEO and Director of MAMAS Dining Group, Thai Ho says the inspiration for Disuko was born from years spent visiting family in Shibuya, Tokyo.

"Japan instantly captivated me – its theatre, cuisine, hospitality, and energy of the city is electric. Disuko is our way of bringing a slice of Shibuya life to Melbourne, think neon, nostalgia, and nothing but good times. We wanted to create a space where the disco era of 1980's Tokyo can live again, but this time, with a distinctively Melbourne heartbeat," Ho said.

From the moment you step inside, Disuko feels like a time warp with a modern edge. Neon signage glows against lacquered walls, disco lighting hums softly over cherry-red leather booths, and the soundtrack pulls you straight into late-night Tokyo. It's a venue designed for long dinners that blur into cocktails, and cocktails that turn into dancefloor moments.

Bar Manager, Joshuea Scott, leads a cocktail program centred on Japanese spirits, highballs, and house signatures. Key drinks include the Hana Nashi – featuring Roku gin, rose water, lemon, pear, and cloudy pear soda, the Ginza Girl – with red shiso-infused Grey Goose, Burmutton sake, and dry vermouth, and the Shogun – presenting a green tea flavour profile, with lemon, yuzu syrup, and ginger beer.

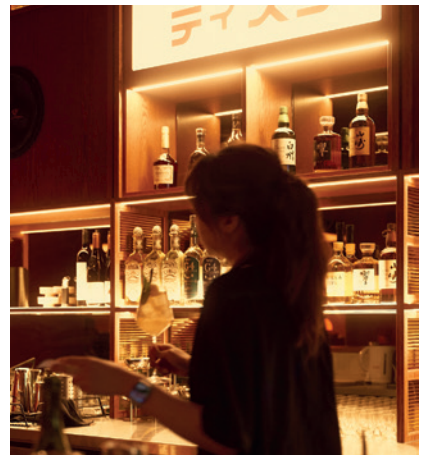
The interior uses Japanese red timber, terracotta tones, lacquered surfaces, and cherry-red leather seating. Booths and nooks sit around the main room, designed as a low-lit Tokyo-style lounge. A terracotta terrace offers city views, and above it sits a 30-seat private dining



space, the Tokyo Sky Mezzanine.

On weekends, the venue runs a disco, Japanese soul, and hip-hop program through custom boombox speakers. Music is quite literally the core of the venue's soul with Disuko meaning Disco in Japanese.

Food is izakaya-style from Creative Culinary Director Stolley and Head Chef Hoa (ex-Nobu and Kisumé). The menu includes hibachi items, nigiri, and Japanese comfort dishes, with an optional set menu, and an eight-seat omakase bar offering a 12-course sushi and sashimi experience.



Sakura House

Basement, 82-88 Elizabeth St
@sakurahousesydney

When you walk down into Sakura House, the new late-night basement izakaya from the team behind The Waratah, you immediately feel like you've stepped out of Sydney and into the backstreets of Tokyo. That's exactly what co-owners Evan Stroeve and Cynthia Litster wanted – a venue that doesn't just reference Japan but feels it.

I sat down with Litster during the venue's opening week to talk design, drinks, late-night culture, and what it really takes to open bar number two.

Litster wanted full immersion – the kind where you walk down the stairs and forget you're in the CBD at all. "We want people to walk in and feel transported" she says. "You don't really get that in Sydney."

A big part of that comes from the details – the obsessive, lovingly overthought ones. Melbourne calligrapher Junko Azukawa hand-painted the walls after Cynthia spotted her at an event. "She was writing English words in Japanese, and I had a lightbulb moment," she says. The finished work frames the room: "At the top of the bar you have the 72 micro seasons of Japan, and behind the spirits there's poetry about cherry blossoms."

"Japan uses space so well," she says. "Tiny izakaya's, everything tucked away, coat hangers because everyone comes straight from work. I wanted that – practical, small touches that make sense." Much of the colour palette and fabric comes from vintage Japanese textiles "It's meant to feel warm, sexy, dim."

And yes – the 4am licence is coming. "We're waiting for the final tick," she says. "We'll trade to 2am for now." When it lands, this will be one of the few spots in the CBD where you can walk in at 2am for some food and a drink – not just a regretful drive-thru situation.

Co-owner Evan Stroeve publicly champions the Sakura Sour, and for good reason – featuring Haku vodka, Lemon, Yuzu, and bubbles, this boozy lemonade is what Stroeve recommends trying first,



although Cynthia has her own favourites.

"The Nagano Sour – I've never tasted anything like it," she says. "It's got wasabi, tequila, apple... they spray this wasabi aroma over the top. It's one of the coolest drinks I've ever had."

Then there's the Fizz. "It tastes like a mango milkshake – mango, passion fruit, condensed milk, slushy vibes. Total crowd-pleaser."

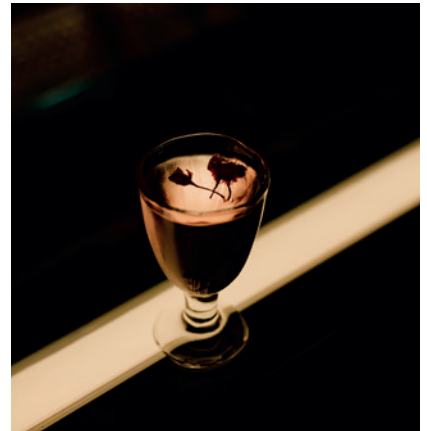
Cynthia wants Sakura House to be part of something bigger – a nudge to get Sydney staying out late again. "When I was in Japan, we were eating ramen at 5am," she says. "And I kept thinking, why is there nothing like this in Sydney?"

"Maybe my little bar won't revive the whole city, but I hope it's a seed. Bring a little bit of life back."

"I've always been an entrepreneur. I had a sneaker business before hospitality," she says. "I always loved bars – the craft, the food, the drinks – as a customer. Eventually I thought, okay, let's actually do this."

Her advice for others thinking about expanding? "Don't skimp on technology," she says immediately. "If something makes your venue more efficient – fridges, glass washers, anything – pay more. Otherwise, you'll pay twice."

And second: stop waiting for the perfect moment. "You're never ready.



You just have to go for it. Be open to feedback, adapt fast, and trust your team. You can't grow if you're doing every tiny thing yourself."

Sakura House wasn't the "easier second venue" people promised. "Being in a strata building made everything harder. More approvals, more layers, more people to answer to. The Waratah didn't have that." Lister said.

Sakura House is atmospheric, vinyl-driven, warm, and proudly late-night. It's the kind of bar Sydney used to have and needs again. As Cynthia puts it: "I just want people to come in, feel transported, and stay up talking until late. Bring your friends, have a yarn – like it used to be."



The Tropic

Ground Floor/2 Scenic Hwy,
Terrigal
@thetropicterrigan

Just over an hour north of Sydney on the Central Coast, Terrigal Pavilion has opened its final dining piece with The Tropic, a 280-seat, ground-floor restaurant now trading with uninterrupted ocean views and a Mediterranean-leaning menu designed for sharing.

The opening completes the multi-level Terrigal Pavilion precinct, following the launch of The Pavilion in November and takeaway outlet The General Store. Positioned just above the shoreline, The Tropic is built around sightlines: floor-to-ceiling custom windows ensure every table faces the water, while an oversized mirror running along the rear wall eliminates the bad-seat problem entirely.

The interior leans coastal without theatrics. Tactile finishes, linen chairs, and yellow terrazzo tables, anchored by a 12-metre custom-glazed bar finished in Spanish tiles. Behind it, the kitchen delivers a Modern Australian menu with

Mediterranean influence.

The drinks list mirrors the setting: relaxed, sunshine-ready and built for long afternoons that turn into evenings. Signatures include the Tropic Margarita with tequila, bergamot and kaffir lime, a classic Tommy's Margarita, and spritzes that suit the coastal brief, from Aperol and Hugo Spritzes to a zesty Limoncello Spritz finished with yuzu.

Frozen options also feature heavily, including a Frozen Margarita, Watermelon Daiquiri and a Mango and Pineapple Daiquiri, alongside crowd-pleasers like an Iced Espresso Martini.

Terrigal Pavilion co-owner Rob Domjen says the cocktail list was shaped to reflect the relaxed, sun-soaked energy of the venue.

"We kept the cocktail list fun and relaxed because that is exactly how The Pav feels," says Domjen. "The backdrop of Terrigal gives us bright colours, warm light and an easy playful energy so the drinks follow the same rhythm.

"Sustainability is built into how we work by using all parts of fruit, batching in house and keeping waste low in a large format venue. Across both levels the drinks reflect the spaces. Downstairs at The Tropic there is a little more

chicness in the presentation which shows through in touches like the signature mini margarita while still staying completely approachable. The builds stay simple, the spirits stay light and the focus is on drinks that feel good in your hand and even better under the Terrigal sun."

The food offering is structured for communal dining. Raw and cold starters include shucked-to-order oysters with lemon and house-made chardonnay mignonette, alongside The Tropic's beef tartare.

Small plates span antipasto selections, while mains move through pasta dishes and larger plates such as seared snapper, grilled wagyu flank and free-range roast chicken with thyme and lemon.

"This is a space that's made for bringing people together over good food, good drinks and an unbeatable location," Domjen says. "Whether it's a milestone celebration, a long lunch or a mid-week dinner as golden hour hits the ocean, we hope this will be a destination for all gatherings, big and small."

The Tropic is open from midday until late, Wednesday to Sunday, with reservations available. Terrigal Pavilion trades from midday until late Monday to Friday and from 11am on weekends.

Death & Co Brisbane

543 Coronation Dr, Toowong
@deathandcompanyaus

Death & Co has officially touched down in Brisbane, taking over the historic basement of The Regatta Hotel. The New York East Village-born institution is one of the biggest names in modern cocktail culture, and Brisbane is now its second Australian home after Melbourne's launch in November.

The team has transformed one of Brisbane's oldest pubs, The Walrus Club, into a low-lit, cellar-style bar built for late-night drinking. Think intimate alcoves with leather booths, candlelit corners, and dimly lit corridors.

There's also The Studio by Death & Co – a second space with a classic-leaning cocktail list, live sets, and a program of jazz landing in the new year.

Founder and co-owner David Kaplan says Brisbane made sense from the start.

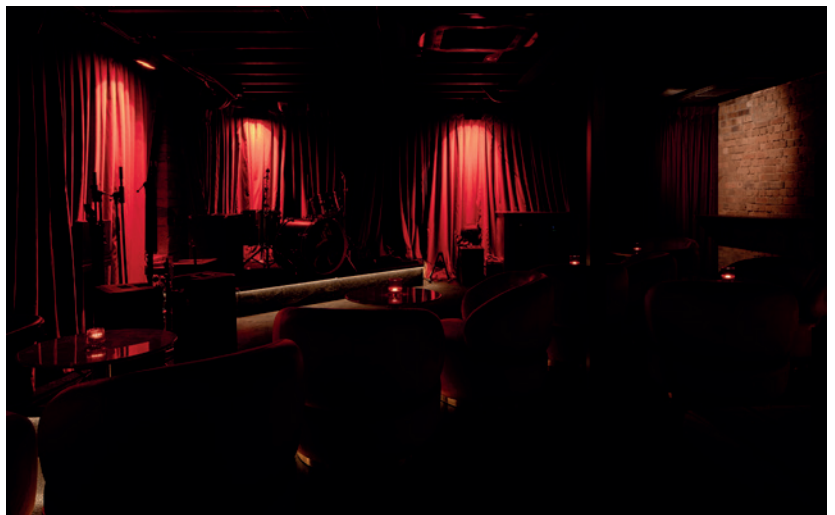
"Brisbane has a rhythm and energy all its own. The mix of historic charm and modern hospitality drew us in – from The Regatta's storied basement to the way locals embrace great food, cocktails, and community," he says.

"We wanted to be in a city where our style of craft cocktails, intimate conversation, and quiet discovery would feel right at home."

The menu merges Death & Co signatures with local inspiration, using Australian botanicals, and Four Pillars. Signature builds include the Telegraph, Sound & Fury, and the Buko Gimlet. You can still expect to see their global staples: the Naked & Famous, the Oaxaca Old Fashioned, and other house hits that define the brand.

The basement's original character is intact, but the finish is unmistakably Death & Co – dark, moody, and built for lingering.

The venue is open seven days a week from Thursday to Saturday 4pm-2am, and Sunday – Wednesday 6pm-1am. There is seated table service and walk-ins run on a first-come, first-served basis.



ESPOLÒN TEQUILA COCKTAIL FIGHTS ARE COMING TO AUSTRALIA IN 2026

Get ready, Australia, Espolòn Tequila is bringing the ultimate bartending showdown to our shores!



Espolòn Tequila Cocktail Fights isn't just another competition; it's built for every bartender, barback, glassy, manager, and owner. The high-energy, bartender royale features fight camps, regionals, and a national final to crown the Australian champion who will fight for their flight to Guadalajara to defend Australia's global title. With an atmosphere like the WWE had a baby with Ninja Warrior, Cocktail Fights is a dynamic bartending competition where we take 200 hopeful bartenders across four regional finals. During those nights of chaos, we whittle them down to ONE bartender to represent and defend Australia's title as the global champ! It's fast-paced, theatrical, and showcases creativity and

technical prowess in real time.

The concept burst onto the scene in 2013, in New York City, breaking away from the calm, structured nature of traditional cocktail contests. Gone were the quiet judging panels, three-piece suits, and tweezers delicately placing micro herbs. In their place came roaring crowds, live commentary, and an energy that felt more like a sporting event than a bartending competition. Espolòn's Cocktail Fights didn't just crown winners; it created people's champs, redefining what competitive bartending could be.

Born from the ideals of Espolòn's legendary Maestro Tequilero, Cirilo Oropeza, who believed that quality 100% Agave Tequila was for the people, not

just celebrities and the elite, brought a range of hospitality workers to the events and saw a true competition for the people.

So why does Espolòn Tequila want to bring cocktail fights down under?

Cocktail Fights are coming to our shores because much like Cirilo, we want to recruit bar workers of all skill levels to showcase the fun and excitement that comes with this industry. It elevates bartending from craft to spectacle, blending technical mastery with entertainment. Unlike traditional competitions, which often focus solely on precision and presentation, Cocktail Fights demands adaptability, speed, and creativity in conditions that are fun and bring the



best out in bartenders of all levels.

In October 2025, Cocktail Fights returned with a global showdown in Guadalajara and Campari Academy Australia stepped into the ring with our very own contender. Representing Melbourne's Moondrop, Jackson Holbrook earned his spot after being randomly selected from participants in the Espolón Tequila's 2025 Afterlife program. Facing off against powerhouse nations like Italy, the US, and Indonesia, Jackson delivered a decisive one-two punch and claimed the ultimate prize: the coveted global belt. Australia didn't just compete, we conquered.

Cocktail Fights might be rambunctious and chaotic, a competition for the people, but at its core, Campari Academy remains committed to the growth and empowerment of hospitality professionals across Australia. Every challenge we design is rooted in real-world skills that bartenders use every day.

Before the regionals kick off, our team will hit the road throughout March and April, visiting major cities nationwide to deliver hands-on workshops that will sharpen your craft.

From mastering flavour mapping and building flawless rounds to twisting classics and creating cocktails on the fly (without six months to prepare) we're bringing the insider knowledge straight to you. For Australian bartenders, this is a game-changer. A chance to develop

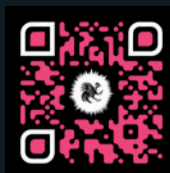
your skills on a national level, fight with and for the people, and gain the opportunity to compete on a global stage in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Beyond technique, Cocktail Fights fosters community. It brings bartenders together, creating networking opportunities and strengthening professional bonds. Not sure you want to compete? Well for spectators, it transforms quiet watching while waiting for the applause sign into an immersive experience, this is something you're not going to want to miss.

“If you're not first, you're last”

Book your ticket, this is how you get there!

- **Step 1:** Scan the QR Code to register your interest in our fight camps. These will give you the combination to land the knock-out punch!
- **Step 2:** Check your inbox and remember to RSVP. Secure your spot, you'll be walking out with some Rick Flair drip.
- **Step 3:** Get yourself to one of the regional finals and sign yourself up for cocktail fights.
- **Step 4:** WIN.
- **Step 5:** (cue Rocky theme) – Train, get flown to Sydney Bar Week to obliterate the competition, and become Australia's defending champ. 🏆



To be first in the know

Scan the QR code to be first in the know with all Cock(tail) Fights updates in your area. For further questions or enquiries please contact your local brand ambassador.



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The bar scene

What's shaping bars in 2026

Australia's bar industry is entering a new phase, shaped not by novelty for novelty's sake, but by a deeper understanding of why people go out to drink in the first place. Kim Berry looks at what will be helping shape bars in 2026.

Words by Kim Berry

Towards the end of 2025, Suntory Oceania hosted Rituals, an afternoon where global and local leaders unpacked the behavioural, cultural and emotional drivers redefining how Australians drink, socialise and choose brands.

Two perspectives anchored the conversation: demographer Bernard Salt's macro view of a growing, wealthier, lifestyle-driven population, and insights from Suntory Global Spirits' Global VP of Insights and Analytics, Jing Matauru, who argued that rituals – not categories – now drive beverage choice.

For bars, that shift has profound implications.

Salt dismantled the idea that Australia is a mature or stagnant market. With Australia now ranked the 11th richest country globally by GDP per capita and one of the fastest growing in the developed world, population growth is increasingly concentrated in lifestyle hubs such as the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Wollongong and Cairns.

These are markets driven by leisure, socialising and experience-led spending

– “more people, with more money, who are primed to spend it on experiences”.

He also pointed to six million millennials entering peak earning years. They may be drinking less volume, but they are trading up – seeking premium spirits, elevated cocktails and moments that feel intentional.

As entertaining at home becomes more common, bars are being forced to sharpen their offer. They must now deliver what the home cannot: expertise, theatre and discovery.

Occasion, not brand or position

That is where Matauru's insights sharpened the focus. Her research, which maps more than 250,000 drinking occasions across Australia and New Zealand, shows that consumers don't choose drinks rationally.

They choose emotionally, defaulting to brands and serves that fit seamlessly into specific moments: the knock-off drink, the group celebration, the food-led social occasion, the pre-event energy boost.

“Rituals drive beverage choice,” Matauru says. “Not branding. Not positioning.”

Those rituals are also being reshaped



Identifying the emotional and functional needs that define drinking occasions is critical.



by Australia's increasingly multicultural population. India, China, the Philippines, Nepal and the Middle East are among the fastest-growing cohorts, each bringing distinct drinking cultures that are influencing mainstream menus.

For bars, that translates into new flavour cues – matcha, ube, pandan, spiced tea, lychee and calamansi – alongside new celebration peaks such as Diwali, Lunar New Year and Eid.

Crucially, Matauru noted that multicultural consumers rarely drink without food, presenting a commercial opportunity many venues still under-leverage.

Layered over these structural and behavioural shifts is something more emotional: a renewed appetite for fun.

Seeking joy and sense of theatre

That point was reinforced by Grey Goose global director of Brand Experience, Joe McCanta, in Australia for the Grey Goose activation at the Australian Open in Melbourne. He argues consumers are actively seeking joy, inclusion, and a sense of theatre when they walk into a bar.

"Consumers want to know everything now," McCanta says. "And I think the brands that are set up for that are succeeding. The brands that are a little flimsy are falling by the wayside."

But transparency alone is not enough.

After years of seriousness, austerity and uncertainty, McCanta believes bars are rediscovering an older truth about hospitality.

"We're not saving lives – we're making drinks," he says. "So have some fun with it."

For McCanta, the return of showmanship and flair is not about gimmicks, but about making people feel welcome.

He points to a growing rejection of the old gatekeeper mentality in cocktail bars – the era of intimidating menus and judgemental service.

"If bartenders are having fun and want to include you, you feel much more comfortable saying, 'I don't know what to have – what should I drink?'"

This sentiment was echoed by Suntory



It's a lesson in balancing global consistency with local optimisation - and proof that brand longevity depends on cultural fluency.



Global Spirits managing director, United States RTD Business, Carol Robert. At Rituals, she told the room that beverage companies need to identify the emotional and functional needs that define drinking occasions.

Robert also argues that brand building is undergoing one of its most dramatic shifts in decades. The traditional model of mass awareness, retail rollout, and extended launch cycles is collapsing.

Local optimisation

It's a lesson in balancing global consistency with local optimisation – and proof that brand longevity depends on cultural fluency.

McCanta says a sense of inclusion is central to how Grey Goose is tapping into modern drinking rituals. He described the brand's recent activations – from caviar-paired vodka moments to playful martini rituals – as deliberate attempts to reconnect premium spirits with celebration.

"It's a little ritual," he says. "It's fun. It's like the tequila, lime and salt – probably the first ritual ever."

Grey Goose's approach also reflects broader moderation trends. Consumers may be drinking fewer drinks, but they are seeking higher-quality experiences.

"People would rather have one really amazing experience than five drinks that are forgettable," McCanta says.

For bartenders and venue owners, the message is consistent across all voices:

- design for the moment, not the menu;
- own specific rituals;
- lean into multicultural flavour influences;
- create moments that home entertainment can't replicate; and
- above all, bring back joy.

As Salt's demographics guarantee a growing audience and Matauru's data explains how they want to drink, McCanta's perspective grounds it in the reality of the bar floor.

The next decade of success will belong to venues that understand that drinking is no longer just about what's in the glass – it's about how it makes people feel.

In a world that often feels grim, bars that offer fun, flair and genuine hospitality are not just serving drinks. They are serving rituals that help people reconnect. 🍷



The Goose Bump: Grey Goose tapping into modern drinking rituals.



Grey Goose global director of Brand Experience, Joe McCanta.



Suntory Global Spirits' Global VP of Insights and Analytics, Jing Matauru.



Demographer Bernard Salt at Suntory Oceania's Rituals event.



Create moments that home can't replicate.



The Long Pour.

World Whisky

The Global Spirit: How whisky went worldwide

Single Malt Whisky Club founder,
Brad Wright, looks at the growth and impact
of the world whisky phenomenon.



Words by Brad Wright

Over the last 20 years I've been fortunate to have seen world whisky come from barely a dribble to a torrent of releases that continue to defy the traditionalists view of 'what whisky is'. In fact, let's face it, 20 years ago that very question would most likely have been framed as 'what scotch is'.

For centuries, whisky was synonymous with Scotland's Highlands, Ireland's green pastures, and Kentucky's bourbon barrels. With Scotland (and to a lesser degree Ireland) considered the home of 'real' single malt whisky, these days emerging countries – from Australia to India, Taiwan to Mexico to Switzerland – are reshaping the global whisky landscape with bold flavours, innovative techniques, and a willingness to break tradition. These regions are already producing whiskies worth watching, and their rise signals a new chapter in the story of the spirit.

I don't think it's an unfair statement to say that Australia was – and remains – at the forefront of this change in attitude. The now legendary rise of Tasmanian single malt whisky was kicked off by Cradle Mountain – but made a sensation (and an industry) by Bill Lark beginning in 1999. When Bill and his team took out 'Best Other' (non Scottish) at the 2009 World Whiskies Awards the whisky world really took notice.

By 2009, Lark wasn't the only Aussie distillery kicking huge flavour and quality goals, but that award really 'hit the switch'. In 2015, Vic and Ian at Tin Shed took out Jim Murray's 'Liquid Gold' (before his fall from grace) for their very first release (appropriately named Batch 001), which cemented whisky as a truly Australian industry, not just a Tassie one. Today's Australian whisky industry continues that tradition with medals and awards flowing down under in a veritable torrent.

Of course, Japan could be considered to be Australia's running mate in this change of attitudes – winning international awards since 2001. It was certainly one of, if not the first, country outside of 'the trinity' of whisky producing nations to be taken seriously.

And these Australian and Japanese successes opened up the stage for the rest of the world. Once considered a novelty, the whisky world has now

embraced world whisky in a big way. Coveted whiskies are now coming from all corners of the globe, with drinkers and collectors racing to buy new releases from countries they wouldn't have considered buying whisky from even 10 years ago.

But what does 'the world' have to offer whisky? What makes these world whiskies interesting and different and worthy of seeking out?

Well firstly geography and climate. Once matured solely in temperate climates, internationally recognised whiskies are now distilled and matured in all geographies of the world.

From the stinking humidity of Thailand and Northern Australia to

the arid deserts of Israel, arctic cold of Scandinavia, monsoonal India, and everything in between!

From below sea level, to over 3300m above sea level – these different conditions mean different strains of barley being favoured. Different types of peat (or the equivalent) – check out the NZ Thompsen Manuka Smoke for something completely different – and local yeasts in those using open ferments. There's a veritable world of terroirs out there.

Experimentation with cask composition is another. Use of woods other than Quercus (oak) is starting to be seen now in both experimental and core range products. Where once ex-sherry



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Coveted whiskies are now coming from all corners of the globe, with drinkers and collectors racing to buy new releases from countries they wouldn't have considered buying whisky from even 10 years ago.

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Wine, rum, cognac, tequila, beer, and even maple syrup, or cider casks are being used to shape flavour profiles - and it's the world whisky scene that's championing this experimentation.



and ex-bourbon casks were the only types used in maturation, the quest for individuality has seen distilleries move towards other cask and wood types. Red Gum matured whiskies from Archie Rose and Backwoods in Australia. The Swedish Mackmyra Svensk Ek, matured in Swedish Oak. Sakura (cherry wood) maturation in Japan. Chestnut, maple, Acacia, Hickory, Pecan and Mizunara (Japanese oak) are some of the woods being experimented with by world whisky distillers looking for new flavours, unique experiences and that consumer 'wow' factor.

The other half of the 'maturation equation' is the casks previous fill(s). Part of the world whisky phenomenon has been tied to use of non-traditional prior-fill cask types for either full maturation or 'finishing' whisky prior to bottling. For example, the Australian embrace of ex-wine cask maturation – with so many wineries Australia-wide it makes perfect sense.

Wine, rum, cognac, tequila, beer, and even maple syrup, or cider casks are being used to shape flavour profiles – and it's the world whisky scene that's championing this experimentation. Maturation in these prior-use barrels is now a hallmark of innovation, giving drinkers endless variety in taste and style.

World whisky has evolved from a curiosity into a defining force in the spirits industry. What began as isolated experiments in places like Tasmania and Japan has grown into a global movement, with distilleries from every corner of the world contributing their own voice to the whisky chorus.

Climate, geography, local grains, and inventive cask choices have created a kaleidoscope of flavours that traditional Scotch or bourbon alone could never encompass. From red gum in Australia to sakura in Japan, from ex-wine casks to maple syrup barrels, these innovations are not gimmicks but genuine expressions of terroir and creativity.

The result is a whisky landscape that is richer, more diverse, and more exciting than ever before. For drinkers, collectors, and storytellers alike, world whisky represents not just a new category, but a new era—one where tradition and innovation meet, and the spirit's future is truly global. 🌍

Classic

Pina Colada

Creamy, nostalgic and tropical, the Pina Colada is a cocktail that doesn't chase trends, it is the trend. This month's classic leans into the original formula, where good rum, real pineapple and coconut cream do all the heavy lifting. No reinvention, no shortcuts, just a reminder that when a drink is built right, it never needs an update.



Pina Colada

- 50 ml white rum
- 30 ml coconut cream
- 50 ml fresh pineapple juice

Dry then wet shake ingredients and pour into coupe glass

Garnish: pineapple wedge and maraschino cherry



Three Summer spritzes

The days are steamy, sultry afternoons drift into evenings touched by gentle breezes. It is the time of year a spritz comes into its own.

Words by Kim Berry

Photography by Chris Pearce

The origin story of the spritz begins in the northern Lombardy-Venetia region of Italy when it was part of the Austrian empire in the 1800s. Austrian soldiers – more accustomed to beer – were not used to the high alcohol content of the local wines so would dilute them with a splash – spritzer – of water to bring the alcohol content down to levels they were more used to.

In Venice during the 1920s-30s, the spritz expanded to include local bitters – Aperol in Padua and Select in Venice. In the 1970s, still wine was swapped out for Prosecco.

The official definition of a spritz is that it contains digestive bitters, it is an aperitivo after all, so you want to excite the appetite. It's also low ABV, making it a great choice when wiling away a hot

summer's afternoon.

While Aperol was created in 1919, the Aperol Spritz didn't appear until the 1950s, and it was an international advertising campaign in the early 2000s that pushed it into the spotlight.

While Aperol, Campari, and limoncello are ubiquitous spritz versions, there are plenty of other amari you can use to create refreshing, intense, and unique cocktails including those from a fernet, carciofo or alpine base.

When making a spritz, the 3-2-1 rule is your friend. Three parts Prosecco, two parts bitter liqueur, and one part soda water.

Now, rules can be broken and yes, that means sometimes a spritz isn't technically a spritz (The Bloody Bramble for example), but its fresh and fizzy so I'm giving it a hall pass.

Let's face it, its summertime, so let's make the living a little easier.



1

Bloody Bramble

- 45ml Shiraz Gin
- 15ml Mure Liqueur
- 30ml Lemon Juice
- 15ml Brandy
- 10ml Simple Syrup
- Garnish with a blackberry

Shaken and double strained into a chilled Nick and Nora glass

Garnish with a blackberry

2

Bicicletta

- 60ml dry white wine
- 45ml Campari
- Splash of soda

Build over ice in a wine glass and top with soda

Garnish with an orange wedge





3

Limoncello Spritz

- 60ml limoncello
- 90ml Prosecco
- 30ml soda

Build over ice in a wine glass

Garnish with lemon

Back.

People

Taran Howard

Ravenspur owner, Taran Howard, doesn't have a traditional hospitality background - and he's the first to tell you that's exactly why the bar works. He explains how he built the bar on instinct rather than instruction, and why service still matters.

Words by Alexandra Zinghini
Photography by Chris Pearce

Before opening Ravenspur in Sydney's inner west suburb, Enmore, Taran Howard owned a crystal and tarot shop during lockdown with a sizeable online following. Prior to that, he worked as a carpenter and electrician, raised around job sites and problem-solving rather than bar manuals and beverage trends. When he spotted the Enmore Road site - a former laundromat in rough shape - he saw potential where others saw a mess.

"Water damaged abandoned equipment - it looked like no one had lived here for years. But I saw its solid bones," Howard says.

He took on the build almost entirely himself, spending close to six months ripping out ceilings, stripping floors, and rebuilding. There was no formal plan or final render, just a loose mood board and vision that evolved as work progressed.

"The one thing I knew was that I wanted was a cathedral back bar," he says. "In a small bar, that's what everyone looks at. That's the heart."

When the ceiling came down and original timber beams were revealed, the direction locked in. Southern Gothic. Dark western. Warm, not cold. A space that feels intimate rather than intimidating.

Despite having little formal hospitality experience, Howard was clear on one thing: Ravenspur would be service-first.

"You can have the best cocktail in the world, but if the service is shit, no one's coming back," he says. "That's always stuck with me."

That philosophy extends behind the bar. While many venues rely on pre-batched cocktails for speed and consistency, Howard made the call to build every drink to order.



I don't like watching my cocktail poured out of a bottle. I want to see it made. And more importantly, I want the conversation that happens while it's being made.



"I don't like watching my cocktail poured out of a bottle," he says plainly. "I want to see it made. And more importantly, I want the conversation that happens while it's being made."

The drinks lean heavily into bourbon and rye - Howard openly admits he

built the bar he wanted to drink at - but Ravenspur has quickly become known for more than just whisky. Martinis and negronis now sit alongside old fashioned as crowd favourites, while the bar's signature cocktail, The Rev, has become a gateway drink for guests less familiar with darker spirits. (See *The Rev's recipe on page 6*.)

"It's a good entry point," Howard says. "Dry whisky, cacao, banana - it eases people in."

Two months in, Howard says the most surreal moment came when he finally sat on the guest side of the bar for the first time.

"I hadn't stopped. I was painting outside barrels on opening day," he says. "A month later, I sat down, had a drink, looked around, and thought - yeah, okay. You built this."

Ravenspur isn't positioned as a destination bar chasing hype. It's a neighbourhood space built on care, craftsmanship and conversation - a reflection of its owner.

"I didn't want a dive bar, and I didn't want something stiff," Howard says. "I wanted somewhere in between. Somewhere people feel comfortable but looked after."

In a hospitality landscape obsessed with trends and templated concepts, Ravenspur feels refreshingly personal. Not because it's perfect - but because it's honest. 🍷

Venue

Ravenspur

A Southern Gothic late night haunt rises



51 Enmore Rd, Newtown
@ravenspur.bar

Ravenspur doesn't announce itself loudly. It broods. Tucked into Enmore Road, the Newtown bar trades neon bravado for shadow, warmth and a distinctly Southern Gothic sensibility that feels deliberately out of step with its surroundings – and that's the point.

The venue is the vision of owner Taran Howard, who built much of the space himself, shaping Ravenspur from the inside out rather than handing it off to a formula. That hands-on approach shows. This is not a grungy bar, nor a polished cocktail temple. Ravenspur sits somewhere in the middle: a late-night haunt wrapped in dark timber, wine-red tones and low, amber lighting that makes time slow down the moment you step inside.

The exterior is unassuming; inside, the venue opens into a saloon-style space anchored by a cathedral-like back bar, a focal point that commands attention without demanding it. Every detail feels considered. Vintage frames line the walls alongside original pieces by local artist

Glenn Smith, while the back bar itself was curated with the eye of a set designer rather than a standard hospitality supplier, lending the room a cinematic quality that feels lived-in rather than staged.

Ravenspur is built for nights that stretch. It's a bar where conversation matters as much as what's in the glass, and where hospitality leads rather than follows. While the drinks skew bourbon and rye-forward, the menu isn't playing favourites – martinis, Negronis and classics are all treated with equal respect. Nothing is pre-batched. Every cocktail is built to order, in full view, because the ritual is part of the experience.

More than anything, Ravenspur feels human. There's no posturing, no velvet rope energy, no demographic it's chasing. It's a neighbourhood bar with depth – welcoming without being casual, polished without being pretentious. In a city crowded with concepts and copycats, Ravenspur stands out by doing something quietly radical – caring, about the room, the drinks, and people on both sides of the bar. In a chaotic capital city, that's worth paying attention to. 🍷





Leadership

Connection over hierarchy

Tilley & Wills cleaned up at this year's AHA NSW Awards for Excellence, taking home Group Hotel Operator of the Year, Best Regional Dining for Aanuka Beach House, and Employee Excellence in Service for Sydney standout, Saskia Eichler.

Words by Alexandra Zinghini

The AHA award wins capped off a massive year of growth for Tilley & Wills, and Saskia's approach to people and culture is a big part of that momentum. In our chat, she broke down what modern leadership actually looks like in hospitality today, and why connection beats old-school hierarchy every time.

How do you define leadership, and how has that definition evolved throughout your career in hospitality?

For me, leadership in hospitality is about being approachable, authentic, and human. It's not about standing above your team it's about standing beside them. True leadership means creating an environment where people feel supported enough to grow, safe enough to make mistakes, and confident enough to come to you when they do.

In my earlier years, I thought leadership was about having all the answers being unshakeable, untouchable, "superhuman." But over time I've learned that the strongest leaders are the ones who can admit when they're still learning too. When your team sees that you're human, it gives them permission to be human as well and that's where real growth happens.

Mistakes are how we learn. I've made plenty of them, and I encourage my team to see them as opportunities, not failures. We talk through them, we learn, we move forward together. Because that's what hospitality is about: teamwork, trust, and shared purpose.

My definition of leadership has evolved from control to connection. It's about being a steady hand when things get chaotic, a sounding board when people need guidance, and a reminder that we're all in this for the same reason to create incredible experiences for others while taking care of each other behind the scenes.

What were some of the most significant challenges you faced on your path to leadership, and how did you overcome them?

One of the biggest challenges on my path to leadership was learning to truly trust myself. In this industry, it's easy to fall into the habit of people pleasing or constantly proving your worth. Early in my career, I'd second-guess every decision, worried about getting it wrong. But over time I realised that leadership isn't about being perfect it's about backing yourself, learning from the moments you get it wrong, and having the courage to grow through them.

Vulnerability has also been a huge part of that journey. For a long time, hospitality culture taught us to put on a brave face to stay composed no matter what was happening behind the scenes. I've learned that showing your human side is what builds trust and connection. When your team sees that you make mistakes too, it gives them permission to take risks, to learn, and to keep showing up even when things don't go perfectly.

Another challenge has been gently breaking some of the old school mindsets that have existed in this industry for decades the "toughen up, keep your head

down, don't show weakness" mentality. I've made it my mission to help shift that culture. Leadership, to me, is about creating spaces where people feel supported, respected, and safe to be themselves not just a cog in the machine.

Every challenge I've faced has shaped the kind of leader I am today: one who leads with empathy, sets high standards but human expectations, and believes that real strength lies in connection, not control.

Can you share a pivotal moment or decision in your career that significantly influenced your leadership journey?

A real turning point in my career came when I worked under a leader who represented everything I didn't want to become. It was that old-school, fear driven approach where people were too scared to make mistakes, too nervous to speak up, and where perfection was expected but support was lacking. I remember thinking, if I ever get the chance to lead people, I'll do it differently.

That experience shaped me more than I realised at the time. It taught me that leadership should never make people feel small. It should make them feel capable, safe, and inspired. I wanted to create the kind of culture where people are encouraged to learn, make mistakes, and grow without fear of judgment because that's where true confidence and innovation come from.

Sometimes it takes one person to remind you of what you're truly capable of. While I had worked in group roles earlier in my career, there was something monumental about being encouraged to take on a group leadership role at Tilley & Wills. I remember second-guessing myself, wondering if I was ready but David Thompson recognised something in me that I hadn't realised was there yet. That belief was a defining moment. It challenged me to step up, trust myself, and truly redefine what leadership looked like for me.

That combination seeing the kind of leader I didn't want to be and then being guided by someone who believed in the kind of leader I could and wanted to be completely reshaped my journey. It's why I lead the way I do today: with empathy, approachability, and a focus on helping others rise rather than making them afraid to fall.

How do you foster inclusive and empowering environments for your teams, especially in an industry known for its fast pace and high pressure?

Hospitality moves fast it's full of pressure, personality, and constant change. But no matter how busy it gets, I never want anyone on my team to feel like they're just part of the machine. For me, leadership is about creating a space where people feel safe, supported, and valued as individuals.

Fostering inclusivity starts with being approachable. I make a point of checking in, not just about the work, but about how people are feeling. I want my team to know that they can come to me with ideas, feedback, or even mistakes without fear of judgment. We're all learning, and I try to lead by showing that I'm learning too. When your team sees you owning your own mistakes, it gives them the freedom to take risks and grow.



Leadership should never make people feel small. It should make them feel capable, safe, and inspired. I wanted to create the kind of culture where people are encouraged to learn, make mistakes, and grow without fear of judgment...



With the events team, I put a lot of focus on empowerment and trust. They know I have their back, but I also encourage them to take the reins and make decisions. Watching them find their confidence, problem solve under pressure, and deliver incredible results is honestly one of the most rewarding parts of what I do.

Mentoring has become a huge part of my role as well. I love helping new coordinators and the team find their rhythm, guiding them not just in the logistics, but in how to carry themselves,

build relationships, and lead with kindness. My goal is to help them build both skill and self-belief.

At the end of the day, inclusion and empowerment come down to culture. If people feel respected, trusted, and seen they'll not only perform, they'll thrive. And when your team thrives, your guests feel it too. That's when the magic happens.

What advice would you give to young people aspiring to leadership roles in hospitality today?

My biggest piece of advice is to never forget why you started. Hospitality is an industry built on people and if you can learn to understand, support, and genuinely care for them, you'll already be ahead of the game. This career will challenge you, stretch you, and teach you lessons you never expected but it will also reward you with purpose, pride, and connection like nothing else.

Don't rush the journey. Every shift, every section, every role teaches you something you'll need later. The best leaders I know (and have personally drawn upon) the ones who earn respect, not demand it have done the hard yards, listened deeply, and stayed humble enough to keep learning.

You'll make mistakes we all do but that's where the real lessons are. What defines you isn't perfection, it's how you respond when things don't go to plan. Own it, learn from it, and move forward with grace.

And most importantly, lead with heart. Be the person who makes others feel capable, valued, and seen. Leadership isn't about being the loudest voice in the room it's about being the one who lifts others up, even when no one's watching.

At the end of the day, hospitality is about people. Remember why you fell in love with it that spark you felt the first time you created an incredible experience for someone. Hold onto that. Because if you can lead with the same passion you started with, you won't just build a career you'll build a legacy.

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that leadership isn't a destination it's a practice. It's about showing up every day for your people, for your guests, and for yourself. And when you do it with love, authenticity, and purpose that's when you create something that lasts far beyond the shift. 🍷



Bar Business

What consultancy really looks like

In the second instalment of his exploration into career opportunities within hospitality beyond shaking drinks and running sections, Alessandro Nardini looks at consultancy possibilities.



Words by Alessandro Nardini
Bar Crafts, @bar_crafts_

The hospitality industry is constantly evolving, and one of the most exciting parts of that is learning how far your skills can take you. One of my recent experiences hopefully sheds some light in what consultancy really looks like!

How it started

All the best stories start with a martini and mine was no different. I still remember when my friend Roslyn hit me with a proposal that sounded too good to be true: "Want to come to China?"

It wasn't a solo mission, I was joined by marketing strategist, Roslyn Foo, and Melbourne based Japanese chef, Ryo Northfield, who had been trained by legendary Iron Chef, Hiroyuki Sakai.

Consulting, not managing

Our first project was unique, working with the polished resort, LUX Chongzuo. Run by a team that genuinely cares about excellence meant we weren't entering chaos or fixing disasters. Instead, we were stepping into a high-performing operation that simply wanted fresh eyes.

And that's a very different type of consulting, one I'd call smart consulting. Our role was to observe, experience the guest journey, and then identify small adjustments that could elevate something already strong.

We experienced its services, food and beverage offerings, observed the behind-the-scenes workflow, and immersed ourselves in the rhythm of daily operations. It wasn't about tearing anything down, but about noticing the little details people within a system often stop seeing.

Refinement, awareness and empathy

The LUX staff were the heartbeat of the entire experience. Many were locals who had grown up in the region, which brought an authenticity and warmth no training manual can replicate. Their pride and discipline set the tone for everything we observed.

Our days became a blend of cultural exchange and collaborative learning. We shared techniques, service rituals, and industry insights. In return, they introduced us to local flavours, traditions, and a perspective on hospitality rooted in genuine care.

The language barrier added a layer of charm... and comedy. Trying to explain gluten? Hard. Trying to avoid gluten? Harder. Trying to ask for more rice? Apparently, I kept asking for a tree. They still brought me rice, with an "international smirk" on their faces that needed no translation!

The team would take us to local markets, cultural sights, and nearby towns. Understanding where their ingredients and traditions came from made our feedback far more meaningful. Consulting is about context, and they made sure we had plenty.



The skills you develop behind the bar can grow into so much more. Consulting isn't about being the loudest voice in the room; it's about insight, culture, people, and perspective.



In simple terms, think of consulting as recognising what already works and identifying what can be implemented more efficiently or more strategically within a different context. These are some of the key areas I focus on:

- **tools and workflow:** more functional, ergonomic bar tools to improve speed, precision, and consistency;
- **presentation:** small adjustments to drink appearance to better align with the resort's elevated food and visual standards;
- **beverage strategy:** shifting focus toward non-alcoholic and low-ABV offerings, recognising that most resort guests come to rest, recover, and unwind – not to party until sunrise. A smart bar program isn't about pushing volume but about offering thoughtful, relevant experiences;
- **health-conscious options:** integrating lighter, fresher flavour profiles to appeal to wellness-focused guests; and
- **sustainable practices:** identifying areas of waste and how it could be

transformed into shrubs, oleos, syrups, and other shelf-stable elements for the bar program.

Consulting: 30% ideas, 70% paperwork

But the real work of consulting begins after the observations. Once gaps and opportunities are identified, the next stage is the least glamorous and the most important. This is when ideas become documents:

- writing operational plans;
- designing trial frameworks;
- building realistic budgets;
- projecting revenue increases;
- mapping efficiency gains;
- preparing SOPs;
- writing training schedules;
- rolling out system changes; and
- monitoring results.

It's the part no one posts on Instagram, but it is what turns creativity into strategy. On projects like this, one would usually build out realistic budgets that highlight where efficiency can increase, where labour can be optimised, and where new offerings can generate profit without compromising service. From there come SOPs, training plans, and structured rollouts, followed by months of monitoring results, adjusting systems, and ensuring the changes actually stick.

Good consulting isn't just suggesting improvements, it's creating a blueprint the team can carry forward long after you're gone.

The bigger picture

At its core, this experience reminded me why I wanted to write this piece in the first place.

Young bartenders often look at hospitality as something temporary, a stepping stone, but the truth is, the skills you develop behind the bar can grow into so much more.

Consulting isn't about being the loudest voice in the room; it's about insight, culture, people, and perspective. And if this trip taught me anything, it's that hospitality is a long-term, evolving career for those willing to stay curious.

My hope is that this story shows what's possible. That your craft can take you further than you ever imagined, sometimes all the way across the world, where even without the right words, the meaning still gets through. 🍷

Staffies.



The Rover



Frankie Cadillac



Peacemaker



The Aster



australianbartender

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ozbartendermag



Death & Co Melbourne



Volstead



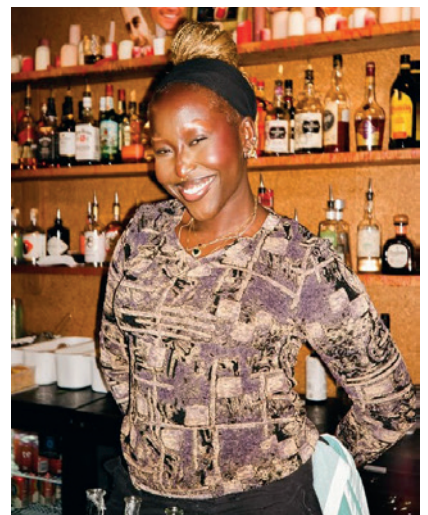
Pleasure Club



Deadwax



Maybe Mae



Wax Bar

Bartender Quiz

The Bar Exam

In a new feature for the magazine, test your knowledge on bar and cocktail history and culture. It will also be useful for those entering Bartender of the Year this year.



- For a spirit to be legally labelled as Armagnac, it must be aged for a minimum of how long?
- Which cocktail book, first published in 1862, is considered the foundation of modern bartending?
- Which London bar is considered the birthplace of the modern cocktail revival and helped launch the speakeasy movement?
- What are the typical ABVs for sake, vermouth, and amaro?
- Name three iconic European aperitifs.
- Which classic cocktail was originally a medicinal remedy for seasickness and later adopted by the British Royal Navy?
- What are the three core ingredients of a traditional Negroni, and what are their proportions?
- Which city is commonly credited as the birthplace of the martini: New York, San Francisco, or London?
- What spirit must legally form the base of a Margarita for it to be considered authentic?
- What is the difference between a daiquiri and a Hemingway daiquiri?

Answers: 1. One year in oak; 2. The Bartender's Guide by Jerry Thomas; 3. Milk & Honey; 4. Sake - 15%, Vermouth - 16-18%, Amaro - 20-35%; 5. Aperol / Campari / Lillet / Suze (any three); 6. Gin and Tonic - The tonic's quinine content was used to prevent malaria, and the drink became a staple of the British Navy; 7. Gin, Campari and sweet vermouth - Served in equal parts (1:1:1); 8. San Francisco - Most commonly linked to the Martini's early development; 9. Tequila - Traditionally 100% agave tequila; 10. The Hemingway Daiquiri contains no sugar and adds grapefruit juice and maraschino liqueur to the standard rum, lime and sugar structure

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