

A U S T R A L I A N

BARTENDER[®]

March 2026

#295



Club Suntory turns 40

The Suntory Cup
celebrates with
\$40,000 in prizes

Plus:

BARS SHARE THEIR
BEST-SELLING NOLO
ALC COCKTAILS

Claudio Bedini
on vermouth



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#295

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THANK YOU FOR VOTING US

#1 BARTENDERS CHOICE

DRINKS INTERNATIONAL BRAND REPORT 2026

With thanks...

TO THE HOSTS WHO UNDERSTAND A
TRULY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE BEGINS
AT THE DOOR,

TO THE BEVERAGE DIRECTORS AND BAR
MANAGERS WHO STEER THE SHIP WITH A
STEADY HAND AND DO WHATEVER IT
TAKES
TO KEEP THE TROOPS HAPPY,

TO THE SERVERS WHO KNOW TO RACE
MARTINIS TO THEIR GUESTS SO THEY
CAN EXPERIENCE THAT PERFECTLY CHILLED
FIRST SIP,

TO THE BARBACKS WHOSE AMBITION
MATCHES THEIR STAMINA, STRENGTH AND
APPETITE FOR KNOWLEDGE,

AND, FINALLY, TO ALL THE BARTENDERS
THAT HAVE CREATED, STIRRED, SHAKEN,
SERVED AND SIPPED THEIR FAVORITE GIN
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Welcome.



Hello there,

It has been a cracking first quarter for the industry, with international awards, competition season getting underway, and major brand activations.

Our cover story this month is a celebration of Club Suntory as it turns 40 and Suntory Oceania is going all out the mark the occasion, with \$40,000 worth of prizes up for grabs in the Suntory Cup. The two winners – Club Omoroi and Club Yatte Minahare – receive \$10,000 in cash and a trip to Europe worth \$10,000.

And speaking of awards – The Australian Bar Awards are officially open and calling for nominations. We have tightened the nomination process this year for a more even playing field and to find out more about why a particular person, venue, operator, or supplier is your pick. But the heart of the awards remains – awards for the industry, voted for by the industry.

The NoLo alcohol movement is only gathering pace, so we've asked some of the country's top bars (all finalists in last year's Bar Awards) how they are stepping up to the challenge. Head to page 24 for the story.

Claudio Bedini writes for us this month (page 32), drawing on his immense knowledge and experience to provide a primer on Vermouth, from where it began to its current renaissance.

Maybe Sammy's Holly Grimshaw shares her bartending story (page 40) and Swillhouse's head of bars, Emma Franceschini, reflects on the leadership lessons – some tougher than others – she has experienced throughout her career to build her own leadership style. That's on page 44.

Don't forget the quiz at the end of the mag – a great way to start practicing for Bartender of the Year exam in September. And a shout-out to House Made Hospitality's Jason Williams for contributing this month's questions.

See you at the bar.

Kim Berry, Editor

On this month's cover:

Club Suntory celebrates its 40th birthday in style, with the Suntory Cup giving two winners a \$10,000 cash prize and trip to Europe valued at \$10,000.

BARTENDER

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The Rail.



Oceans 11

Maybe Sammy
@maybe_sammy_sydney

Maybe Sammy's current menu is inspired by movies classic and current. The Oceans 11 uses Herradura Blanco to lay a clean, crisp foundation, sharpened by a hit of wasabi distillate. A strawberry-coriander-chipotle cordial brings heat, smoke, and subtle sweetness to the blend. It is margarita's silk-suited cousin – sleek, confident, and made for the spotlight, the kind of drink that doesn't demand attention, it simply owns the room.

Oceans 11

- 30ml Herradura Blanco Tequila
- 20ml Wasabi Distillate
- 45ml Strawberry, Coriander and Chipotle Cordial

Headlines & Stuff



The 2026 Australian Bar Awards are LIVE!

Nominations for this year's Bar Awards are officially open. It is time to show the country's bars, bartenders, owners, and suppliers some love and nominate who you think should take home a trophy this year.

Thirty categories, submit nominations for one, several, or all – this is the only industry awards where the finalists and winners are chosen by their peers.

Australian Bartender editor, Kim Berry, said, "It is time to celebrate all the legends in the industry. Nominate your favourite person, venue, operator, or supplier – remember, these are Australia's only awards voted by the

industry, for the industry where for the industry, voted by the industry."

How voting works (quick, clean, done)

- **Who can vote:** Hospitality industry professionals only (bartenders, managers, operators, brand teams).
- **Round one:** Industry votes determine the top 10 finalists in each category.
- **Round two:** Finalists rank their peers; sponsors also cast a vote to determine winners, along with a panel of industry professionals overseeing the voting process.
- **Finalists announced:** July issue of *Australian Bartender* and online.
- **Awards night:** Wednesday 16 September at Doltone House, Jones Bay Wharf during Sydney Bar Week (12–16 September).
- **Voting window:** Opens Tuesday 03 March and closes 11:59pm AEST, 15 May 2025.

Note: Bartender of the Year isn't a nominated award – register interest via events@twodforce.com.au.

Full terms and conditions are available online.



Odd Culture Group sets sights on Sydney's CBD

Odd Culture Group has confirmed its move into the Sydney CBD, locking in two venues on York Street set to open in the first half of this year. The expansion brings a two-venue concept into the heart of the city: an underground daiquiri bar and discotheque, alongside a neighbourhood osteria, marking the group's first move beyond the Inner West and into the CBD's high-traffic, high-pressure trading environment.

CEO Rebecca Lines said the decision to enter the CBD had been on the table for some time.

"Looking towards the Sydney CBD for our venues has been a natural progression for us at Odd Culture Group," Lines said.

With the project now locked in and development underway, Lines will lead the rollout alongside co-directors James Thorpe and Nick Zavadszky, with venue teams to be named closer to opening.

"We're approaching these new venues with a much clearer sense of purpose: who the guest is, how they want to feel when they walk in; and what will make them come back not just once, but daily. That means tighter operational design, deeper investment in training and leadership, and a much more deliberate focus on service, flow, and guest connection," she said.



Headlines & Stuff



Australian whisky icon awarded AM

Tasmanian whisky pioneer, Bill Lark, received a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the 2026 Australia Day Honours List, recognising his extraordinary contribution to the Australian distilling industry and Tasmanian community.

It is also recognition of the man who fundamentally changed what sits on back bars, how Australian whisky is perceived, and what local distilling could aspire to become.

Known universally as the Godfather of Australian whisky, Lark has spent more than three decades reshaping the country's spirits landscape – from overturning a 150-year-old distilling ban in Tasmania to building Lark Distilling Co. into a global reference point for New World whisky.

For bartenders, Lark's influence is tangible. Before Lark, Australian whisky was largely absent from premium back bars. Today, Tasmanian single malt is poured alongside – and increasingly instead of – imported Scotch, embraced not as a novelty but as a benchmark of

quality and provenance.

Driven by curiosity and a refusal to accept convention, Lark began his whisky journey in the late 1980s, inspired by a fishing trip with his Scottish father-in-law who recognised Tasmania's uncanny resemblance to Scotland. That moment sparked a fight to legalise small-scale distillation in Tasmania – a fight Lark and his wife Lyn ultimately won.

"I am genuinely humbled by receiving this award and feel immensely honoured to be recognised as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the sharing and collegiality offered to me by the Scottish industry, a sentiment which is largely shared today throughout the industry in Australia," Lark said.

Lark is not a pioneer who has stepped away. He remains actively involved in the business and continues to champion Australian whisky on the global stage.

The whole industry raises a glass.

Lark whisky is distributed by Spirits Platform.

Brix enters voluntary admin

Sydney-based craft rum producer, Sydney Distilling Co, trading as Brix Distillers, has entered voluntary administration, with Ben Carson and Richard Stone from RSM Australia Partners appointed as voluntary administrators on 21 January 2026.

Founded in 2017, Brix was Australia's first dedicated craft rum distillery, with a production site, cellar door and bar in Surry Hills. Carson said administrators were assessing all available options, including a potential sale of assets or a recapitalisation via a deed of company arrangement (DOCA).

"Our priority is to explore every available option to achieve the best possible outcome for not only creditors, but for a legacy Australian distillery brand – including pursuing a sale of the business and its assets," he said.

Carson confirmed discussions were underway with several interested parties and RSM was encouraged by the interest.

He also noted that the company holds one of the largest private inventories of Australian rum in the country, a factor expected to attract interest from both wholesalers and potential buyers seeking to acquire an established distillery and brand with mature stock on hand.



Headlines & Stuff



LARK's Chris Thomson named master distiller

LARK Distilling Co. Master Distiller Chris Thomson has been named Master Distiller/Blender of the Year – Rest of the World at the World Whiskies Awards Icons of Whisky. The win rounds out a stellar run for the Australian distillery, with founder Bill Lark appointed an Order of Australia (AM) earlier in the week.

The Rest of the World category spans more than 40 whisky-producing nations, including Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Brazil, recognising distillers working outside the traditional powerhouses of the USA, Scotland and Ireland.

Thomson will now progress as a finalist for the Global Icon of Whisky Award, announced later this year in London.

Thomson said the award was recognition of the “dedication and craftsmanship” of Lark’s distilling and blending team at its new Pontville Distillery.

“It’s incredibly exciting to see our uniquely Tasmanian whiskies so positively received on the world stage,” Thomson said.

“This recognition comes at a pivotal moment for Lark as we prepare to launch new whiskies globally. It’s also the first time these expressions have been entered into competition, making the acknowledgement even more meaningful.”

In March, Lark will unveil a new luxury portfolio of four whisky expressions, designed to elevate the fortified depth, flavour intensity and silky complexity for which the distillery is known. The release will feature a new visual identity and a sculptural redesigned 700ml bottle.

Starward Whisky returns to Australian ownership

Starward Whisky has returned to full Australian ownership, with David Vitale acquiring the brand and ending its 11-year involvement with Diageo’s Distill Ventures program.

Diageo first invested in Starward in 2015 through its accelerator, supporting the brand’s growth into one of Australia’s leading whisky producers. The exit follows Diageo’s decision in early 2025 to scale back Distill Ventures.

Vitale said, “It’s been more than ten years since I last led Starward. With the considerable volume of work done in that time by a deeply dedicated team, this feels like a rare opportunity to scale what we know works, in a category that’s only just getting started. I feel incredibly lucky to be doing that with the best brand, the best people, and the best years still ahead of us.”

Over the past decade, Starward has become known for its red wine barrel maturation, modern Australian style and accessible core range. In 2025, the distillery claimed six of Australia’s 12 Double Gold medals for single malt whisky at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.



Headlines & Stuff

Barlei launches sugar-free range

Based on the New South Wales South Coast, beverage company, Barlei, has launched a range of 100% naturally sugar-free liqueurs, aperitivos, and cocktail syrups to tap into the growing mindset of more health-conscious drinking.

Barlei co-founder, Lexy Meyerson, said up until now, there had been a wellness-led version of most alcoholic beverages, except cocktails.

“Cocktails are meant to be social, celebratory, and shared, yet for many, they have been off-limits. With Barlei, we’re making cocktail culture inclusive again, offering the same balance, flavour, and ABV as classic cocktails, without the sugar, calories, or compromise,” Meyerson said.

“The cocktail category has remained one of the last frontiers of excess sugar and calories, with most cocktails containing between 5-9 teaspoons of sugar per serve, more than the

recommended daily intake.”The range includes Barlei Sugar-Free Orange Liqueur, Sugar-Free Coffee Liqueur, Sugar-Free Bittersweet Aperitivo, and Sugar-Free Simple Syrup.

Today’s drinkers are seeking connection and enjoyment without sacrificing their wellbeing, yet cocktail menus have largely excluded those who are health-conscious, sugar-free, diabetic, keto or calorie-conscious. Meyerson said Barlei was created to close that gap, allowing everyone to raise a glass together, regardless of their dietary or lifestyle choices.

“On premise, this means bars and restaurants can now serve premium sugar-free or low-sugar and low-calorie cocktails that don’t compromise on quality, sweetness or taste,” she said.

Barlei is looking for trade and distribution partners. Visit barlei.com



FEVER-TREE

G&T WEEK

18-24 MAY

ginandtonicweek.com

The advertisement features a vibrant, abstract background with geometric shapes in shades of blue, orange, and red. In the foreground, a glass of gin and tonic is shown with a slice of orange on the rim. The Fever-Tree logo is positioned at the top left, and the 'G&T WEEK' logo is prominently displayed in the center. The dates '18-24 MAY' and the website 'ginandtonicweek.com' are at the bottom.

Headlines & Stuff



New NSW rep for Noble Spirits

Pete Barker has joined Noble Spirits as its new account manager for New South Wales. He comes from Manly Spirits where he worked closely with venues and retailers across Sydney.

Noble Spirits founder and managing director, Grégoire Bertaud, said Barker's appointment would allow the company to take an important step forward.

"Our portfolio, our team, and our national footprint have grown considerably. With Pete leading day-to-day support in NSW, from orders and tastings to activations, new products and regular visits, I'll be able to dedicate more time to the bigger picture," Bertaud said.

His focus will now turn to strengthening relationships with producers, finding new products, expanding its national partnerships, developing long-term strategy, and opening new opportunities for the Noble Spirits community.

"In short, you gain a dedicated, on-the-ground NSW account manager, while I stay focused on driving the broader growth that ultimately benefits all our partners," he said.

Contact Pete on 0450 404 339 or at nswsales@noblespirits.com.au

Spirits Platform to distribute ABM

Spirits Platform has signed a deal with the US producer of premium cocktail mixers, American Beverage Marketers (ABM), to be its Australian distributor. ABM's brands include Master of Mixers, Finest Call, and Reàl Infused Exotics, which are available on premise and in retail channels.

ABM regional APAC manager, Boyde Skinner, said Spirits Platform's reputation, premium spirits focus, and understanding of the Australian on premise and retail landscape made it the ideal partner.

"We're excited to see our brands grow in Australia through a distributor that shares our long-term commitment to quality, family ownership values and bartender relevance," said Skinner.

Spirits Platform CEO, Ian Atherton, said the partnership is a natural extension of the company's commitment to delivering complete cocktail solutions for the Australian market.

"Master of Mixers, Finest Call and Reàl Infused Exotics are globally respected brands that solve real challenges behind the bar and at home, such as speed, consistency and quality," said Atherton.

"They complement our premium spirits portfolio perfectly and add genuine value for bartenders, venues and retailers alike," Atherton said.



Headlines & Stuff

First spirits excise rise for 2026

The first spirits excise increase for 2026 pushed the tax to \$107.99 per litre of alcohol, reinforcing calls from the industry for the government to extend the excise freeze on beer to spirits-based drinks.

Under Australia's long-standing alcohol taxation framework, the spirits excise is indexed to inflation twice a year. While draught beer has been granted a two-year excise freeze, no equivalent relief applies to spirits served in mixed drinks or cocktails.

In Senate Estimates, senator David Pocock questioned Treasury deputy secretary, Shane Johnson, as to why the alcohol tax brought in more revenue (\$2.7 billion) than the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (1.5 billion) – a 40 per cent tax on net super-profits from the sale of oil, gas, and LPG from Australian waters – when Australia is one of the largest exporters of gas in the world.

Spirits & Cocktails Australia executive director, Steven Fanner, said the ongoing increases disproportionately affect hospitality venues and consumers who favour spirits.

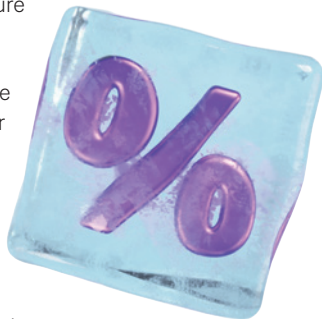
"Spirits are taxed more than beer or wine, and the tax increases every six months. This latest rise will mean around \$32 of the price of a standard 700ml bottle of gin or whisky is tax going straight to the government.

"Applying the freeze to tap spirits as well as tap beer would ensure many more people having a drink with friends on a Friday night benefit from this sensible cost-of-living measure" Fanner said.

Night Time Industries Association chief executive Mick Gibb said the twice-yearly tax increases continue to undermine efforts to rebuild Australia's night-time economy.

"We've seen some real progress in recent months to foster vibrant 24-hour cities, but for many consumers the rising price of a mixed-drink or a cocktail makes going out a luxury," Gibb said.

"For venue owners, particularly those with small bars, these twice-yearly tax hikes become very difficult to wear and even harder to budget for."



MUCHO Group locks in two new Sydney venues

MUCHO Group is doubling down on Sydney this autumn, opening two new venues within weeks of each other: Bar Bridge in the CBD and Super 44 in Newtown.

The hospitality group behind Sydney cult-favourites like Cantina OK! and Bar Planet is planting its flag at 6 Bridge Street from early April, before heading up Newtown to 44 Enmore Road in late May with a second, still-under-wraps concept.

First up is Bar Bridge, a chic Sydney martini bar set to take over a prime pocket of Bridge Street. This one's a sharp pivot into classic-meets-modern drinking: clean city energy, and a menu built around martinis. Expect tight, considered serves – alongside a focused list of cocktails designed for late finishes and repeat rounds.

While details on Super 44 are being kept firmly under lock and key, MUCHO Group has confirmed the Enmore Road venue will land in late May, adding another venue to the groups growing list in one of Sydney's most competitive hospitality strips.

Two openings, two different plays, and one group making it clear they're not done shaping how Sydney drinks just yet.

Headlines & Stuff

Burrow Bar closes for a reset

One of Sydney's most influential basement bars, Burrow Bar, held its final drinks at the beginning of March. It was a celebration of its 10th birthday and closure for a full refurbishment and brand overhaul. In the meantime, tiki pop-up Lost Luau will take up residence, with its signature escapism and tropical theatrics.

"For a decade, Burrow Bar has quietly watered and welcomed Sydney's parched, adding warmth and old-fashioned hospitality, championing creativity, community, and service without compromise," said co-owner Chau Tran. "This milestone celebration is both a love letter to the past and a signal that much more is still to come. Lost Luau will run for a couple of months. We will work with our build team off site while Lost Luau runs to keep close to a minimum. It will be a full overhaul with new concept and name."

The refresh isn't a handover or exit strategy – the founding team is staying firmly in control. "We are holding onto ownership. After ten wonderful years we felt it was time to give the place a real change," Tran said. "When we opened a decade ago drinking out was different."

"This 10th birthday is not a farewell, but a celebration of all we have done before our next chapter," Tran said. "A final toast to what Burrow Bar has been – and a tease of something exciting and new on the horizon."



Doom Juice Cellar Door is coming back to Marrickville

The wine label first launched a temporary cellar door in 2022, operating for four months as a pop-up pouring its Australian-produced wines alongside a broader drinks offering. The site closed later that year. In 2026, the brand will open a permanent cellar door at 66/6 Chalder Avenue, taking over the former Poor Tom's space.

Co-founder Zachary Godbolt, also of the Batt & Ball Hotel, said the new venue builds on years of considering a long-term site. The fit-out is expected to reflect the brand's offbeat identity, with Godbolt citing the live-action Scooby-Doo film as a point of visual reference.

"I think that if we were to do a pretty straightforward cosy wine bar people would be even more confused than what we currently have done," Godbolt said. "It needs a few quirks."

While full details of the drinks list have not yet been released, the venue will extend beyond wine. DJ and co-founder Sebastian Keys said the team wants to challenge the standard cellar door format.

"Everyone's been to a cellar door," Keys said. "But let's be honest, how fun are they? If this doesn't genuinely blow people away, I'll eat my own shoe."

The venue will join Marrickville's established Ale Trail, positioning itself among the breweries, distilleries and warehouse-style operators that define the precinct.

Opening is scheduled for mid-April.

FOAM, RECONSIDERED

Behind every great cocktail is a moment of intention. A balance of flavour, texture and presentation that turns a good drink into a memorable one. When it comes to foam, bartenders deserve a product that works as hard as they do. That's where Aquafab comes in.

Produced in Victoria and proudly Aussie made and owned, Aquafab is crafted specifically for the modern bar. It's designed to deliver consistent, stable, silky foam without compromising on flavour, ethics or ingredient integrity. Simply put, Aquafab should be the first choice behind the bar when it comes to cocktail foamers.

Made from 100 per cent natural ingredients and completely vegan, Aquafab offers a clean alternative to traditional foaming agents. No egg whites, no animal products, and no need to explain what's floating on top of the glass. It performs beautifully across sours, flips, and creative signatures, producing a fine, long-lasting foam that looks as good as it tastes.

And while some foamers rely on long

ingredient lists filled with preservatives and what seem to be mathematical equations, Aquafab keeps things refreshingly simple. No E numbers. No unnecessary additives. Just a natural, bar-friendly solution that lets your cocktail do the talking.

Practicality matters behind the bar, and Aquafab delivers here too. It's shelf stable for up to 18 months, making storage easy and wastage minimal. Once opened, Aquafab lasts seven to 10 days when kept chilled, giving venues flexibility without sacrificing performance. Whether you're running a high-volume cocktail bar or a refined restaurant program, Aquafab fits seamlessly into service.

Using Aquafab is effortless, just 15-30ml, no need for dry shaking, creates a dense, glossy foam with excellent

structure and mouthfeel. Perfect for everything from classic whiskey sours to modern, experimental serves. The neutral flavour profile ensures the cocktail remains the hero, while the foam elevates the final presentation.

Aquafab isn't just a product, it's a reflection of where the bar industry is heading. Cleaner ingredients. Thoughtful choices. Locally produced solutions that support Australian bars and meet the demands of today's drinkers.

For bartenders who care about what goes into the glass. And what stays out of it. Aquafab is the natural choice.

Curious to see the difference for yourself? Scan the QR code to receive a free Aquafab sample and get shaking!



Opens

Lush 2.0

446 City Rd, South Melbourne
@lush2.0_rooftopandbar

A new local has landed in South Melbourne – and it's one the neighbourhood already knows. Lush 2.0 has opened in the former Wayside Inn, a pub that's been part of the area since around 1868, now reworked into a modern, high-energy venue.

Located five minutes from South Melbourne Market, the opening marks the second venue from hospitality operator Arjun Reddy, who brings 17 years in the industry and a sharp focus on value, consistency, and community.

"I don't believe the customer is always right," says Reddy. "I believe the customer is God. Everything starts and ends with great food and genuine service."

The transformation was completed in just 42 days, turning the historic site into a jungle-themed space layered with bold artwork by Mike Makatron.

Inside, it's loud, social, and built for long sessions; outside, street dining and a pet-friendly beer garden with a wood-fired pizza oven keep things relaxed. An upstairs function space with city views rounds it out.

The drinks list leans hard into fun, familiarity, and crowd appeal, balancing easy spritzes with colourful signatures and all the classics you'd expect from a proper local.

House signatures include the floral Elderflower Spritz, tropical crowd-pleasers like Bird of Paradise and Coco Lush, and bolder builds such as El Diablo, and the Rainbow Serpent.

Classics are kept tight and recognisable – from margaritas and negronis to espresso martinis and old fashioned – while a solid mocktail lineup ensures non-drinkers aren't an afterthought.

Food is generous and familiar, with pub favourites sitting alongside more elevated plates. The menu spans parmigiani's, steaks, seafood, pizzas, pastas, and desserts.

"The overall goal is to bring five Lush venues to life across Melbourne," says

Arjun. "I know that's ambitious, some people even think I'm crazy – but I have an extraordinary team who are highly motivated to make it happen with me. Over the coming years we will focus on continuing to deliver great venues, with a solid reputation amongst the community."

Lush 2.0 follows the success of Lush Rooftop & Bar in Keilor Park, proving Reddy's community-first approach works beyond the inner city, with a third venue already locked in for 2026.





Hamsi Taverna

Shop E1B/1 Bridge Rd, Glebe
@hamsitaverna

At waterside Turkish restaurant and bar Hamsi, the cocktail list has been shaped as much by the view as the kitchen.

Group Bar Operations Manager, Emre Ozan Ozcan, says the venue's light-filled, open position by the water set the tone early on, steering the team toward drinks that feel refreshing, relaxed, and quietly considered.

Drawing inspiration from the Aegean and Mediterranean, the menu leans into freshness, herbs and gentle salinity, with cocktails designed to be easy to drink without losing intent.

There's a noticeable move away from overt sweetness, and it's no accident. Savoury elements like olive oil, herbs and spice run through the list, creating drinks that feel more aromatic and balanced.

"Instead of very sweet cocktails, we wanted to focus on flavours that work better with food," Ozcan says, noting that sweetness still plays a role, but sits firmly in the background.

The approach was developed alongside the kitchen, with both teams focused on

creating harmony rather than competition between plate and glass.

That philosophy extends to the bar's stripped-back style. Cocktails like Proper Form and Clean Cut showcase Hamsi's preference for minimalism, where simplicity isn't about doing less, but about doing it properly.

"When there are fewer ingredients, everything has to be right," Ozcan says. "We try not to add anything unnecessary."

Even when working with assertive ingredients, restraint is key – whether it's raki in Two Minutes, Turkish, where structure and temperature are used to support the spirit's bold character, or chilli in Do You Know What Nemesis Means, treated more like seasoning than centre stage.

If there's one drink that captures Hamsi as a venue, Ozcan doesn't hesitate. Two Minutes, Turkish stands as the clearest expression of the bar's identity – confident, clean, and Mediterranean at heart.

Beyond the bar, Hamsi's atmosphere is deliberately tuned to its setting. By day, the space feels breezy and open, with



marine tones and natural light reflecting the movement of the water outside. As the sun drops, the energy shifts. Low lighting, warm timber and the hum of the open kitchen give the room a relaxed intensity, while resident DJs layer in coastal rhythms that nod to long nights spent by the Aegean.

The menu is unapologetically seafood-forward, built for sharing and anchored by fire. Hamsi originals, developed specifically for the waterfront location, balance richness and restraint, from charred lobster finished with sujuk butter, to swordfish steak glazed with veal demi-glace.

As part of the \$836 million Sydney Fish Market redevelopment, Hamsi Taverna arrives with scale, ambition and a strong sense of place.

With its combination of bold Turkish flavours, considered cocktails and a setting that celebrates the rhythm of coastal life, the venue is positioned to become one of the precinct's defining destinations.

Vitelli's Upstairs

Corner of Cleveland & Baptist St,
Redfern
@vitellis.upstairs

Vitelli's Upstairs has taken over the Baptist Street Rec. Club site at Wunderlich Lane, but don't mistake it for a total reinvention. The bones of a good time are still there, and by 8pm on Fridays and Saturdays, Vitelli's Upstairs stops pretending it's just a restaurant.

DJs set up, the lights dim and the 20-seat cocktail bar comes to life. For director, Justin Newton, the evolution of the space was about longevity, not just late-night momentum.



"Baptist Street Rec. Club was a really good time, particularly on weekends, but we needed a concept that could hold its own across the whole week," says Newton,

"Vitelli's Upstairs keeps the energy of the space but gives it more purpose night to night. We've kept the DJs on Friday and Saturday evenings, so as dinner thins out, the room naturally tilts toward the bar.

"You can drop in later for a drink and a snack, or even a plate of pasta, without feeling like you've missed the window."

The drinks list leans unapologetically Italian. The Bellini 'del momento' rotates with seasonal fruit, currently sweet blood plum, and lifted with Amaro Montenegro and prosecco. The Tomatini is the wildcard: savoury, tomato-led, and sharpened with citrus and black pepper.

From there, it moves deeper into amaro territory, with a broad regional line-up that invites mixing, matching and tasting side by side. A tight edit of fruit-forward cellos – limoncello, passionfruit,

yuzu, melon, can be ordered by the glass or grouped into flights. It's built for sipping, not rushing.

Wine follows the same logic: predominantly Italian, structured to work alongside the food menu, while being backed by a handful of Australian bottles that hold their own. There's also a short late-night bar menu designed to keep things moving – snackable, punchy and built to sit alongside a negroni or something stirred and strong.

Earlier in the evening, the room runs as a full restaurant, but even then, the mood is relaxed. Executive chef, Elliott Pinn, working again with Seckold after their time at Grana, keeps the food unapologetically Italian-American inspired, with red-sauce pastas, and crowd-friendly plates.

"It's confident food," Pinn says. "No overthinking. Just dishes people actually want to eat."

Vitelli's Upstairs is open Tuesday to Thursday, 4pm to 12am, and Friday and Saturday from 4pm until 2am.





Darling Glebe

134A Glebe Point Rd, Glebe
@darlingglebe

A new restaurant and bar has opened in Glebe, with Darling Glebe taking over one of Sydney's most historically charged dining rooms and returning it to what it has always done best: pour serious drinks and give people a reason to stay.

The venue occupies the former Darling Mills site beneath St John's Church, a sandstone space carved by hand over more than a decade.

Long before martinis hit the bar, the room was shaped by architect Edmund Blackett, dentist-turned-visionary, Dr Alfred Adey, Roman stonemason, Sergio Ferrari, and artist, Anne Dybka. Together, they created a subterranean dining room that helped define Sydney's early farm-to-table movement when Darling Mills opened in 1989.

Chef restaurateur, Jeff Schroeter, found the space decades later and first reopened it as Beckett's in 2020. In 2026, he returned with Darling Glebe.

"When the landlord messaged me 'welcome home', it felt like the right time to bring the room back to what it does naturally," said Schroeter.

The bar leads the experience. Darling Glebe's Ferrari Martini Lounge

is named not for speed, but for Sergio Ferrari, the stonemason who carved the arches and vaults. The drinks list is unapologetically martini-forward, built around balance, savoury depth, and structure rather than showmanship.

The Chef's Martini anchors the list – Plymouth gin and Dolin dry vermouth in a deliberately wetter ratio, finished with olive brine and three olives. "It's a revival of the early martini, before dryness became a dare. Balance matters more than bravado," said Schroeter.

Classic variations follow: Gibson, Gimlet, Vesper, Martinez and Tuxedo, alongside fully customisable martinis and a mini format named "Our Little Darlings" for those pacing themselves.

Beyond martinis, the cocktail list leans nostalgic and textural. A Sgroppino blends vodka, rotating sorbet, and prosecco. Petal and Cane pairs white rum with peach and jasmine. Fig-ure Me Out layers cognac, amaretto, and spiced fig, while Sunset Serenade brings rum, chocolate and cherry together.

A considered non-alcoholic section



mirrors the complexity of the main list rather than sidelining it.

The atmosphere is deliberately restrained. Lighting is low, glassware is fine, and staff wear vintage Hermès Papillon bow ties, chosen nightly.

"They're a wink – something that makes people smile before the menu even arrives," Schroeter said.

Food plays a supporting role to the bar, drawing on classical French technique with a European brasserie sensibility. Dishes are designed to hold their own alongside strong drinks, not compete with them, keeping the focus firmly on conversation, pace and repeat rounds.

Darling Glebe is bar committed to structure, history and well-served drinks, in a room that has always known how to tell a story.

Hannah St Hotel

19 Walker St, Southbank
@hannahsthotel

Five new venues have opened inside Southbank's newly launched Hannah St Hotel, marking the Mulberry Group's first venture into hotels and its largest project to date.

Led by founder, Nathan Toleman, the partnership positions Hannah St Hotel as an all-day drinking and dining destination at the heart of the Queensbridge Building, designed to carry guests from morning coffee through to late-night cocktails without leaving the site.

The bar offering leads the charge. Bar Hannah sits front and centre in the

lobby, reworking the traditional hotel bar into a neighbourhood hub. Inspired by modernist bars in Milan, it serves coffee from 7am before shifting gears into cocktails and snacks from midday. Signature serves include the Vesper Blueprint – a local-beeswax-and-pollen twist on the classic martini – and a sharp Finger Lime Gimlet.

DJs take over as day turns to night, keeping the energy moving.

Hidden behind Bar Hannah, Carriage Lounge offers a darker, more intimate drinking room. Accessed via a steel-and-leather tunnel, it's built for lingering, late-night pours. The cocktail list leans local and ingredient-led, with nightcaps like the Southbank Eclipse – chocolate-driven with depth, a peppermint lift and toasted marshmallow. A strong by-the-glass wine list and a tight bar snack offering round it out.

Up on level 10, The Terrace Lounge delivers Hannah St Hotel's indoor-outdoor rooftop bar. Light-filled and relaxed, the space is designed for afternoon drinks and sunset cocktails, with spritzes and Australian-first serves like the Mango & Geraldton Wax Spritz setting the tone. It's open daily from 3pm and doubles as an events space.

The atmosphere across all five venues is cohesive but varied. Designed by Flack Studio, the spaces layer texture, art, and furniture with intent – from the mustard and gold banquettes of Bar Hannah to the moody gloss finishes of Carriage Lounge and the Parisian-garden feel of The Terrace Lounge. Artworks by Justene Williams, Hannah Gartside, Kat Shapiro and Mia Boe anchor each venue, giving the hotel a strong cultural thread rather than decorative noise.

Food follows the drinks. Menus across the venues are overseen by executive chef Andrew Beddoes, whose background includes Michelin-starred kitchens and venues such as J. Sheekey, Soho House and Enoteca Boccaccio.

Hannah St Hotel brings five distinct but connected venues to Melbourne's Southbank – built to “drink well, stay late and keep locals coming back”.



Opens



Frenchie

1/15 Collins St, Melbourne
@frenchie.melb

Frenchie, a new Parisian inspired restaurant and bar has opened on Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD, led by owners Julian Diprose and Lucas Boucly.

The idea is simple – late nights, high energy and a \$14 menu across food and drinks, built for sharing and staying for “one more”.

Cocktails are all \$14 and are playful, there are taps pouring their signature white negroni finished with an elderflower cloud, a cognac highball lifted with apricot brandy, and very dirty martinis. The bottled list backs that up with a tight mix of French and Australian wines. Beer is on tap too, split between local craft and European staples.

There is a tableside caviar and champagne trolley, offering \$14 caviar bumps, for those wanting to flex without the full commitment.

The room matches the tempo of the bar – moody and designed for movement. Patrons are greeted by a



mirrored staircase that flows into a low-lit, velvet-heavy space, anchored by a marble central bar.

Classic dishes complement the drinks list. Everything comes in shareable plates with dishes such as the beef cheek with bourguignonne and mash, confit duck with potatoes sarladaises, tuna with peppercorn sauce, cordon bleu meatballs, and steak frites.

Frenchie trades Monday to Saturday from 5pm, with bookings recommended.





SUNTORY CUP 2026 COCKTAIL COMPETITION

Celebrating 40 years of excellence
with \$40,000 in prizes!

The Suntory Cup made a triumphant return in 2025. Hosted by Club Suntory, the cup is back and officially live for 2026, with the most prestigious prize in the program's history up for grabs.

This year also marks 40 years since Club Suntory was established in 1986, and this year's program highlights the theme of "Celebration".

Hospitality professionals from all backgrounds are invited to participate in this year's competition, with the challenge to design a cocktail that reflects a chosen celebratory occasion – something joyful, memorable and thoughtfully crafted – that brings people together.

Suntory Oceania head of Advocacy, John Galiatsatos, says, "From its inception, Club Suntory has been dedicated to creating opportunities for others to shine. I can't wait to see how our community embodies this year's theme of celebration, and how the next generation will continue the legacy of excellence and creativity that Club Suntory represents throughout Australia."

Celebrating Suntory Cup's most prestigious prize

Commemorating Club Suntory's 40 years, this year the two winners will share a prize of \$40,000.

The prize includes an unforgettable trip to Europe, featuring a visit to Edinburgh and Islay, the home of Suntory Global Spirits' distinguished Scotch

brands, Laphroaig and Bowmore. Winners will also attend the Athens Bar Show and receive a cash prize of \$10,000 each.

Entrants can compete in one of two categories based on their level of experience:

- **Club Omoroi:** for bartenders with two years or more of experience behind the bar.
- **Club Yatte Minahare:** for those with less than two years of experience in drink preparation.

One lucky winner will be crowned in each category. Additionally, five state-based People's Choice winners will be selected, each receiving a trip to Sydney to attend the Suntory Cup Grand Final in September.

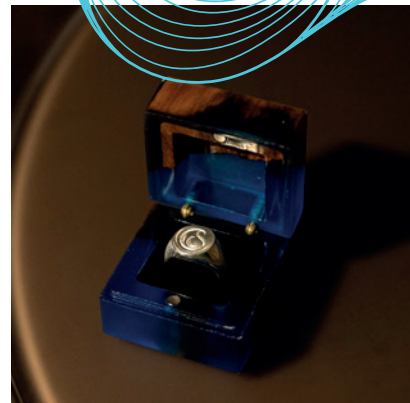
Key Dates

Phase One

- **Entries open:** 16 March-19 May 2026 (www.club.suntory.com)
- **National Top 80 announcement:** 8 June 2026

Judging Criteria:

- **The Suntory Serve (40%):** cocktail name, specifications, garnish and methodology.
- **Storytelling (40%):** the inspiration and narrative behind your creation.
- **Cocktail Presentation (20%):** the beauty and composition of your cocktail in a photo.



Phase Two:

In-venue promotional activity (throughout July), followed by Suntory Showdown events across August (Monday and Tuesday). Showdowns will take place in Sydney (for NSW/ACT finalists), Melbourne (for VIC/TAS finalists), Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane (for QLD/NT finalists) – exact dates TBC.

Phase Three

- **Grand Final:** 12-13 September 2026
- **Winner Prize Trip:** late October/ November 2026

For full terms and conditions and entry details, visit www.club.suntory.com. Follow @clubsuntoryoceania for updates on educational masterclasses, events and competition announcements designed to inspire and empower our community. 🍷

*Two winners. Each winner receives \$10,000 cash plus a trip to Europe valued at \$10,000.

Contacts

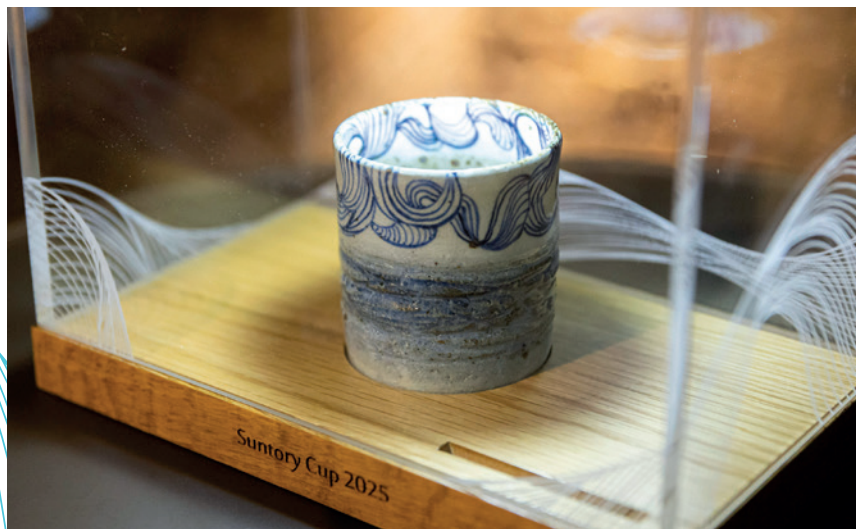
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The Long Pour.



Feature

From novelty to strategy

There's a new normal. As more Australians moderate, bars that treat non-alcoholic cocktails as premium, purposeful drinks - rather than substitutes - stand to win big.

Words by Kim Berry

In 2008, three Australian friends decided to not drink for one month and raise money for their local hospital – and so Dry July came into being.

Eighteen years later, that one month feels like the harbinger of a much broader changing mindset towards alcohol. So how can bars appeal to people who are no longer drinking alcohol, or at least, less of it?

If the research is correct – consumer surveys, sales figures, brand growth – the reality is fewer people are drinking alcohol, and more are abstaining altogether.

NielsenIQ's APAC on-premise research found 34 per cent of Australians are drinking less alcohol than a year ago, while research company, Vypr, found that when people are at a bar or a pub, 64 per cent of those looking for an alcohol alternative choose a carbonated soft drink, compared to only seven per cent choosing a low or no (LoNo) alcoholic beverage.

And Euromonitor International's *Voice of the Consumer: Health and Nutrition Survey 2025* found a nine per cent jump (to 53 per cent) in five years of consumers who drink occasionally saying they are actively trying to cut back.

The number of people not drinking alcohol at all rose by three per cent.

This shift was very clear with younger consumers – 36 per cent of Gen Z within legal drinking age report never consuming alcohol.

The reasons behind reduced alcohol intake include wellness, self-awareness, and economic pressures. Among those drinking less, 41 per cent say they were doing so to be healthier.

Last year, Australia had a five per cent increase in people wanting to reduce or quit drinking to 54 per cent.

Euromonitor International global insight manager for alcoholic drinks, Spiros Malandrakis, says while the alcoholic drinks industry continues to face a complex mix of challenges, the adult non-alcoholic beverages market is gaining "remarkable momentum" across different categories.

"Its consistent growth is not only reshaping consumer preferences but also redefining drinking rituals and social occasions.

"Non-alcoholic alternatives are no longer niche – they're becoming a central part of how people choose to enjoy and celebrate, offering fresh opportunities for innovation and repositioning within the broader beverage landscape," Malandrakis says.



Bobèche, Perth

The Dark & Stormy is a cocktail that's been tried, tested, and twisted, withstanding the test of time. Our focus at Bobèche is on culture, not alcohol content. It's where you can enjoy a well-crafted boozy cocktail or a non-alcoholic drink made with the same level of care. The higher goal is to encourage participation, socialisation, and ultimately, spark enjoyment. And yes, sometimes that looks like a complex cocktail that's taken days of preparation, and other times, it's a humble classic like the Dark & Stormy.

Dark & Stormy (above)

- 30ml Lyres Spiced Cane spirit
- 10ml lime juice
- Ginger beer
- Angostura bitters

1. Build then add crushed ice
2. Garnish with a Bitter float, lime wheel, and mint sprig

Byrdi, Melbourne

We're passionate about our guests being able to enjoy our menus whether they're drinking alcohol or not. Bars should be inclusive; our community is a varied demographic of people with different ideas of what a good time looks like. With every menu, we try to keep at least 40-50 per cent of our drinks available with or without alcohol, as well as a selection of lower-ABV serves.

Fig Leaf (page 24)

- 40ml distilled fig leaf
- 10ml pickled young fig leaves
- 100ml buffalo milk whey soda
- 0.125g malic acid
- 0.2% shio koji

1. Combine all ingredients and filter through V60 coffee filter
2. Transfer batch to PET bottles, chill and carbonate for service

Time for LoNo to shine

Meanwhile, Asia Pacific saw the sale of non-alcoholic spirits grow by 11 per cent in total volume terms, non-alcoholic RTDs by 12 per cent, non/low alcohol beer by seven per cent, and non-alcoholic wine by 7 per cent.

Globally, Euromonitor International says the adult non-alcoholic drinks market is expected to grow by 24 per cent in total volume terms between 2025 and 2029, surpassing 10.2 billion litres in 2029.

To see the potential of NoLo, the beer industry is leading the way. LoNo and mid-strength products now account for more than 30 per cent of lager sales. What began as a niche marketing opportunity and defensive growth strategy in a weakening beer market, is now a core business channel for brewers.

To extrapolate that to on-prem, there are some friction points and a category identity challenge. Primarily, pricing NoLo options like alcohol – when they are consumed like a soft drink – is problematic. Particularly when you consider NIQ's research which found one in four (25 per cent) moderating consumers cited financial pressures as what was causing them to cut back.

The flipside of that, is that adult consumers are looking for adult alternatives.

NIQ head of Beverage Alcohol – APAC, James Phillips, says consumers are no longer drinking out of habit, instead, drinking with purpose.

"The shift toward mindful consumption is not a passing trend, but a cultural reset that's redefining how, when and why people drink.

"The key question – is this the new normal in the on premise? If so, it presents big challenges for suppliers, manufacturers and operators, including the need to cater for moderating guests without alienating core consumers," Phillips says.

People abstain for many more reasons than 'just' sobriety – it is important to make every customer feel included and seen.

"Brands that can gain a deep understanding of this complex recalibration and adapt nimbly will be the ones that stay relevant in the months and years ahead," he says.



Santé, Toowoomba

It's important for us to have refined non-alcoholic options that allow people to come out and enjoy their night with something special and tasty to create a sense of occasion. We try to have to something for everyone and we often have a replica of our signature drinks as a non-alcoholic or lower ABV option. The non-alcoholic products market is now so diverse with non-alcoholic spirits and premium mixers that it's getting easier to create different flavour profiles these days.

Sunny Suzie

- 30ml Suze
- 10ml Calvados Christian Drouin Selection
- 10ml verjus
- 120ml of mango tonic
- Fresh mango for garnish

1. Add everything to carbonation bottle and carbonate at 40 PSI
2. Pour into a highball glass over an ice spear
3. Garnish with a slice of fresh mango

Mango tonic

1. Blend 200g of mango flesh with 1g of Pectinex
2. Let it sit overnight in the fridge and filter through a coffee filter
3. Weigh the liquid
4. Add 5% of the weight in glucose
5. Add 100% of the weight in Fever Tree Mediterranean Tonic



Bar Love, Perth

Our most popular non-alcoholic option is The Bullfighter. It's a smoky take on a Toreador using Sammy Piquant Oaxacan (a Melbourne made non alcoholic spirit imitating mezcal – see profile on p30), apricot and lime. We like to make sure that our mocktails have the same balance and mouthfeel as their alcoholic counterparts – they should be approached with care and consideration – not as an afterthought.

We like using ingredients with bitter, smoky or tannic elements which add depth and weight. There are plenty of non-alc spirits which do this well but you can also look at teas, bitter syrups, non-alcoholic beers, milk punched cordials or foaming agents to add complexity and texture.

The Bullfighter

- 45ml Sammy Piquant Oaxacan
- 20ml apricot syrup
- 30ml lime juice
- 2 dashes saline
- Tajin for garnish

1. Shake ingredients with ice
2. Pour into a coupe with half the rim edged in Tajin

Two of the main challenges are flavour and cost. Alcohol provides a number of reactions, from flavour to the initial heat from the ethanol and its warming effect.

Bartenders need to be creative as well as knowledgeable about ingredients, how they interact, and what they can contribute to a sophisticated non-alc option.

And then there is the issue of cost. A concerted education campaign is needed to address the “it doesn’t have alcohol in it so it should be cheaper” mindset. Botanicals, herbs, fresh produce, and ice all cost money – as does the labour to create the recipes and make the cocktails.



Bartenders need to be creative as well as knowledgeable about ingredients, how they interact, and what they can contribute to a sophisticated non-alc option.



There can be specialised equipment and another element that is growing is the use of functional ingredients like adaptogens and nootropics that can elevate non-alc options.

The reality is the NoLo guest is no longer an edge case – they’re already at the bar, and they want the same sense of occasion as everyone else.

The venues that will win are the ones that stop treating non-alcoholic drinks as a substitute and start treating them as a signature: built with intent, priced with confidence, served with the same theatre, glassware and storytelling as a classic cocktail.

Do that – train staff to recommend, give the menu equal real estate, and make moderation feel normal rather than apologetic – and NoLo becomes what it’s always promised to be: not a compromise, but a genuine new profit-and-loyalty channel in modern drinking. 🍷

trap., Adelaide

We treat NoLo like real cocktails except for one thing – every drink needs a wow moment because NoLo has no “boozy fallback” to rely on. For our Guardians of the Cocktail menu (think Guardians of the Galaxy meets Captain Planet and the Planeteers), each “Captain” had to taste great without alcohol before a spirit is added.

Cpt. Harmony is a serve that mimics a boozy stir down riff by leaning into extra salinity and texture with a coconut brine, and it evolves in the glass via a frozen sloped ice insert made from raspberry and coconut water.

Our hot tip: avoid the “triple S trap” of syrup, sour and soda. Instead, think about fun things you can do with normal cocktails and at least do that. Then, wherever you would normally dilute with water, try diluting with a flavour that belongs. Coconut water is our fingerprint for this, and it for sure gives our NoLo drinks the trap. treatment.

Captain Harmony

Batch (makes ~1L, about 10 serves)

- 300ml coconut brine
- 150ml lemon juice
- 100ml sugar syrup
- 450ml coconut water
- 1g MSG

Combine all ingredients in a thermos and store in freezer

Sloped Ice Mix (yields ~500ml)

- 230g raspberries
- 650g coconut water

1. Blend ingredients until smooth
2. Strain through a coarse strainer and then a fine strainer
3. To prep each glass, weigh 70g Sloped Ice Mix into a rocks glass
4. Freeze the glass on an angle overnight so it sets as a slanted “ice slope”

Coconut Brine

- 300g dried coconut flakes
- 2% coconut salt water (20g salt per 1000g coconut water)
- 240ml coconut water (for dilution)
- 60ml vegetable glycerine

1. Add coconut flakes to a 1L container
2. Fill to the top with 2% coconut salt water and shake
3. Infuse overnight
4. Strain off the brine
5. Dilute the strained brine with the coconut water and glycerine
6. Return flakes to container for reuse with fresh 2% salt water 1-2 more times





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THE GLOBALLY INSPIRED SAMMY PIQUANT

Marcus Child launched non-alcoholic Sammy Piquant in 2024, but it was years in the making, with world travel and global hospitality inspiring its creation.



The idea behind Sammy Piquant began years ago for Marcus Child, during motorcycle journeys around the world, including an overland ride from Europe through Central Asia into South-East Asia, and travels through Latin America, including Cuba and Mexico.

Travelling at ground level and crossing borders by road rather than air, Child experienced hospitality expressed through flavour and ritual, and saw how beautifully people celebrated without alcohol.

Inspired by these traditions, he began experimenting, combining botanicals, spices and dried fruits, and developing his own maceration and extraction methods to create structure. Using cold infusion and small-batch brewing, Child steeped

whole ingredients at low temperatures to preserve aromatics while building texture, grip and length. The result was a sophisticated, adult liquid designed to stand confidently behind the bar.

Since its launch in 2024, Sammy Piquant has become one of Australia's fastest-growing non-alcoholic drinks. It is now poured in over 500 restaurants, resorts and bars, including more than 120 chef-hatted venues.

It is now served at leading destinations such as Saint Peter and Portefino, while Opera Bar serves up to 1000 Sammy Piquant cocktails per week. This momentum reflects a global shift: drinking frequency is declining, intentional moderation is rising, and consumers are seeking flavour-forward

alternatives that deliver the ritual of drinking without compromise.

Our vision is to live in a world where everyone can find social connection and refreshment without compromise –building bridges for healthy human interaction.

Sammy Piquant is designed for modern social occasions, offering layered, sophisticated non-alcoholic drinks that allow people to celebrate fully and remain present without sacrificing flavour, ritual or experience.

One of our most popular signature expressions, The Oaxacan (pronounced wah-ha-kan), delivers smoky agave, habanero and fresh lime, creating a compelling alcohol-free twist on a Tommy's Margarita. 🍹

**Oaxacan Tommy's
margarita (non-alcoholic)**

- 60ml Sammy Piquant Oaxacan
- 30ml fresh lime
- 15ml agave
- Shake well

1. Pour contents into a rocks glass with Tajin-crusted rim
2. Add a chilli garnish



Vermouth

Vermouth: From forgotten fortified wine to bar-top essential

Once relegated to dusty back bars and faded memories, vermouth has quietly reclaimed its place as one of the most important ingredients in modern bars. Vermouth expert, Claudio Bedini, explores its history.

Claudio Bedini
Curator, *L'Ora del Vermouth*

On World Vermouth Day, it's worth pausing to appreciate how this aromatised wine went from medicinal tonic to cocktail cornerstone, fell out of fashion, and then staged one of the drinks world's most compelling comebacks.

A short, spirited history

Vermouth's story begins in Europe. Its name comes from the German wermut, meaning wormwood, a bitter herb already used by the ancient Romans and Greeks for its medicinal purposes. Infusing wine with wormwood and other botanicals blurred the line between medicine and pleasure, evolving into something intentionally crafted.

In 1786, Antonio Benedetto Carpano, then a clerk in a Turin liquor shop, created what we now recognise as modern vermouth: a sweet, aromatised wine made from Moscato and infused

with more than 30 herbs and spices.

The drink was an immediate sensation, drawing crowds beneath the porticoes of Piazza Castello and quickly embedding vermouth in Turin's social life.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, vermouth was firmly established across Europe, a fixture of cafés, social rituals, and the emerging aperitivo culture.

As large waves of European immigrants spread across the Americas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they brought vermouth with them. From Argentina to Brazil, it became part of everyday social life, enjoyed simply, much as it had been back home.

It was in the US, however, that vermouth found something new: a rapidly developing cocktail culture. Bartenders began using vermouth not just as a drink in its own right, but as a tool to soften, balance, and elevate rough spirits.

Out of this environment, the iconic Manhattan was born: a deceptively simple mix of whiskey, sweet vermouth,



Cocchi owner and MD, Roberto Bava, will be in Australia this May for L'ora del Vermouth.



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Today, vermouth is enjoying attention it hasn't seen in decades. No longer just a supporting player, it's at the forefront of the low-alcohol movement and increasingly showcased in inventive cocktails.

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Americano

- 30ml Campari
- 30ml sweet vermouth
- Splash of soda water
- Orange slice and lemon slice for garnish

1. Chill a Collins glass and prepare garnish
2. Fill glass with ice and add all the ingredients
3. Stir briefly, garnish with orange and lemon

and bitters. Vermouth wasn't a background note; it was the backbone, giving structure, depth, and elegance to the drink. The drink helped reshape American drinking culture and the very idea of what a cocktail could be.

The success of the Manhattan sparked the golden age of cocktails in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Bartenders began pairing vermouth with gin, whiskey, and other spirits, giving rise to enduring classics like the Martini and the Negroni. From that point on, vermouth was no longer just an aperitif; it was a cornerstone of modern mixology, shipped from Europe to bars in almost every corner of the world.

How vermouth fell out of fashion

Vermouth's decline in the mid-to-late 20th century wasn't caused by a single event, but by a perfect storm of historical and cultural shifts. Two World Wars disrupted European production and trade, while Prohibition in the US severed an entire generation from established drinking traditions. When legal drinking returned, tastes and habits had changed.

Post-war drinking increasingly favoured higher-proof spirits and cleaner, sharper flavours. The rise of the ultra-dry Martini didn't help either, reducing vermouth to the smallest possible measure or, as Winston Churchill joked, a glance in the direction of France.

Through all of this, vermouth survived largely thanks to brands like Martini & Rossi. Iconic advertising campaigns kept the name front of mind around the world, even as the category itself faded from view. By the late 20th century, vermouth had largely lost its identity, reduced from a defining ingredient to a modifier: familiar, but poorly understood.

The revival: Quality, identity, and Turin

Vermouth's comeback didn't happen overnight. It was driven by two forces: the craft cocktail renaissance and a renewed focus on quality at the production level.

On the bar side, pioneers like Dale DeGroff and Dave Wondrich revisited classic recipes, showing that vermouth could be more than a splash in a cocktail; it could shine.

Behind the scenes, Roberto Bava, owner and managing director of Cocchi,

was transforming production. At a time when vermouth was often made poorly, he brought producers together, guiding them to agree on shared standards rooted in the original Turin recipes.

This effort not only protected vermouth's heritage but elevated quality across the board, laying the foundations for what would become the Vermouth di Torino Denomination. Today, producers are once again investing in craftsmanship, rediscovering the balance, depth, and complexity that made vermouth famous.

Bava will be in Australia this May, participating in L'ora del Vermouth, bringing his knowledge and passion directly to bartenders and enthusiasts.

Where vermouth is today

Today, vermouth is enjoying attention it hasn't seen in decades. No longer just a supporting player, it's at the forefront of the low-alcohol movement and increasingly showcased in inventive cocktails. Producers worldwide are experimenting with local botanicals and wine bases, giving each bottle a sense of place and craft.

Where vermouth is heading

Looking ahead, vermouth faces both opportunity and challenge. While it thrives in cocktails, its consumption on its own has declined, even in Italy.

Education will be key to sustaining its revival: understanding vermouth's styles, origins, and proper handling will allow bartenders and consumers to explore its full potential as a low-alcohol drink, an aperitif, and a cornerstone of inventive cocktails.

Expect more vermouth-forward cocktails, inventive pairings, and regional expressions that blur the line between wine and spirits. Vermouth isn't just making a comeback; it's redefining its role, proving that a drink once overlooked can continue to surprise, delight, and evolve. 🍷

Claudio, the founder of L'ora del Vermouth, will be holding a series of degustation dinners, The Vermouth Table, where vermouth is the star and guests have a night of rediscovery, stories and delectable pairings. Contact Claudio for more details at cbconsultancy5@gmail.com.

Jack Bar.



Venue

Maybe Sammy

Where cocktails and service meet theatre,
without losing personality.

115 Harrington St, The Rocks
@maybe_sammy_sydney

When you step into Maybe Sammy, it's immediately clear why this Sydney bar keeps landing on global best lists. The room hits a rare sweet spot, playful theatrics without slipping into gimmick, polished service without losing personality. It's fun, but also serious about drinks.

The theatrics aren't an after thought, instead built into how the venue operates. Theatre is part of the experience, not a side show, with its annual cocktail menu rollout a true production. With only one new menu released each year, every change is deliberate, researched, and designed to land with impact.

The current menu

This year's menu takes its cues from film and television moments that shaped entire eras. There are 12 cocktails, each reworked through the Maybe Sammy lens. The drinks read like a greatest-hits reel, without leaning on nostalgia alone.

The list includes A Bug's Life, a citrus-and-mango highball built around Glenfiddich 14. Peaky Blinders hides a punch with Benriach 10, sherry, mead, and green tea soda. The David Attenborough Martini Series runs three styles – Ocean, Forest, and Desert. The rest of the menu moves through The Great Gatsby, Goodfellas, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Big Lebowski, The Shining, and Ocean's 11, each drink

stands on its own rather than mimicking a scene for novelty points.

In typical Maybe Sammy fashion, every cocktail comes with a custom trailer. The team shot them across Sydney over several months, writing, directing, styling, and starring in the clips themselves. The scenes range from a bubble-gun western standoff to a Wonka-style press conference. Guests can scan a QR code in-venue to watch or catch them rolling out online.

Service that feels like service

Ordering a cocktail here comes with a performance, but it never feels forced. The room runs on genuine buy-in from the staff. Bartender Holly Grimshaw puts it simply: "Passion, teamwork, and respect is embedded in Maybe Sammy."

It shows. The energy isn't rehearsed. The team knows the drinks inside out, and the confidence behind the bar comes from repetition, not ego. The result is service that feels intentional without becoming stiff.

The takeaway

Maybe Sammy has built a reputation on precision, consistency, and knowing exactly when to turn things up.

The drinks are award-winning for a reason, but they're delivered with flair that doesn't tip into theatre-for-the-sake-of-it.

So what does it feel like to walk into one of the most celebrated bars in the world? It feels special – not because it tries to be, but because the details are done right. 🍸

Hotel Bars

Rico Deang

Melbourne's Beverly bar manager, Rico Deang, has worked all over the world before taking up his role at one of Melbourne's favourite rooftop venues.

Words by Kim Berry

You've worked at high profile venues in Singapore, the Philippines, and the US before moving to Australia – what were some of the key learnings for you working in that calibre of bars?

A key learning is there's always something new to learn! The industry is constantly changing with new products and trends emerging, and this makes putting the time in and having a real passion for our industry, the people and craft essential.

I learned a lot about the chefs' palate during my five years at Wolfgang Puck's CUT and Spago – from using ingredients like herbs so our drinks pair well with the food, to making our own syrups and tea infusions.

I've also found peoples' tastes, as well as serving and service rituals tend to be different between countries, so it's a must to be in tune with those.

Overall, it's important to keep having fun and keep creating, while having that commitment to dishing out world class cocktails and top-notch hospitality.

What prompted your move to Beverly?

Beverly is known as one of Melbourne's best rooftop venues, so to have the opportunity to work alongside the people behind it while placing my own little stamp on the bar inspired the move,

as did having the creative freedom to develop the cocktail list and always evolving special releases – like for Summer Sunset Sundaze – our new weekly ritual for summer.

Tell us some more about the new menu – what was the inspiration, what's your favourite, what can guests expect?

In a nutshell it's filled with fresh and fun cocktails, which are made using quality ingredients, including a lot that we make here at Beverly.



The cocktails are inspired by what our guests like and the seasons, along with my experiences working overseas and in Melbourne, and I've balanced this with wanting them all to be accessible and simple enough for everyone to understand.

And the Yes Please – why did you select that cocktail to share?

People love their tequila, at least here in Melbourne, and who doesn't like passionfruit? Pair them with some Asian herbs and a touch of heat from the Habanero chillis, and it's just a great combo that appeals to everyone's palate. 🍹

Yes Please

- 45ml Don Julio Blanco Tequila
- 30ml passionfruit puree
- 22ml 1:1 sugar syrup
- 10ml freshly squeezed lime juice
- 2 dashes house made habanero chilli mix
- 3 Thai basil leaves
- 1 makrut lime leaf

1. Place the Thai basil leaves in a shaker and muddle
2. Add the rest of the ingredients
3. Add ice and shake vigorously
4. Double strain and pour over an ice block in a double old fashioned glass
5. Garnish with a makrut leaf





People

Holly Grimshaw

Alexandra Zinghini sits down with Manchester-born bartender Holly Grimshaw to talk straight about career advice, cultivating a strong team culture, and what it really takes to thrive behind the bar at one of the world's most celebrated venues.



Words by Alexandra Zinghini
Images by Chris Pearce

Manchester-born bartender, Holly Grimshaw, didn't set out with a grand hospitality masterplan – but once bars got under her skin, there was no shaking them. Now based in Sydney, Grimshaw has spent the past 2.5 years behind the bar at Maybe Sammy, carving out a career defined by commitment, curiosity, and a deep belief in team culture.

Like many in the industry, Grimshaw began working in hospitality at 16, picking up shifts at a local pub before moving through casual jobs while studying politics at university – a degree

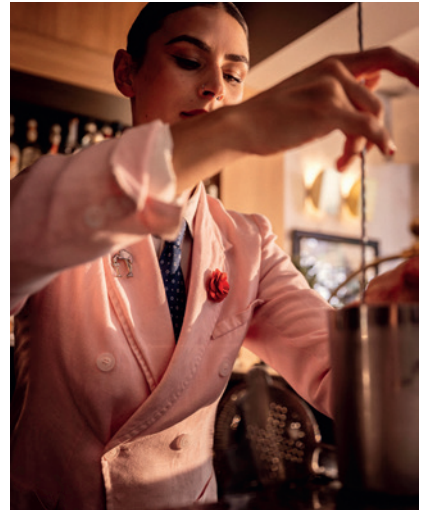
she jokes has proven unexpectedly useful in the bar world. It wasn't until she returned to Manchester post-university that bartending shifted from side hustle to serious pursuit. At the time, the city's cocktail scene was evolving fast, with techniques like dehydrated garnishes and clear ice only just entering the mainstream. "That moment really hooked me," she says.

Her turning point came at Sterling, owned by the Schofield brothers, where she was exposed to a higher level of hospitality and mentorship.

"That was my first real hit of what this industry could be," Grimshaw says. "Working with people at that level



You can't compare your path to anyone else's, it hasn't been easy, but you have to believe in yourself, know what you want, and enjoy it - otherwise, hospitality won't give back.



changed everything.”

What began as a teenage job quickly became a calling, fuelled by learning from people she considers among the best in the business.

Despite loving her role in Manchester, Grimshaw felt the pull of change – and sunshine didn't hurt. Australia had long been on her radar, and Maybe Sammy was a name she'd heard whispered throughout her career. One interview with Sarah Proietti later, and she was behind the bar the following week.

“It just fell into place,” she says.

Since moving to Sydney, Grimshaw has noticed clear differences between the UK and Australian bar scenes. While the UK offers a wider spread of styles – from hotel bars to molecular cocktail dens – Australia, and Sydney in particular, leans into warmth and approachability.

“It's more laid back here,” she says. “You walk into a bar and it's 'hey team, how's it going?' There's less variety, but an abundance of hospitality.”

At venues like Maybe Sammy, that friendliness is paired with world-class execution. Her time at the award-winning bar hasn't been easy – and she doesn't pretend it is.

“It's taken perseverance, dedication and commitment,” Grimshaw says. “But it's easier when you truly love what you're doing.” One phrase she's taken to heart at Maybe Sammy is simple: time to push. Keep going, trust the process, and what's meant to be will be.

When asked about advice entering the industry, Grimshaw is thoughtful rather than preachy. She believes that no two journeys are the same.

“You can't compare your path to anyone else's,” she says. “It hasn't been easy, but you have to believe in yourself, know what you want, and enjoy it – otherwise, hospitality won't give back.”

What's kept her grounded is the team around her.

“Culture is everything, you join for the idea, but you stay for the outcome,” she says. “At Maybe Sammy, trust, support, and a shared passion for excellence are what hold the operation together – especially during high-pressure periods like the Maybe Festival season, where learning curves are steep and teamwork is non-negotiable.”

To Grimshaw, hospitality is more than a job. “You're dealing with people,” she says. “You have to genuinely want to

be there, to help people and create an experience.” That mindset extends to her personal tastes too – her go-to drinks are a cold, creamy pint of Guinness (which she insists is never quite the same in Australia) and a Miami Vice, a tiki classic she's still hunting down in Sydney.

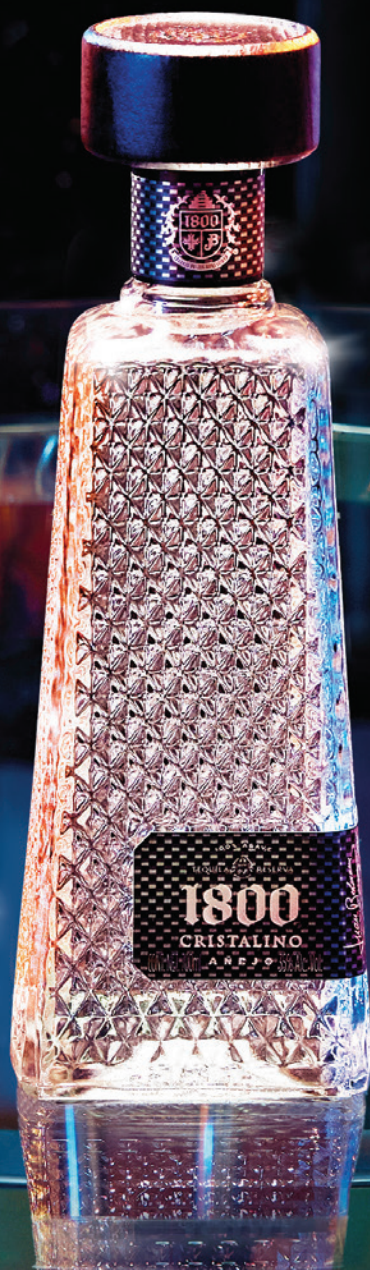
As for the future, Grimshaw keeps it refreshingly simple. “Over the next five years, my goal is to absorb as much knowledge as possible” she says. Becoming the best version of myself, while growing organically with Maybe Sammy, rather than chasing titles or timelines is what I strive to achieve.”

In an industry built on patience, pressure, and people, it's a grounded vision – and one that feels right at home behind one of the world's most celebrated bars. 🍷

THE WORLD'S MOST AWARDED TEQUILA

1800

TEQUILA



1800 Cristalino is aged in both American and French oak, after which the liquid is married together and finished in port wine casks for an additional six months.

The result is a spirit with all the complexity of an añejo tequila and the crystal-clear, silky-smooth drinkability of a blanco.



Leadership

Build relationships, cultivate resilience, keep learning

Emma Franceschini, head of bars for Swillhouse, shares her experiences in becoming the leader she wanted to be.

Words by Emma Franceschini
Photography by Andrea Velton

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

I love this question, it's actually a really interesting thing to reflect on. When I was younger I probably would have answered by saying something about leading from the front. Obviously that's a pretty narrow view on it, but being in the mix, doing the hard jobs and setting a pace and tone in service was really where my focus lay as an aspirational young manager.

These days, leadership is about looking after people, it's a type of service, it's doing the right thing even when it's hard, it's empowering people, recognising other people, being humble and recognising your own limits, taking accountability and hearing people and helping them get where they need to go.

The way I see it now there is nothing inherent in leadership behaviour that requires an official title, but if you are ticking all of those boxes people will tend to come along within you on things naturally.

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

I'm pretty visible as a queer woman, existing in the world this way definitely brought sets of challenges with it that made the early parts of my career and life generally challenging. I gave a lot and put up with a lot to have a seat at the table – I think a lot of women



Commit yourself to continual growth and development and invest some time everyday to learning. Build a broad knowledge base across lots of different subjects.



in leadership positions would express similar sentiments.

For me personally pushing against barriers created a certain amount of baggage that just did not serve me well as a leader in any sort of healthy workspace. Adversity breeds resilience. I'm grateful for the resilience I developed as a result of adversity, but I also learned to be really hard, set unreasonable standards on myself and others, and draw poor boundaries with my work and personal life. So for me in many ways the most significant challenges to leadership growth were around unlearning and reframing my instinctive ways of looking at things.

manager that makes people small or the sort of manager that builds people up. Talk about getting to the core of something. It's been a long time and I still reflect on that line really regularly, it's such a simple poignant lesson.

On my best days I find myself reflecting on that challenge and actively choosing to build people up. I went back and apologised to the person I was training by the way – as we all should whenever we realise we've acted like a jerk.

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



[My boss] told me that I had to choose if I wanted to be the sort of manager that makes people small or the sort of manager that builds people up. Talk about getting to the core of something.



If we want to talk about challenges as a leader that is a whole different conversation. But challenges on the path to leadership, that's really about inner work and cultivating leadership traits which aren't necessarily intrinsic. For me there was a lot of reading, learning, reflecting and making active choices.

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

I mean, there are few big pivotal moments for me. The one I think on the most came when I was a junior manager training a new team mate on a well during service. I wasn't doing a great job of it, I was pulling up everything this person was doing wrong and generally being a bit mean, which I kinda rationalised as ok because I was maintaining high standards.

My boss pulled me aside and was like why are you approaching this situation like this? Then he told me that I had to choose if I wanted to be the sort of

If you want to create an inclusive environment for your team you really have to set clear expectations and talk about inclusivity on a regular basis and then walk your talk. Be brave and critically evaluate yourself, take feedback and listen to and consider diverse opinions. Also recognising that different people have different ways of learning and might need different levels of support to do well, you need to be willing and able to tailor your approach as a leader.

I think it's really key here that staff at all levels within a team feel like they have a voice and feel comfortable bringing issues to you. In my experience checking in with your team regularly on a one on one basis is the most effective way to make sure everyone has a voice.

Build relationships, ask them how they are doing, what they need to thrive, where they need support, what their goals are and where they need help. The conversations don't always need to be long but they need some regularity. You're going to need some sort of way of

tracking yourself on this. Even if it's just a diary note 'catch up with Billy'.

Hospitality workplaces are really dynamic and fast moving, if you aren't tracking that you are having these meaningful conversations with your team regularly you'll likely not realise that you haven't caught up with someone in a long time, you need to be methodical about this.

If you manage your check ins right, listen to your people, and act on what they raise back to you and walk your talk, then you'll be on a pretty sound path tracking towards having an inclusive empowering environment.

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

Cultivate resilience in yourself and learn how to manage stress. Part of being a really effective leader is about being able to make good decisions in stressful situations. Stressful scenarios in service are going to happen sometimes, rude customers, kitchen going down, short staff because of sickness, bar way busier than anyone planned for, hospitality can be challenging.

Thinking about how you are going to manage stressful scenarios and planning before things happen will serve you and your team well. The shot and a cigarette approach to managing stress isn't sustainable personally or professionally. I draw on a few practical mindfulness exercises in the moment if something rattles me during a busy service, find what works for you and methodise it. Be humble, we all have limits, know yours and own them. People will judge yours less harshly if you take ownership of them.

Commit yourself to continual growth and development and invest some time everyday to learning. Build a broad knowledge base across lots of different subjects. As a leader I think a big toolkit serves you better than a super specialised one. A broader knowledge base is going to help you find solutions to problems more effectively.

Be true to yourself, it's great to have role models that you wish to emulate but you'll be more sincere and effective if you are authentic and true to yourself. Look to others, draw on what you admire, but synthesise into your own practice. 🍷



Staffies.



Lucky's Lounge



Bobèche



El Pirmo Sanchez



Bar Peripheral



Cantina OK!



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ozbartendermag



Fortunate Son



Leigh Street Luggage



Old Canberra Inn



The Pickled Bear



Above Board



Apollonia

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.



1. Name five Australian whisky brands.
2. What does Piña Colada translate to?
3. Who founded NYC bar, Milk & Honey, the bar widely considered to have kicked off the speakeasy revival?
4. What kind of beer is Guinness?
5. What is the main grape in prosecco?
6. What is the name of the hotel and bar in which the Singapore Sling was created?
7. What is a 'carb rig' and what does it do?
8. What is the minimal amount of wooden barrel aging required to be classified as a Bourbon whisky.
9. What is the main difference in production between an ale and a lager?
10. What grapes are used in the production of Penfold's Grange?
11. What TV show helped popularise the cosmopolitan cocktails?

Answers: 1. Starward, Archie Rose, Highwayman, Cape Byron Distillery, Morris, Amber Lane, Manly Spirits, Heliyers, Bakery Hill. 2. Piña Colada translates from Spanish as "strained pineapple", referring to freshly pressed and strained pineapple juice used in the original drink. 3. Sasha Petraske. 4. Stout, specifically Irish Dry Stout. 5. Glera. 6. Long Bar, Raffles Hotel Singapore. 7. A carb/cab rig is a setup including CO2, liquid vessel and suite of equipment to create carbonated cocktails behind the bar. It uses pressurised CO2 to force-carbonate cocktails or other liquids quickly, allowing bartenders to carbonate drinks with controlled, consistent effervescence. 8. Two years. 9. Fermentation method: Ales use top-fermenting yeast at warmer temperatures, while lagers use bottom-fermenting yeast at colder temperatures and are conditioned for longer. 10. Shiraz predominantly with some Cabernet Sauvignon. 11. Sex and the City.

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