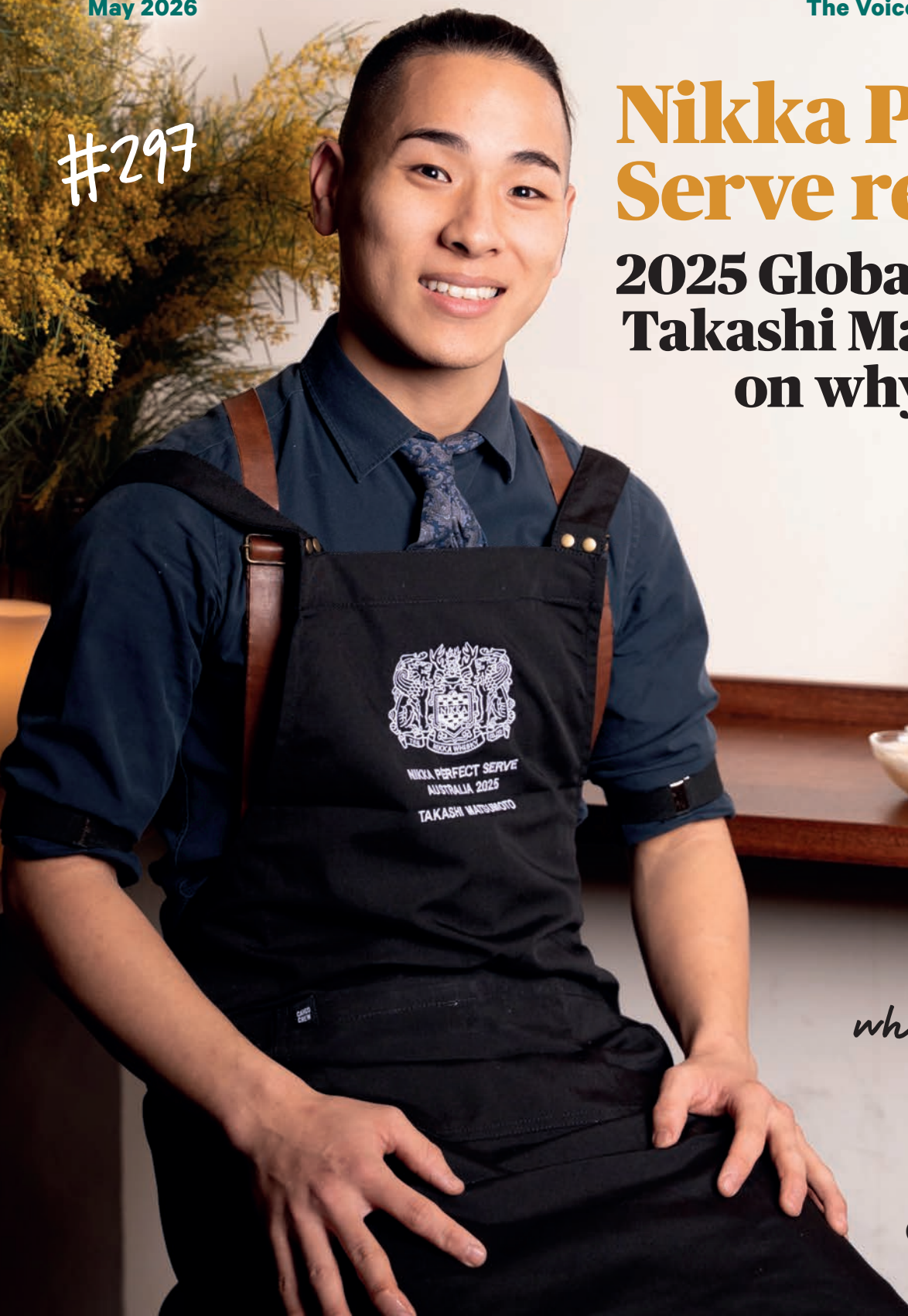


May 2026

The Voice of Bar Professionals

#297



Nikka Perfect Serve returns

**2025 Global winner,
Takashi Matsumoto
on why to enter**

Plus:

*Women in
whisky history*

**Tea, Coffee,
Cocktail**

**TANGUY
CHARBONNET
EXPLAINS**



20
26 | SYDNEY

BAR WEEK

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Welcome.



Hi shakers and stirrers,

Another bumper edition this month – with entries now closed for the Bar Awards and planning for Sydney Bar Week well underway, nominations for *Australian Bartender* of the Year are open. The other big-ticket event on the horizon is our bi-annual Top 100 Most Influential List. Nominations for that open on 25 May so pop that in the diary.

Meanwhile, this year's Bartender of the Year, Tanguy Chabonnet, looks at the world of tea and coffee and their place in world of cocktails. That's on page 24.

Our cover story this issue (page 18) is with Nikka Whisky, as its global competition – Nikka Perfect Serve – gets underway for 2026. Our Rail cocktail (page 8) is last year's winning cocktail by Sydney bartender, Takashi Matsumoto.

I went to a talk about the history of women in the whisky industry on International Women's Day and was blown away by the seemingly limitless knowledge of Baxter Inn's London Purvis on the topic. So much so I asked her to write it down – you can read her article from page 20.

We have lots of profiles for you this month – Tigerfish's Brendan Scott Grey's postcard from Tokyo, Trish Brew on building a brand, and the new MD for Amber Beverage Australia, Uliana Linenko.

If you're entering Bartender of the Year, don't miss The Bar Exam on page 50 as part of your preparation.

Kim Berry, Editor

On this month's cover:

The Nikka Perfect Serve global competition, built on the Japanese philosophy *Ichigo, Ichi-e* – "one moment, one encounter" – returns in 2026.

The Rail.

Northern Legacy

Takashi Matsumoto,
Global Winner
Nikka Perfect Serve 2025
@taka_matsu.96

Northern Legacy was my winning cocktail recipe from Nikka Perfect Serve 2025, which had the theme Bridging Taste and Time.

The cocktail pays tribute to the journey of Nikka Whisky founder, Masataka Taketsuru.

Taketsuru studied whisky-making in Scotland, later returning to Japan where he discovered his spiritual home – Yoichi, which is also my birthplace.

He chose Yoichi for its climate, water, and natural surroundings, all reminiscent of Scotland.

Northern Legacy honours that connection, using ingredients deeply rooted in the town's history.

The apple jam, for example, recalls the early days of the Nikka distillery, when they brewed cider to stay afloat.

It bridges tradition and innovation, past and present, Scotland and Japan.



Northern Legacy

- 50ml Yoichi Whisky
- 30ml Yoichi Wine & Heather Cordial
- 2tsp Yoichi Apple Jam
- 15ml fresh lemon juice
- 20ml egg white
- Lavender Bitters for garnish

1. Add all ingredients to a Boston shaker
2. Blend first, then shake with ice
3. Double strain into an apple-shaped cocktail glass
4. Garnish with Lavender Bitters (sprayed on top)

Headlines & Stuff



Are you the 2026 Bartender of the Year?

With the Australian Bar Awards underway, it's time to launch the search for the country's best bartender. With Spirits Academy the official sponsor of the 2026 competition, it is time to nominate for this prestigious title.

To give you a general idea of how the competition works, it is structured across multiple rounds designed to test knowledge, palate, creativity and performance under pressure.

The early stages focus on foundational knowledge and sensory ability, before progressing to practical cocktail challenges that test technique, flavour balance and creativity.

From there, a small group of finalists will be selected, with the top three advancing to a live final held at the 100 Most Influential party during Sydney Bar Week.

Full details of each round - including formats, timings and preparation



materials - will be released very soon.

The 2026 Bartender of the Year will be announced at the Bar Awards on Wednesday, 16 September at Doltone House, Jones Bay Wharf.



TOP 100

Australia's Most Influential Movers & Shakers

It's time to recognise the Most Influential

Bartender's Most Influential List is back for 2026 and it's time to cast your vote. Held every two years, the original who's who of the Australian Bar industry – *Australian Bartender's* Top 100 Most Influential – is back, with nominations open from 25 May.

Past winners have included Natalie Ng (2024), Stefano Cantino (2022), and Michael Madrusan (2019).

We are looking for people from all parts of the Australian bar industry, from bartenders and bar managers, to owners, brand managers, trainers, and designers – those who lead the way, who inspire, and who are shaping the future of our industry.

Once the nomination process has closed on 17 July, the team at *Australian Bartender* will evaluate each nomination and decide who makes this year's Top 100 Most Influential.

The full list – in alphabetical order – will be announced on 17 August.

The Most Influential party – held during Sydney Bar Week on 15 September – will reveal this year's most influential person.

The Bartender Magazine Most Influential List relies on your nominations – we want you to tell us who you think has most influenced the bar industry in your eyes over the last two years.

Enter your nomination from 25 May to 17 July at surveymonkey.com/r/Top100_2026Social



BARTENDER
OF THE YEAR | 20/26

× **BARTENDER**

Headlines & Stuff



Spirits Platform unveils new premium spirits identity

Spirits Platform has unveiled a new brand identity to reflect it becoming a full-service beverage solutions partner for the Australian trade, with a focus on the growing importance of cocktails across both on – and off-premise channels. It has expanded its offering to include mixers and syrups, enabling customers to access complete, scalable cocktail solutions from a single partner.

CEO Ian Atherton said it was more than a rebrand.

“It represents the evolution of Spirits Platform as a premium spirits-led business with expanded capability, built on a simple belief: building meaningful connections and creating exceptional experiences for our customers and the people they serve,” Atherton said.

Spirits Platform represents a portfolio of globally recognised brands across liqueur, whisky, and tequila, including Cointreau, Licor 43, The Macallan and Disaronno, alongside a growing presence in luxury and ultra-premium spirits such as Lark and Louis XIII.

The expanded portfolio is designed to support venues with greater efficiency while strengthening premium spirits visibility, ranging and rate of sale across both bar and retail environments. By integrating premium spirits, mixers, education and commercial capability, the business is positioning itself to deliver more practical, commercially focused outcomes for the trade.

The new identity is now live, reflecting a sharper, more modern expression of Spirits Platform’s commitment to premium and luxury spirits leadership and long-term vision for growth.

“As an independent, family-owned business, our focus remains on long-term partnerships and execution. We’re building a platform that the world’s leading premium spirits brands choose for growth, and one that delivers real value to our customers,” Atherton said.

Download Spirits Platform’s latest portfolio here: spiritsplatform.com.au/product-portfolio/

Bar Lourinhã marks 20 years

Melbourne’s Bar Lourinhã is celebrating 20 years of being a part of the city’s hospo scene. Founded in 2006 by Matt McConnell (head chef) and Jo Gamvros (MD), the Iberian Mediterranean bar and dining room was at the forefront of Melbourne’s small-bar movement, setting a standard for a relaxed, European approach to dining.

“Reaching 20 years feels incredibly special and quite emotional. To still be here 20 years later, doing what we love, is something we feel very proud of. It represents resilience, passion and the strong relationships we have built with our team, our suppliers, and our guests,” McConnell says.

Looking ahead, the pair remain focused on mentoring the next generation, deepening producer relationships and evolving with intention.

“If in another 10- or 20-years people are still celebrating their special moments with us,” says Gamvros, “that will be the greatest success of all.”

To celebrate, the bar is rolling out a year-long program of events, including releasing its cookbook, *Lourinhã: Iberian and Mediterranean Dishes to Share*.



Headlines & Stuff

Savile Row tailors its cocktail menu

Brisbane cocktail and whisky bar, Savile Row, has launched *Tailored*, a monthly collectible magazine with the drinks menu built in.

Savile Row GM, Jacob Cohen, says, "It is, in the politest possible terms, a quiet rewrite of everything a drinks menu has been allowed to become – and the first one we've ever designed to be kept, collected, and shared."

The format borrows from tailoring across three tiers:

- **Ready to Wear** – drinks that begin with a classic and wear it differently. Familiar silhouettes, altered at the seam.
- **Made to Measure** – drinks built from scratch. Original compositions, patterned to a theme rather than a template.
- **Bespoke** – a drink designed entirely around you. A consultation at the bar. A conversation. Then, the work begins.

Between the drink listings, each edition carries short stories from the tailoring trade, its craft, history, and language as well as a new cover, editor's letter, and a feature, whether a bartender profile, a rare bottle, a seasonal special, or a story from behind the bar. Across the 12 editions, the core cocktail menu holds fast while everything around it is refreshed each month.

Cohen is frank about the likely fate of the physical copies. Printed as a hand-finished object, *Tailored* has been designed with the expectation that guests will pocket it. Each edition is numbered and dated, with the bar inviting guests to collect the set.

"We wanted to show our working. Every drink here is the end of a long conversation about flavour, about intention, about the person who's about to pick up the glass. *Tailored* is the first time we've put that conversation on the page," Cohen says.



Massenez A staple behind bars globally. Now exclusively distributed by Australia Wine & Spirits!

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Headlines & Stuff



Dean & Nancy board the time machine

Dean & Nancy on 22 has launched its latest signature cocktail menu, Time Machine, taking guests through the cultural icons, inventions and milestones that defined the 1950s and 1960s.

Restaurant & Bar manager, Krisztian Csigo, said the 14 signature cocktails are a nod to the venue's origins, and the result of months of research finding both iconic and less well-known stories of the era.

"I wanted to take us back to the roots of the original concept behind Dean & Nancy, which is the 50s-60s golden era of hotel bars," Csigo said.

Some of the cocktails are:

Black Box

A sophisticated, citrus-driven whisky cocktail honouring Australian inventor Dr David Warren and his groundbreaking 1954 flight recorder. With macadamia-infused The Dalmore 12, mandarin oleo saccharum, blackberry, and an orange dust garnish to echo the real device's colour, this cocktail a toast to ingenuity that changed aviation forever.

Instant Camera

Blending nostalgia with innovation and channelling the childlike curiosity of inventor Edwin Land's three-year-old daughter who asked why she couldn't see a photo immediately after it was taken. Guests receive a freshly snapped instant photo as their garnish – a keepsake from their night in the sky.

Road Runner 'Beep Beep'

A playful tribute to the beloved Warner Brothers' cartoon, this tequila-based cocktail arrives in a custom 3D printed dynamite bar vessel – just like the ACME props of the TV classic.

2001 Space Odyssey

Inspired by the classic 1968 film, which centres on the spacecraft Discovery One and its onboard AI, HAL 9000. Fast forward to today, more than half a century later, its portrayal of AI-human tension remains unsettlingly relevant. The drink's garnish features a mirrored surface to evoke the film's iconic use of light, symmetry, reflection and altered perception.



Headlines & Stuff

RHUBI taps Eduardo Conde as ambassador

RHUBI Aperitif has appointed leading bartender, Eduardo Conde, as its new brand ambassador. The aperitif brand is looking to deepen its footprint across on-premise. Conde, most recently creative lead at The Maybe Group.

He will take on a broad ambassador role, working across serve development, menu integration, and trade engagement to showcase the product's versatility.

Conde brings strong industry credentials to the role, including being the 2023 Diageo World Class *Australian Bartender* of the Year. His appointment also strengthens RHUBI's ties to the global competition, joining founders Tim Philips-Johansson and Evan Stroeve, making it the only Australian brand with three World Class winners contributing creatively to its direction.

RHUBI brand director, Linn Philips-Johansson, said Conde's mix of technical skill and approachability made him a natural fit for the brand's growth.

"Eduardo brings a level of credibility and creativity that resonates strongly with the trade. His ability to balance technique with approachability makes him an ideal voice for the brand," Linn said.

The appointment comes as RHUBI continues to build traction in venues nationwide, positioning itself as a contemporary Australian aperitif suited to both spritz serves and cocktail modification.

Conde said the category offered bartenders room to experiment across formats.

"RHUBI is an exciting product to work with – it's versatile and sits in a space that encourages creativity. There's strong potential for bartenders to explore how it performs across a range of drink styles," he said.

The move signals a continued push by RHUBI to grow awareness of the aperitif category in Australia, particularly as venues look to expand lower-sugar and sessionable drink options.



Vodka's dirty shift

For decades, vodka has been the most versatile spirit behind the bar, yet often the least considered. Built for neutrality, it played a supporting role. But today's drinker is demanding more: less sugar, more structure, and a move toward savoury, textural drinks with intent.

Sunchaser was created for this moment. Developed in collaboration with leading Australian bartenders and distillers, Sunchaser reimagines vodka not as a blank canvas, but as a spirit with character.

Pure Vodka delivers weight and minerality, designed to elevate the Martini. Crafted from Australian wheat and pot distilled with a significant heads and tails cut, it delivers a spirit with genuine weight, minerality and structure. This is vodka built for the Martini, clean, textural and expressive, allowing simple serves to shine.

Dirty Vodka goes further, blending olive distillate and brine to create an umami-driven profile redefining the category. Sunchaser says it is a "deliberate disruption of the category".

Luckys Lounge

Lvl 1/83 Stanley St, Darlinghurst
@luckys.lounge

Lucky's Lounge has opened on Stanley Street, and it's not interested in easing into the neighbourhood. From Sam Overton – the operator behind Frankie's Cadillac, the new venue narrows the focus: martinis, control, and a room built to keep people in it longer than they planned.

"This is a bar built from the ground up around one obsession – making drinks people actually want to drink, and doing it better than anyone else," Overton says. "We make our own gin, our own vodka, our own vermouth. Not for the sake of it, but because no one else is doing it to the level we want."

That control shows up behind the bar. Nothing is pre-batched, nothing is rushed. "Everything is made fresh to order. No shortcuts, no compromises," he says. The result is a tight cocktail list that doesn't overreach – just executes. Martinis sit at the centre. "Stirred. Ice cold. No exceptions. We don't shake them, we don't bend the rules, and we don't apologise for it."

The menu leans into that clarity. The Frozen Appletini lands exactly where it should – clean, sharp, and built for drinking, while the Filthy As Fuck pushes further, loaded with muddled olives, celery bitters and served on the rocks. Beyond that, a full gin offering lets guests build their own direction, from Tanqueray through to saffron-led expressions, alongside classics like gimlets, southsides and negronis.

The room follows the same thinking. Overton handled the fit-out himself, leaning into detail rather than polish. "I prefer being hands-on – it's about getting every detail right," he says. Purple runs through the bar, offset by layered textures – velvet seating, timber finishes, hand-painted murals, eclectic rugs sourced and repurposed. A disco ball anchors the space, sitting above a green tiger rug that shouldn't work on paper but does. The overall feel lands somewhere between New York basement



bar and 90s R&B lounge – dark, loud in the right ways, and built for people to settle in.

"We wanted a space where people come in for one and end up staying all night," Overton says. "We've already had people miss dinner reservations because they're too busy drinking and having a good time. That's exactly what it's built for."

Food stays in its lane. Small, considered, and there to support the drinks.

Lucky's Lounge isn't trying to compete on scale or spectacle. It's tighter than that. Everything made in-house, everything built to order, everything dialled in. Or, as Overton puts it "No overcomplicated

Bar Hanami

403 Crown St, Surry Hills
@Barhanami

Bar Hanami on Crown Street has opened in the former Bad Mama site as a 98-seat Japanese-inspired cocktail and whisky bar. Owner Adam Tremont built the bar around his 17-year personal collection and a more considered, slower style of drinking.

The venue leans into contrast from the start. Upstairs, it's soft and open – a Sakura-style ceiling washes the room in pink, with seating spread across tables and booths that push guests to settle in rather than hover. Downstairs, it flips completely. A hidden basement “whisky dungeon,” built from an old boat and tucked behind a discreet entry, trades light for mood – tighter, darker, and designed for longer conversations over serious pours.

“For me, this was about creating a space where people can slow down and connect,” Tremont says. “Sydney has plenty of high-energy venues – this is something different.”

That shift in pace carries into the bar. The whisky list anchors everything, pulling directly from Tremont’s personal archive, including rare bottles and older expressions that aren’t often seen on lists locally.

Around that, the cocktail list takes a



different route. It leans nostalgic, pulling from ‘90s references but reworking them through an Asian lens. Drinks like the Fairy Floss Tingle and Lychee Sau Wau are built to be recognisable but not basic – playful without losing structure.

“The idea was to create drinks people connect with straight away, but still give them something new,” Tremont says.

The result is a program that splits cleanly – whisky for depth, cocktails for accessibility – without either side feeling like an afterthought.

In the kitchen, Babita Jaishi leads the food offering, bringing continuity from

the venue’s previous life while shifting the menu into a tighter, bar-focused format. The approach is simple: dishes that work with drinks, not against them.

For Tremont, the venue is less about reinvention and more about intention – taking a familiar Surry Hills footprint and turning it into something more layered. “It’s about giving people a reason to stay,” he says.

Between the upstairs dining room and the basement whisky space, Bar Hanami doesn’t try to be one thing. It just gives you options – and expects you to stick around long enough to work through them.



Opens



Bar Ferdinand

Level 1/7 Alfred Pl, Melbourne
@bar.ferdinand

Above 7 Alfred in Melbourne's CBD, Hunter St. Hospitality is opening Bar Ferdinand – a 21-seat cocktail bar led by Beverage Director Ali Toghani and Bar Manager Greg Thompson, landing on 22 April inside a heritage-listed 1885 building.

It's small, deliberate, and built around a single idea: cocktails as a walk through a garden. Not in a literal, garnish-heavy way – more in how each drink is structured, named, and experienced. The menu is split into collections like Rose, Fern, Camellia, Eucalypt and Arid, giving the bar a framework that stays put while the drinks shift with season and direction.

For Thompson, whose background runs through Apollo Inn and Gimlet, that structure is the point. It gives the list consistency without locking it in.

"A Rose Garden cocktail in a few months' time will be very different to what it is now, and that's true of the whole menu. What shifts is how each one

is expressed at that moment, depending on the produce, the season and where we want to take it. Sometimes that means thinking less literally. With Fern Garden, for example, you can't really work from fern as a flavour, so it becomes about capturing the feeling of walking through a fernery: the drop in temperature, the earthiness, the smell of rain. That challenge is what keeps the menu alive", Thompson said.

The drinks lean technical without feeling heavy-handed. Camellia builds from a house blend of teas steeped into fino sherry, landing bright with a savoury edge. Rose goes the other way with distilled petals, rosé vermouth and Macedon Ranges rosé, force-carbonated into something floral but tight. Herb is all texture, with gin, macadamia orgeat and clarified citrus pulling in fig leaf and sage, while Eucalypt cuts sharp and clean, pairing Calvados with nashi pear wine and eucalyptus soda.

Two house signatures sit outside the garden entirely. A House Martini keeps things cold and precise with gin, vodka,

Cocchi Americano, and apple mint, while a reworked Japanese Slipper nods to the building's history – the original was created on-site back in the '80s, but dials it into something lighter, sharper and less neon. The rest of the offer stays tight: a short wine list, bottled beer, and a food menu built like a polished snack spread – oysters, anchovies, pretzels, terrine, all designed to sit alongside the drinks, not compete with them.

Inside, the room does exactly what it needs to. Herringbone floors, marble, brass, and deep leather set the base, with a hanging installation of dried Queen Anne's Lace pulling focus above the bar. There is greenery throughout, but it's restrained – more suggestion than theme.

At 21 seats, it's not trying to be everything to everyone. It's built for people who want to sit, stay, and work through a menu that has a point of view. In a city that doesn't exactly lack cocktail bars, Bar Ferdinand isn't chasing scale – it's going small, specific, and quietly ambitious.

Bar Bridge

6 Bridge St, Sydney
@barbridgebar

MUCHO Group has opened Bar Bridge on 6 Bridge Street, taking over the former Double Deuce site and shifting the space into martini territory. It's the latest from the team behind Bar Planet, Cantina OK! and Tio's Cerveceria, this time zeroing in on the Dry Martini and the rituals that come with it.

The room leans into that brief. Low-lit, tight, and built for sitting down and staying put, it pulls cues from old European cocktail bars. Leather booths, candlelight, and a wash of red give it a city edge.

The drinks list keeps things tight and deliberate. Three Extra Dry Martinis lead, alongside a rotating monthly special – kicking off with a Passionfruit Creme Martini – and a short list of signatures. “We are searching for drinks that are electric,” says MUCHO Group Creative Director Jeremy Blackmore. “When two or three really bold flavours sing in harmony and the drink jumps out of the glass.”

The Bridge Martini anchors the menu, a clean, stripped-back take on a Vesper. It swaps vermouth for a house-made, freeze-concentrated Australian Brut, paired with seasonal vodka and local gin for a dry finish. Elsewhere, the Citron Martini runs bright and zesty with yuzu and Lillet Blanc, while the Kimchi Martini goes savoury, built on oyster shell gin, kimchi seasoning, and seaweed vodka.

Beyond martinis, the signatures pull from a broader flavour map. Concorde mixes Calvados, raspberry eau de vie and sumac into a sharp, pink sour; Pippin keeps things crisp with tequila, cucumber, and green apple; and Stirling leans richer, blending Scotch, mirin and pineapple into a whipped, foam-topped serve.

MUCHO's complimentary popcorn returns, this time in a sweet-salty nori version, but the focus is clear: drinks first, everything else second.

“The cocktails are excellent; the new popcorn flavour is my favourite yet,” says Group CEO Daisy Tulley.



“Bar Bridge is here but feels like it's been in Sydney forever.”

Open Tuesday to Saturday, the bar leans into the after-work and late-night crowd, with a 4–6pm happy hour pouring \$13 Bridge Martinis.

Book a booth if you're organised or roll in and take your chances.

Razz Room

18-20 York St, Sydney
@razz__room

Odd Culture Group has just opened their highly anticipated venue, Razz Room – an underground daiquiri bar and discotheque. The room is the first of two venues to open on York St, marking the group's first venture into Sydney's CBD.

The venue offers two distinct areas, the upper bar, and the sunken dancefloor, worked to feel intimate, yet laid back, the upper bar serves drinks and food throughout the evening until late. While the sunken dancefloor will offer entertainment with a mix of live DJ's, musicians, and performances running every night from 7pm until late.

Odd Culture Group CEO Rebecca Lines says the venue's atmosphere will shift throughout one night.

"Razz Room will really change shape throughout a single evening. Earlier, it's geared towards post-work drinks with a happy hour, substantial food offering, and music at a level where you can still talk. It's relaxed and social, but it has a clear point of view," Lines explains.

"As the evening progresses, you can expect the music to get a little louder and the focus will shift to live performances with recurring residencies and DJs that flow from disco to house, funk, and jazz."

The concept is a nod to the underground clubs of New York, taking inspiration from GG's Barnum Room and The Mudd Club, with Group Entertainment & Operations manager, Sabrina Medcalf, behind a guest line-up anchored in disco, funk, soul, and early house-adjacent sounds approached through a contemporary lens.

Lines adds, "The space told us what it wanted to be. Yes, it's quite literally underground, but we wanted to dig further into what 'underground' means culturally. Disco started as a counter culture. We kept returning to the essence of grunge and glamour in 70s era NYC discotheques with Paradise Garage a real point of inspiration. But Razz Room is no nostalgia project, it's a reimagining of the



next era of the discotheque."

And the Razz Room's signature cocktail? The daiquiri, made using an evolution of the regal shake cocktail technique, with a whole citrus peel – sans pith – in the shaker.

Group Beverage manager, Jordan Blackman, says the daiquiri was a no brainer. "Ultimately refreshing, a well-balanced daiquiri is unrivalled and transcends the cocktail world. The daiquiri is an incredibly malleable drink that means many different things to different people. It really lends itself to riffs and playful takes – we'll see how far

down the rabbit hole one can really go. We're chasing depth, complexity, and texture without wandering too far from the feeling of a real, classic daiquiri – shaken, frozen, blended and beyond," Blackman says.

Blackman also hints for guests to order the off-menu 'nuclear daiquiri, and to keep an eye out for the "snaiquiri" menu offering small, sipping daiquiris. The menu will also offer rum slushies, and a tight list of wine, beers, spirits, and cocktails.

The "Velvet Hour" runs from 4-6pm with classic, dirty, or strawberry daiquiris.

Opens



PIQU

194 King St, Newtown
@piqu_newtown

On King Street in Newtown, PIQU has opened – a tight, low-key Southeast Asian diner from chef-owners Jihwan Choi (ex-Momofuku Seiobo, Callao) and Nicola D'Angela (ex-Osteria di Russo & Russo, Callao). It's an unassuming space with a menu that doesn't hold back.

The two met working across Sydney kitchens and built the concept around a shared focus on Southeast Asian food, particularly Thai. The idea is simple: take the structure and technique, then push it. "The name comes from the word 'piquant' – meaning food with a sharp, spicy, or tangy edge, but also something that sparks interest. That's pretty much our whole ethos at PIQU," says D'Angela.

That approach shows up immediately in the kitchen. Mortar and pestle are doing the heavy lifting – galangal,

coriander root, chilli, and garlic being worked by hand, no shortcuts. It sets the tone for everything that follows.

The menu leans punchy. Raw Tuna riffs on a Thai laab, cut with beetroot and orange nam jim, loaded with herbs and built to be wrapped into lettuce cups. Larger plates go harder with riverine rump sitting over a dense, spiced massaman.

Drinks follow the same direction. Cocktails stay in-region, from a Thai Peanut Colada to sharper, citrus-led builds. The wine list comes via Alice Massaria of Wine Concept, with a focus that leans into what's coming off the pass rather than fighting it.

The room keeps things restrained. It's small, easy to walk past, and doesn't try too hard – sketches of chillies and limes scattered through the space, plus a hand-painted Last Supper-style piece by Choi's wife, with the chefs dropped in alongside a few unexpected Pulp Fiction cameos.



NIKKA PERFECT SERVE RETURNS: WHERE CRAFT MEETS CONNECTION



In an industry built on flavour, technique and speed, Nikka Perfect Serve asks something more of bartenders: presence.

Returning in 2026, the Nikka Whisky global competition is less about creating the most complex cocktail, and more about delivering a moment, one that reflects the guest in front of you, the story behind the spirit, and the skill to bring both together in real time.

For Australian bartenders, it's a rare opportunity to test not just creativity, but the full spectrum of what it means to work behind the bar.

As Nikka Whisky brand ambassador Marcus Parmenter says, "The best bartenders combine their skill with impeccable service, the ability to think on their feet and manage a range of different requests."

More than a cocktail competition

At its core, Nikka Perfect Serve is built on the Japanese philosophy *Ichigo, Ichi-e* – "one moment, one encounter" – a concept that places the guest experience above all else.

That philosophy shapes every stage of the competition.

Bartenders aren't just judged on what's in the glass, but how they read a room, respond to different personalities, and adapt their approach on the fly. It's this combination of hospitality, storytelling and technical precision that sets Nikka Perfect Serve apart.

In 2025, Sydney bartender Takashi Matsumoto demonstrated exactly that,

taking out the Australian title, and ultimately the Global prize with a cocktail that paid tribute to his hometown of Yoichi, blending whisky, apple and heather into a drink that was both personal and technically refined.

For Matsumoto, the experience went beyond competition.

"A cocktail becomes something special when your background, your story, and the flavours you love come together naturally," he says.

A legacy built on pursuit

Long before Japanese whisky became a global category, Nikka Whisky was built on one man's obsession with getting it right.

Founder Masataka Taketsuru travelled from Japan to Scotland in the early 20th century to learn the craft of whisky-making at its source, studying distillation, chemistry and blending before returning home to establish what would become Nikka Whisky in 1934.

That journey still shapes the brand today. Nikka Whisky's approach blends Scottish technique with Japanese precision, producing whiskies known for balance, structure and subtle complexity. It's not just a production story, but a philosophy grounded in patience, experimentation and respect for the craft.

For bartenders, that history becomes part of the serve. It's a narrative that adds depth to the drink, giving context to flavour and creating a point of connection with guests.



The 2026 Nikka Perfect Serve

This year's theme – Inspired by the Guest. Guided by Nikka – builds on that idea, asking bartenders to create a drink rooted in a real interaction behind the bar.

It could be a conversation, a request, or a memorable moment with a guest. The challenge is to translate that encounter into a cocktail, while connecting it back to Nikka Whisky's heritage, craftsmanship and philosophy.

The result should feel intentional, providing a clear link between the guest, the learning, and the final drink.

How the competition works

Round One: Online submission

Bartenders begin with an online knowledge test on Nikka Whisky, followed by a cocktail submission aligned to the 2026 theme. The recipe must:

- Use at least 30ml of a Nikka Whisky expression;
- include no more than six ingredients;
- be reproducible in a standard bar setting; and
- be supported by a written concept (max 500 words).

Round Two: Instagram challenge

Selected entrants move on to a 100-second Instagram video, sharing the story behind their cocktail. Not the recipe, but the inspiration drawn from this year's theme.

The brief is simple: authentic, unpolished, and filmed behind the bar.

Regional final

Australia's top bartenders compete live, preparing three cocktails:

- Two improvised "omakase" drinks for judges acting as guests; and
- signature cocktail submitted at entry.

Judging spans hospitality, communication, creativity, product knowledge and flavour.

Global final

The Australian winner will be flown to Japan for the international finals in November, with the trip including time in the home of the Nikka Whisky distillery, Yoichi, Sapporo and Tokyo.

What's at stake

Beyond the title, Nikka Perfect Serve offers something more valuable than a trophy. Finalists gain exposure on a global stage, connections within an international bartending community, and the chance to experience Nikka Whisky's distilleries and Japanese bar culture firsthand. For many, it's a career-defining moment.

"It's not just about making a great drink," says Parmenter. "It's about understanding the guest, telling a story, and delivering something memorable in that moment."



Why bartenders should enter

In a competitive landscape, Nikka Perfect Serve stands out for its focus on hospitality as craft. It rewards bartenders who can balance creativity with restraint, precision with intuition, and understand that a great tasting cocktail is only part of the experience.

Matsumoto says, "If you have a genuine interest in cocktails and bar culture, I would strongly encourage you to enter, because in the end, the perfect serve isn't just about what you make but how you make someone feel. 🍷"

Australian bartenders can enter via nikkawhisky.eu/perfect-serve/. Entries are now open and close on Sunday 14 June.

The Long Pour.



Whisky

Women and the world of whisky

Some may say whisky is a man's game, but Baxter Inn's London Purvis is here to set the record straight. Women have been at the heart of whisky making since its inception.

Words by London Purvis
Photography by Ethan Smart

A man walks into a bar. The bartender – let's think of her as an edgy young woman – asks him how she can help.

"Oh, it's alright, I wanted to talk to someone about whisky. Do you think he can help me?" the man says with a condescending smile.

It's not the setup to a bad joke; simply the reality that me and countless other women in the whisky industry, have to grin and bear almost every day.

I have had the pleasure of working in this big, brilliant, exciting industry for years now, and frequently get asked the same handful of questions: Have I ever tried whisky myself? How does a young woman like you learn so much about whisky? On one occasion, I was even told it must be hard for me to work in a whisky bar when I "don't drink whisky myself". (Anyone who has met me knows just how untrue that assumption is.)

These questions all circle back to one large, overarching theme; that whisky is a man's game. And how can we really even blame people for making that connection? Pop culture and marketing have painted whisky as a cornerstone in masculinity. That it belongs to the likes of wealthy gentlemen in leather armchairs with cigars.

What bothers me so much about the whole idea of whisky being made by men, for men, isn't so much the exclusivity of it; it's that it is simply not true.

From the very beginning

Women and whisky isn't some new, groundbreaking concept; they have gone hand in hand since before some of the earliest distilleries were licensed. For as long as the whisky industry has existed, women have been there to drive it forward with determination.

Take Littlemill in Scotland, the first distillery to get an official license. Though the doors to this iconic Lowland site are long shut, and the site burned down over 20 years ago, it's a favourite among whisky collectors.

Its iconic foundations were laid by Jane MacGregor, who took the reins in 1823 after her husband passed away and just shortly after the excise act came into effect. In an era when women were often not even allowed to "work", MacGregor became the first female licensee in the world.

Her shrewd eye for business doubled production, not just putting a once-modest distillery on the map but also aiding a boom in whisky production throughout the Lowlands region.

To put this into perspective – this was over 200 years ago. The UK suffragette movement didn't take off until the beginning of the 20th century, so women were running distilleries before we even had the legal right to vote.

Another legendary figure was Bessie Williamson. In 1934, she started work at Laphroaig as a temporary secretary, but was quickly recognised by the owners for

her drive and determination.

She climbed the ranks quickly and by 1938 was running the entire operation, creating trade deals with America. It was under Bessie's hand that Laphroaig avoided total closure during World War 2.

Here's where it gets really interesting; Williamson was also largely responsible for the single malt whisky movement. She saw the decline in sales for blended whisky, a lack of demand for new barrels, and that brands were evolving.

To ensure Laphroaig stayed ahead of the times, she positioned it to be sold as a single malt to the American market where a lot of industry trends were set. She popularised Laphroaig's distinct, heavily peated flavour.

So when people make the common assumption that a woman's "delicate palate" can't handle a smoky scotch, I say, "Tell that to Bessie Williamson".

The modern era

Today, whisky is still constantly evolving and is in very capable hands. Since 2021, Johnnie Walker, the highest selling Scottish whisky in the world, has been under the care of Dr Emma Walker, the brand's first female master blender in history. Her PHD in organic chemistry gives her a perfect grasp on just what will work, and she's already left her own stamp on a household name.



ABOVE RIGHT
& BELOW:
Bessie Williamson,
'The First Lady
of Scotch'

Another giant brand, Macallan, may have cultivated a "masculine persona" associated with luxury cars and James Bond, but it's Kirsteen Campbell, the brand's first female master distiller, who has been steering the ship since 2019.

A lifelong passion for whisky plus a degree in nutrition and food science have led her to create new and innovative ideas for Macallan – such as Their Harmony Series – along with bottling some of its oldest releases to date.

There are countless other women to name, from those who shaped whisky in the past to those working on its future.

Dr Rachel Barrie, affectionately known as the First Lady of Whisky, was the first female master blender in Scotland. Her devotion to the craft has left its mark on countless whisky brands.

In Ireland, Helen Mullholland was partially responsible for discovering a new kind of malt during her tenure at Bushmills.

I could happily spend all day talking about one woman in whisky after another, and I wouldn't come close to covering them all.

When someone tells me whisky is a man's game, I simply laugh, because it never has been. Women are firmly part of the past, present and future of the whisky industry. So raise a glass, ladies, we've earned it. 🍷





From the BOTY

Tea and coffee in modern cocktail culture

Tea and coffee are deeply entrenched in cultures all around the world. Tanguy Charbonnet, the 2025 Australian Bartender of the Year and Jackalope Hotels food and beverage director, looks at how they can be used in cocktails.

Words by Tanguy Charbonnet
Australian Bartender of the Year
2025 | Food & Beverage director,
Jackalope Hotels
@tanguy_charbonnet

**Photography by Brodie
Bloomfield (opposite)
Chris Pearce (page 26)**

I often think back to my early years in bartending, working in hotel bars where tea and coffee were deeply tied to the rhythm of the day.

Mornings belonged to coffee serving early risers in need of energy while afternoons were shaped by the elegance of the traditional afternoon tea.

Tables were filled with porcelain teapots and delicate cups, surrounded by the remnants of petit fours, macarons, and friends.

These moments left a lasting impression. Today, tea and coffee continue to influence the drinks world, driven by the passion of baristas and the ever-evolving café culture.

Their presence in cocktails is far from new. As early as 1862, the pioneering bartender Jerry Thomas published *How to Mix Drinks*, where we find some of the earliest punch recipes blends of tea, spirits, sugar, citrus, and spices.

Both tea and coffee contribute structure, balance, and complexity to cocktails. Tea brings tannins, floral aromatics, and subtle bitterness, while coffee delivers intensity, roasted depth, and a more pronounced bitter profile.

Like many aspects of the drinks world, their use moves in cycles.

Today, we are witnessing a renewed interest in both, as bartenders rediscover and refine their place in modern bars.







Understanding a cocktail's structure

Before exploring specific drinks, it is helpful to understand how a cocktail is built. A cocktail can be visualised as a pyramid composed of three key elements:

1. The base (structure)

At the foundation is the structure of the drink traditionally a spirit which provides body and defines its character. In contemporary approaches, this role can also be fulfilled or complemented by tea or even coffee, offering new layers of complexity.

2. The sour or bitter element

The second component introduces freshness and balance, typically through acidity such as citrus. In some cases, bitterness replaces or complements acidity. A classic example is the old fashioned, where bitterness plays a central role instead of sourness.

This is where tea and coffee become particularly compelling. Tea contributes structure through its tannins, bringing controlled bitterness and aromatic complexity, while coffee can act as a structural modifier, reinforcing bitterness and depth within the drink.

3. The sweet element

Finally, sweetness rounds out the drink. This can come from syrups, liqueurs, or naturally occurring sugars within ingredients. When these three elements are in harmony, the result is a well-balanced cocktail.

Together, tea and coffee allow us to rethink this classic framework not simply as a balance between sweet and sour, but as a more nuanced interplay of sweetness, acidity, and controlled bitterness.

Three contemporary tea-based creations

1. A floral tea fizz

The first drink is a refined fizz. It begins with peach kernels, roasted in a wood-fired oven for ten minutes, then infused in coconut water for two weeks. This infusion is transformed into a syrup with sugar.

To this base, an apple cordial is added alongside a low-ABV sake, which contributes a subtle saline character.

The drink is finished with Buddha's Tears tea from T2, a beautifully floral jasmine tea, cold brewed to preserve its

delicate aromatics. The final cocktail is fully carbonated, allowing the elements to integrate seamlessly and creating a harmonious balance.

2. A clarified jasmine tea & gin cocktail

Jasmine tea is infused into a floral gin Hendrick's Gin works particularly well here due to its distinctive notes of rose and cucumber, which complement the tea's natural aromatics. As the tea infuses, its tannins gently colour the gin while adding structure and a subtle bitterness.



Both tea and coffee contribute structure, balance, and complexity to cocktails. Tea brings tannins, floral aromatics and subtle bitterness, while coffee delivers intensity, roasted depth, and a more pronounced bitter profile.



To this infusion, a homemade lime cordial is added for brightness and balance. The mixture is then clarified using milk, resulting in a crystal-clear, luminous drink with a silky texture.

This clarification process softens the acidity, rounds out the tannins, and enhances the delicate floral profile, creating an elegant and well-balanced cocktail.

3. A shaken tea cocktail

The final drink is shaken, showcasing a cold brew of Phoenix Honey tea from T2.

This is paired with pear juice, a salted caramel coconut water syrup, and fresh lime juice. Shaking aerates the drink, enhancing its aromatics and building structure.

The tea's profile works beautifully alongside the richness of salted caramel and the freshness of coconut.

Coffee in cocktail culture

Coffee holds an equally important place in contemporary bar culture. In a city like Melbourne, where coffee culture is famously strong, its influence naturally extends into cocktail creation.

Coffee can be understood as a powerful bitter element, bringing intensity, depth, and roasted complexity to drinks.

When thinking about coffee in cocktails, many immediately think of the espresso martini a modern classic created in London in the 1980s by Dick Bradsell, originally designed to "wake up" the drinker while still delivering the effect of alcohol.

Another timeless example is Irish coffee, created by Joe Sheridan in the early 1940s (around 1943), combining coffee, whiskey, sugar, and cream into a warm and comforting drink.

Australia's strong coffee roasting culture has also led to the creation of distinctive products such as Red Mill White Bay Series Coffee Rum, reflecting both craftsmanship and regional identity.

Among contemporary creations, one standout is the Café Frappé, developed by Felix Wood at La Reine La Rue.

This refreshing and complex cocktail combines coffee, vodka, amaro, and crème de menthe, resulting in a drink that is bitter, vibrant, and particularly intriguing.

Sustainability behind the bar

In a more sustainable approach to bartending, citrus waste, such as leftover peels from lemons, limes, and oranges can be repurposed rather than discarded.

By covering these peels with sugar and allowing them to rest overnight, bartenders can extract a rich, aromatic syrup known as oleo saccharum.

Once strained, this syrup can be combined with lime juice and a cold brew of French Earl Grey tea to create a bright, layered, and sustainable cocktail component.

Tea and coffee are more than just ingredients they are tools of structure, balance, and creativity.

Together, they allow bartenders to push the boundaries of flavour, redefining how we experience both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. 🍷

Godfather

- 60ml blended Scotch whisky
- 20ml Amaretto
- 2 dashes bitters

Method: Stir all ingredients with ice, then strain into glass over ice

Garnish: Express orange zest twist over the cocktail and use as garnish

Classic

Godfather

Bold, simple, and a little bit dangerous - the Godfather pairs Scotch with a hit of amaretto for a smooth, no-nonsense classic.

THE DIRTY SHIFT

As drinkers move beyond citrus and sugar, savoury cocktails are redefining the vodka category and creating a new drinks frontier. Sunchaser is leading the charge, bringing texture, minerality and umami to the modern bar.

For decades, vodka has been the most versatile spirit behind the bar, yet often the least considered. Built for neutrality, it has traditionally played a supporting role, lengthening, lifting and blending into the background.

But the way people are drinking is changing, and vodka is being redefined in the process. Consumers are moving away from high-sugar, fruit-forward profiles, creating demand for savoury sessionable serves – as reflected by the increasing popularity of the Martini.

Sunchaser – an Australian spirits project developed in collaboration with some of the country's most respected bartenders and distillers – was created to meet this shift. Rather than chasing neutrality, the focus is on building spirits with character, precision and purpose.

Its Pure Vodka is crafted from Australian wheat and pot distilled with a significant heads and tails cut, delivering a spirit with genuine weight, minerality and structure. This is vodka built for the Martini, clean, textural and expressive.

Disrupting the market

Alongside it sits Sunchaser Dirty Vodka, a deliberate disruption of the category. By blending pure vodka with olive distillate and premium olive brine, it creates a savoury, umami-driven profile that sits somewhere between vodka and a lightly aged agave spirit. It's a product built not just for a drink, but for an occasion, the continued rise of the Dirty Martini as a modern classic.

Sunchaser is also opening up new territory within the spritz category. The Dirty Spritz, a simple build of Dirty Vodka, a touch of fortified wine and mineral soda, offers a refreshing, lower-calorie alternative to traditional citrus-led spritzes.

Venue opportunities

The Dirty Vodka is clean and highly sessionable, providing versatility, low cost build and standout margins for venues, while giving consumers something genuinely new. It also offers:

- Fast serve = improved bar efficiency;
- cross-occasion appeal (day/night); and
- a distinction from saturated citrus spritz category.

In a category long defined by neutrality, Sunchaser represents a shift toward flavour, texture and intent. It's not about replacing vodka's role behind the bar, but redefining what it can be. 🍷

Dirty Spritz

- 30ml Sunchaser Dirty Vodka
- 10ml dry sherry/vermouth/wine
- 120ml sparkling mineral water
- Cucumber slice and lemon wedge for garnish

Build over ice in a tall highball, garnish.





Three Martinis from Frisk. Small Bar

After 16 years, Frisk. Small Bar is tightening its focus on what it does best: sharp drinks, zero fuss, and a bit of attitude. Enter Three Martinis by Frisk, a concise, dialled-in menu that reflects the bar's long-standing obsession with the classic.



1

MSG Martini (Gibson)

- 50ml Wandering Distillery Rosemary gin
- 20ml Carpano Bianco vermouth
- 3 dashes MSG brine (onion brine plus MSG)
- House pickled daikon

"A nice savoury martini with the tang of house pickled daikon in place of onion and a healthy dose of MSG."



2

House Dirty Martini

- 45ml EVOO fat-washed gin, infused with rosemary, chilli and garlic
- 15ml dry vermouth
- 15-30ml olive brine (on preference)

“We ask how dirty you like it on a scale of 1-5. It appears on the till as the XXXtina (Aguilera)”

3

Happy Hour Wet Martini

- 45ml Damaged Goods Orange gin
- 20ml Carpano Bianco vermouth
- 2 dashes orange bitters

“Like orangey and wet, it’s perfect for an on-the-way-home drink or a pre-dinner tipple.”





BELUGA

THE NOBLE VODKA

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WITH CAVIAR



For all sales enquiries, please reach out via [@altus.brands](#) on Instagram.

The roots of Amari

Claudio Bedini continues his series exploring the world of bitter spirits.

Words by Claudio Bedini
@bitter_tales_

Photography by Chris Pearce

Bitterness is a flavour that has always existed in the world around us, in roots, in bark and in wild herbs.

For a long time, our palate read it as a warning. It's how we learned to recognise what might be harmful, what might be too strong, even poisonous.

And yet, over time, something shifted. What once signalled caution became something we learned to accept, then to understand, and eventually to enjoy.

As our understanding of these plants deepened, so did the way we used them. Apothecaries, monks and early pharmacists began working with roots, barks and herbs, gathering, infusing and refining them into preparations designed to support the body. Not just remedies, but early expressions of balance: mixtures that could stimulate appetite, ease digestion and bring a sense of equilibrium.

Over time, these preparations moved beyond their original purpose. What began as medicine became something shared at the table, part of everyday life.

Bitterness, once prescribed, found its way into the glass. This is where we find the roots of what we now call Amari.

By the late 1800s, producers began to explore bitterness from a different angle. Confectioners and distillers started shaping it not just for function, but for pleasure, creating lighter, brighter expressions that would come to define bitters and aperitifs.

And so today we find ourselves

surrounded by a wide spectrum of products: Bitters, Aperitifs, Amaros – categories that often overlap, sometimes confuse, and still resist simple definition.

So what is, really, the difference between an Amaro and a Bitter? Doesn't the word amaro literally mean "bitter" in Italian?

We're often told they serve different purposes, that we should have an amaro after a meal to help digestion, bitters and aperitifs before to stimulate the appetite. But in reality, they do both. Bitterness triggers the body, increasing saliva and gastric juices, and what this does, literally, is that it makes you feel hungry if you haven't had a meal yet, and helps you digest if you already have.

So, the difference isn't really about function, but about flavour, structure, and how they sit within a meal.

Bitters and aperitifs tend to be brighter, more direct, often lighter on the palate: something that opens the way and sharpens the senses.

Amaros, on the other hand, lean towards depth: more layered, more rounded and often richer in texture and aroma. Something that lingers, that feels like a natural end rather than a beginning.

It's about how bitterness is expressed: whether it's direct and lifted, or deeper and more rounded. How it sits on the palate. How it interacts with sweetness, alcohol and aroma. And ultimately, how it works at the table.

And so the real distinction lies in balance, structure, and intent, not in when they're served, but in how they're made and how they're meant to be experienced. 🍷



Jack Bar.

Postcard

A postcard from Ginza and Bar High Five

In Ginza, tradition still runs the bar. Tigerfish's Brendan Scott Grey shares a first-hand take on the district he knows best, and inside Bar High Five, where precision and repetition define the craft.

Words by Brendan Scott Grey

When I first came to Japan, I made the mistake of discussing Tokyo as if it was a unified concept. A city – of course with different districts – that would somehow be largely homogeneous.

The reality is it is more like having eight cities crammed together with strangely noticeable borders once you know what you're looking at.

For the past four years, I have been travelling to and working in Ginza, which makes me feel like this is the only district I can comment on with any level of understanding.

The streets of Ginza are a beautiful tapestry of grace and fashion with high end clothing, jewellery and apparel stores showcasing their wares through clean and elegant shop fronts often with someone waiting at the door to greet you as their sole responsibility (a role they take very seriously).

Gorgeous little pastry and cake stores are littered throughout with lines stretching down the block as tourists and locals alike compete to get today's limited release as a treat for themselves or a gift for someone special.

Head back a few blocks from the main strip and you find yourself surrounded by buildings with quiet placards announcing a plethora of bars and restaurants to be investigated on the various floors. Any street you pick will have a myriad of options. Finding the right one for you

requires either a lot for trial and error or an insider's tip.

Down one of the many side alleys then down a quick elevator trip you can find Bar High Five: a 22-seat cocktail bar renowned globally for the excellence of its head bartenders Ueno and Kaori. Once a year in the far corner, you'll see me frantically preparing your oshiburi, coasters and snacks to get to you before you sit down.

In a global bartending landscape of endless innovation Ginza (and Bar High Five especially) is perfectly happy to stick to tradition and focus on achieving excellence through execution. You won't find the latest lacto fermentation techniques here. What you will find is classic cocktails refined through years of dedication and love, served to you with all the reverence of a finely sculpted diamond.

To give you an insider's perspective; once Bar High Five is closed all the apprentices and interns begin working on some area of their craft. Just last night, I watched an apprentice spend two hours trying to make 10 Manhattans in a row of exactly the same flavour, dilution, and appearance. He never made it past three. However, this is the first step on his journey to excellence, and his dedication deserves all the praise in the world.

To visit Ginza is a joy. To work here is to dedicate yourself to something much bigger. It is my sincerest hope that more Australian bartenders come to be a part of that. 🍸



Profile

Trish Brew on building a brand

There's a fine line between passion and pure defiance - and Trish Brew has no interest in staying on the polite side of it.

Trish Brew, the founder of Bellicose Distilling Co didn't set out to gently enter the spirits market, she kicked the door in after years of watching flavoured gin reduced to sugar, and lazy assumptions about what drinkers – particularly women – wanted. What followed was a five-year grind fuelled by frustration and an unwillingness to compromise on quality. In this conversation, Brew speaks candidly about rage as a business plan, the cost of integrity, and why doing it properly is still the most radical move you can make.

What made you start your own company?

Honestly... rage, and I stand by that as a very valid motivator!

Every time I judged a spirits competition, I'd get the flavoured gin category. It felt like punishment. Fluorescent pinks, cloying flavours, and this ongoing narrative from brands that women want something sweet, frankly, it's patronising.

It wasn't just one moment that pushed me to create Bellicose Pink Gin. It was years of watching the category not be taken seriously, despite the gin boom.

The final nail in the coffin was hearing a distiller joke about slapping together a pink gin for a "Mother's Day special" – no thought behind it, just a cash-cow mentality – I hit the point where I thought, enough!

So, I said stuff it, let's make a pink gin I actually want to drink and that bartenders want to use. Something with integrity. Something that earns its place on a back bar. Something unapologetically bold, and

a note to that particular distiller, because when I think about mothers and Mother's Day, I think about fierce women who make the biggest sacrifices. There's nothing more powerful than that, and Bellicose reflects it.

When did it stop feeling like a concept and start feeling like a real business?

I don't know if I've fully hit that point yet, to be honest. There's still a level of imposter syndrome that creeps in. It's the messages from people saying, "I'm sitting at a bar in X state and they have your gin!" – those moments are unreal.

The support from some of the best bars and bartenders in Australia has been overwhelming, proper pinch-me moments! Sometimes I feel like a deer in headlights, thinking is this actually happening?

It feels like a real business when I'm chasing invoices but emotionally, it feels real when a bartender is excited to show me what they've created with my gin. When they're inspired and making something magical, and I'm thinking – wait, this is my product? Those moments get me every time.

What did those first months actually look like behind the scenes?

The reality is it took five years from idea to bottle, so the grind started long before there was even a product.

It was knocking on doors, asking people to take me seriously, and pushing through the naysayers. "Too risky," "too expensive," "wrong category" – you hear it all.

But what really stood out were the

people who said yes. The Gospel Whisky and Reed & Co. opening their distilleries and expertise to me – you really don't get better than these guys! Marionette helping source incredible fruit, and Jason Chan lending me a rotovap so I could actually bring the raspberry component to life.

And then the bars, the ones who backed it from day one. Friends who bought bottles immediately. And not just random bars, some of the best bars and restaurants in Australia. The places big brands pay to be in.

What part of building the business tested you the most?

The product, without question. I wasn't willing to cut corners. No artificial flavours and no fake colours make things exponentially harder and more expensive. Heritage raspberries from the Derwent Valley in Tasmania, vacuum distillation, building a proper London Dry base, it's a lot.

But honestly, the back end was the most obscene. The paperwork, the licensing, dealing with council, navigating all of that without even owning a distillery or having any business partners to help, it was a steep learning curve!

The saving grace has been working with people who are genuinely generous with their knowledge. That's something really special about this industry. People want to see you succeed, and often, it's the most successful people who are the most generous.

How many iterations did it take before you were confident?

Years. There were years of on-and-off R&D. Working with natural ingredients is incredibly challenging. I completely understand why brands go artificial – it's easier, cheaper, more consistent. But it wasn't what I wanted.

Andrew Fitzgerald from The Gospel said something to me that stuck, "Integrity costs". And it really does.

I made the decision to absorb that cost both financially and emotionally. It means I'll probably never be sitting on a yacht, but I can sleep at night knowing I created exactly what I set out to. And that's why Bellicose is what it is – uncompromising. And honestly, probably a bit stupid to attempt, but here we are.

What's the financial reality people might not know about or comprehend?

Excise tax. Every distiller will complain about it and there's good reason for it – it is crippling. You're paying a huge amount upfront just to get your product out of bond. Then add everything else: ingredients, rent, bottles, labels.

The raspberries alone cost more than my first car, which still makes me laugh/cry.

And then there's cash flow, going direct to keep pricing fair, venues that don't always pay on time, you carry a lot of that risk yourself.



It wasn't just one moment that pushed me to create Bellicose Pink Gin. It was years of watching the category not be taken seriously, despite the gin boom.



Starting a liquor company in Australia right now is not something you do lightly. You must believe in it so deeply that you're willing to wear all of that. And I am.

Was there anything you wish you had been warned about?

I was warned, heavily, but alongside that, I had people backing me and believing in me, and that balance is powerful.

The best thing someone said to me was: "If not you, then who?" And I agree, if you see a gap and believe you can do it better, or differently, or first, then that could be your calling.

I want people to understand – especially younger bartenders – that you already have access to an incredible network. You're not alone in this industry.

Also, you absolutely cannot do this alone, so talk to people, lean on them, and make it happen! You are in control of your own destiny so go out and slay it!

How different is being a founder compared to working in hospitality?

If you're good at hospitality, the world really is your oyster. People still give me the time of day now because of how I treated them years ago at Gin Palace. That carries through. The shift is that I'm still in service, but now it's to the trade. I'm thinking about how I can support venues, make their lives easier, create something that actually works for them. Yes, there's more commercial pressure, but at its core, it's the same philosophy: give people what they need, give them a great experience, be authentic, and they'll stick with you.

How do you know when to push on?

There were definitely moments when I thought I should quit. But you need time and pressure to create diamonds. Most people quit right when it gets hard, and that's exactly when you need to keep going. Also, seeing cheaply made products succeed pushed me even harder. It made me want to prove that you can do it properly, and that people deserve better. Even if this doesn't work out long-term, I know I've done everything I can to raise the standard. Better to build something you fully believe in and have it fail, than chase something you don't stand behind. You become what you do, so you should always try to do the very best you can!

What advice would you give to someone starting out?

If I can pass anything on, it's this: you're not just working in hospitality, you're part of a community. And that community will carry you further than you realise. No interaction is ever too small. Be kind to everyone!! You genuinely don't know where people will end up, and it always comes back around.

Know your "why" and make sure it's strong enough to carry you through the hard parts. If you're in it for a quick win or to sell out to a conglomerate, it's probably not going to work. If you genuinely want to contribute something meaningful and long-term to a category, then go all in.

I wouldn't be here without people backing me, so I'll always pay that forward. If you ever need anything, even just a sounding board for your idea, I'm here. Reach out anytime. 🍷



Gin distiller and now brand ambassador, Trish Brew was recently appointed as Australia's first brand ambassador for Teremana tequila.



Profile

Uliana Linenko: support, strengthen and build

For Amber Beverage Australia's new managing director, Uliana Linenko, the priority is supporting hospitality careers, strengthening trade partnerships and building long-term industry resilience.

When did you join Amber Beverage Australia? How does it differ from other markets you have worked in?

I will have been with Amber Beverage for one year in June and assumed the managing director role in Australia in July 2025.

Throughout my career, I have worked across APAC, Eastern Europe, the Baltics, Russia and CIS countries, which has provided a broad perspective on how different regulatory environments, retail structures, and consumer behaviours shape alcohol markets.

The Australian market is quite unique. Its retail structure differs significantly from European and CIS markets, where retailers are increasingly shifting toward hard discounters and everyday low pricing strategies.

In Australia, large retailers and supermarket groups continue to dominate.

Across APAC, channel structures vary widely. Markets such as Thailand, Hong Kong, and Singapore are largely driven by the on-trade channel, while Vietnam relies more heavily on traditional trade. Australia, by contrast, is characterised by a strong modern off-trade channel.

Due to relatively high excise taxes and the continued premiumisation of alcohol, the market remains highly trade-focused, unlike some other regions where sales are more price-driven.

We are also seeing strong participation from Gen Z consumers compared to Europe, which is an interesting shift in category engagement.

What is the importance of long-term trade partnerships?

A long-term strategy in international distribution is critical for sustainable growth. Brand awareness does not develop overnight, it requires consistent investment in distribution, marketing campaigns, and trade marketing initiatives.

For brands entering a new market, a minimum commitment of three years is typically required to establish strong foundations. The following three to five years are then focused on building brand equity and consumer engagement through social media marketing, events, and strong visibility in hospitality environments.

Strong partnerships between brand owners and distributors are therefore essential. These relationships allow both parties to align on long-term objectives and invest appropriately in building brand recognition and loyalty.

Execution is equally important. A strong trade partnership begins with a complementary portfolio and a clearly defined commercial strategy, including positioning, pricing approach, market share ambitions, and marketing activities tailored to local consumption behaviour.

Flexibility is also key as each market requires a customised approach – the right partner with relevant expertise ensures stronger outcomes. For example, in China an effective ecommerce strategy is essential, whereas other markets may require stronger on-trade activation or traditional trade development.

Trust, accountability, and the ability to adapt strategy together are critical to long-term success.

What is the importance of brand or venue identity and culture?

A clear identity and unique selling proposition are essential for any business, whether in hospitality, distribution, or production.

Creating a compelling environment, a clear point of difference, and strong expertise within the team helps attract individuals who are motivated by being part of a concept, rather than simply a workplace.

Consumers are increasingly seeking experiences that feel distinctive and memorable. They are willing to invest not only in food and beverages, but also in atmosphere, aesthetics, and new experiences.

Globally, we see many successful examples across categories where strong concepts are supported by consistent execution.

Having a compelling brand identity helps venues stand out in a competitive market, but consistency and persistence in delivering that experience is what ultimately builds loyalty.

Do you have a favourite cocktail?

I am more of a wine enthusiast. I particularly enjoy innovative de-alcoholised wines from both Europe and the New World, which reflect the growing consumer interest in moderation and evolving drinking occasions. 🍷

Career pathways: Brand rep

There are many misconceptions about the role of brand representatives in the bar industry. Bar Crafts' Alessandro Nardini dispels the myths and explores opportunities the role affords.

Words by Alessandro Nardini
Bar Crafts, @bar_crafts_

There are many labels thrown at the brand representative role, so let's clear the air. Brand representatives are more formally known as business development managers (BDMs) or business development executives (BDEs). No, they are not just retired bartenders, in fact sometimes they have very little hospitality experience at all. That's because this role is very different and requires very different skills from bartending.

That said, the stability of the role and its perks make it very attractive to people working in the industry. And yes, those with a hospo background often have a clear advantage, especially when it comes to empathy, communication, and understanding how venues actually operate.

A brand representative wears many hats, from sales to business development, relationship building, and brand advocacy. While the role can offer greater stability than other jobs in hospitality, here is a checklist of the skills you need.

1 Don't be a dick (classic)
This job is all about people skills and networking. Respecting your peers and showing up with an attitude that helps elevate the industry is crucial. In many ways, this can be a very solitary role, so

how you build and maintain relationships matters more than anything else.

2 Reliability (welcome to a routine)

It has very different hours from bartending – up early and ready for bed by 10pm. Night time or weekend events are only occasional, but being on call is part of the deal as is stepping up for special events or resolving issues.

3 Working independently (the lone wolf with heaps of friends)

The role can be surprisingly isolating. Having worked for a small independent brand and a larger portfolio, I can confidently say the experience is very different. When you're the only person covering a region for a small brand, it can feel lonely with a lack of office banter, minimal mentoring, and limited support.

Yes, you're visiting venues, seeing old friends, and making new ones, but a lot of time is still spent alone. Larger teams help. Having a kick-ass office to drop into a few times a week can be a breath of fresh air, even if most of your time is still spent on the road.

4 Numbers (yes, you have to know them)

If you think being a good rep is about knowing what lacto-fermentation is or which bourbon cask finished your Scotch, you couldn't be more wrong.



Knowledge is power, sure. But the job is really about supporting businesses with data, sales opportunities, deals, and contracts.

Understanding ROI, bonus stock, cash rebates, marketing spend, and why promotions exist is essential.

Being data-driven and able to analyse trends and growth opportunities is what makes you effective.

Must-know BDM acronyms:

- **BDM** – Business Development Manager
- **BA** – Brand Ambassador
- **BM** – Brand Manager
- **MOQ** – Minimum Order Quantity
- **MES** – Minimum Executional Standards
- **ROI** – Return on Investment
- **SKU** – Stock Keeping Unit
- **LUC** – Landed Unit Cost
- **PO** – Purchase Order
- **KPI** – Key Performance Indicator
- **CRM** – Customer Relationship Management
- **EDM** – Electronic Direct Mail

5 Organisation and self-control (yes, really)

Organisation is everything. Run plans, consistent calls, action plans. Knowing why you're walking into each venue gives structure and purpose to your day. Most BDMs work within a mix of the following:

- **Cold calls** – emails, phone calls, or walking in completely cold. Often at the worst possible time. Yes, it happens. I've done it myself. Research helps, experience helps more but cold calls are part of the job, you have to deal with it.
- **Sales calls** – the classic sit-down when you talk business with venue managers and owners. Preparation is key and don't pitch 100 ideas at once. BDMs, especially with big portfolios, can get overexcited and leave venues with nothing but a headache. Pick your wins. Focus on what works best for that venue, this industry runs on trust, it has to be a win-win.
- **Bar calls (the 'fun' ones)** – the company card, tasting stock is in the bag and there is great banter over the bar.

This is where professionalism and self-control matter most. It's very easy to slip back into nightlife bartender mode and party every night with your favourite teams. I've seen reps burn out this way more times than I can count.

A quick note to bartenders: reps not showing up for drinks doesn't mean they don't care. Many chose this role for routine, health, family, pets, or balance.

6 Rejection, resilience, and not taking it personally (this one hurts)

Think dealing with drunk guests is bad,

then try interrupting a bartender during admin time. I say this with love, but bartenders can be feral.

You might get shut down, shooed away, or looked down on. Some people won't like your brand, your presence, or you at all. That can be the harsh reality of the role, you need thick skin.

Selling is part of the job, yes, but it's about striking the right deals to ensure longevity, visibility, volume, and rate of sale. The goal is to give bar managers and owners the tools to grow their business. The goal might be to sell a product, but you have to ask the buyer the right question – do they need that product.

If there's no need, there's no sale. Sales is about adding value and fulfilling needs. That's it.

The best operators understand this and stay in regular contact with their suppliers. They build real relationships, share strategies, and unlock opportunities that give their venues an edge.

Look around. The venues killing it near you? They're usually tight with their suppliers.

Enjoying the perks

It's not all challenges. This job can open doors to entire career paths we'll explore in future pieces. You stay connected to the industry you love, but from the other side of the bar. You live the "day walker" life. You learn about products, trends, and how the world of booze actually works at scale.

And yes, there are perks:

- 9 to 5 routine (a dream for many);
- competitive salaries depending on experience and targets;
- car allowance or company car with fuel, rego, insurance covered;
- merch (your wardrobe will quietly become branded);
- personal allocations and staff discounts;
- travel, education, training, sometimes even university support; and
- additional benefits like gym membership, therapies, and dieticians.

Perks or not, being a brand representative is equally tough and fun, and definitely not for everyone. Hopefully this clears up a few misconceptions and gives you a clearer picture of what actually happens on this side of the bar.

But if you're looking at hospitality as your long-term plan, the options don't end here. More to come. 🍷



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Bartender Quiz

The Bar Exam

Test your knowledge of bar and cocktail history and culture. It's also a handy tool for anyone entering this year's Bartender of the Year, sponsored by Spirits Platform's Spirits Academy.



1. What is a mixto tequila?

2. What is Baijiu?

3. Name 3 x emerging Mexican agave spirits other than tequila

4. How would you describe a 'Spanish style' vs. an 'English style' rum?

5. What is an amaro and what are some characteristics?

6. What was the Rum Rebellion in Australia?

7. What is a 'clarified milk punch'?

8. What are two benefits of throwing a cocktail?

1. A tequila made with at least 51% Blue Weber agave sugars, with the balance from other fermentable sugars. 2. A high-proof, clear, and fragrant Chinese distilled spirit. Known as the world's most popular liquor by volume, it is traditionally fermented from sorghum and distilled, then diluted to bottling strength. 3. Mezcal, Raicilla, Bacanora. 4. Spanish style (Cuban, Puerto Rican) are lighter, vegetal, mineral driven. English style are richer, sweeter, more robust. 5. An Italian style herbal liqueur, typically bitter, phenolic, sweet, rich. Amaro means bitter in Italian. 6. A military coup in the colony of NSW in 1808, during which the New South Wales Corps arrested and deposed Governor William Bligh. The conflict arose because Governor Bligh attempted to restrict the use of rum as a form of currency. 7. A cocktail, batched and prepared with milk or other dairy product. After curdling, and reducing the temperature, the cocktail is filtered and clarified creating a silky, almost clear drink. 8. Creates aeration, while also chilling and lightly diluting the cocktail, and adds theatre behind the bar.

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