

June 2026

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#298

## Dry July The new era with Angostura



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# Ingredients.



## The Rail

p4.

### EDITOR'S NOTE

p5.

### THE RAIL

Silver's Motel Ice Magic Old Fashioned

p6.

### HEADLINES

What's happening in the bar world

p12.

### COVER STORY

Angostura Bitters and the growing opportunities from Dry July

p14.

### OPENS

New bar openings from around the country

## The Long Pour

p20.

### GUIDE

Darling Glebe's Jeff Shroeter explains pairing dishes with cocktails

p28.

### BOTY COLUMN

2025 BOTY, Tanguy Charbonnet, on using native ingredients in cocktails

p32.

### THE CLASSIC

The Gimlet

## Back Bar

p34.

### PROFILE

Doom Juice

p38.

### PROFILE

Jacob Jang, Conrad Seoul

p40.

### VENUE PROFILE

Bar Clara

p42.

### PROFILE

Nick King, Olivette

p44.

### BUSINESS OF BARS

By Alessandro Nardini

p48.

### STAFFIES

p50.

### THE BAR EXAM

# Welcome.



Hey Shakers and Stirrers,  
Welcome to the June issue of *Australian Bartender*. This edition comes to you as planning is well advanced for this year's Sydney Bar Week, with an extra day added to the program and a packed schedule of events. Also building anticipation is the bi-annual Top 100 Most Influential list. Nominations are open so make sure you get on board. And of course, Bartender of the Year is all systems go. Remember, you must nominate yourself to be in the running, so head to the website for all the info.

This issue is packed full of profiles, news, stories, and ideas. Jeff Schroeter has been behind the burners in some of the world's top restaurants over a 40-year career. He's back in Sydney with his latest venture, Darling Glebe. Jeff's insights and advice on how to match cocktails to food are as poetic as they are informative. Have a read from page 21.

And staying with flavours, our 2025 Bartender of the Year, Tanguy Charbonnet, shares his experience of using native ingredients to forge deeper, more creative thinking about flavour, seasonality, and sustainability. That's on page 28.

We have loads of profiles for you from page 34, taking you from Doom Juice's cellar door in Marrickville, Sydney, to 37 Bar on the top floor of the Conrad hotel in Seoul.

With so much happening, take a couple of minutes to draw breath with the mag and spark some new ideas.

*Kim Berry, Editor*

#### On this month's cover:

A new era for Angostura is underway, with the rapidly growing no- and low-alcohol movement driving greater creativity to create drinks that feel considered and grown-up, just with lower levels of alcohol.

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# The Rail.

## Ice Magic Old Fashioned

Silver's Motel, Newtown  
@silversmotel

Dessert nostalgia meets late-night bar energy with the Ice Magic Old Fashioned at Silver's Motel – a rich, spirit-forward twist on the classic that leans into caramel and chocolate.

Built around house-made whey caramel infused bourbon, tawny port and bitters, the cocktail is finished with an Ice Magic garnish that throws it straight back to childhood flavours, just with a more grown-up edge. Served at Silver's Motel in Sydney's inner west, it's indulgent, playful and dangerously easy to drink.

### Ice Magic Old Fashioned

- 50ml house-made whey caramel-infused bourbon
- 10ml tawny port
- 5ml 2:1 sugar syrup
- 3 dashes Angostura Bitters
- Ice Magic to garnish

1. Combine ingredients and stir with ice
2. Serve in an old fashioned glass
3. Add a column of ice and drizzle Ice Magic over the top



## Headlines & Stuff



### Spirits industry calls for urgent tax review amid illicit alcohol concerns

Spirits industry and liquor retail bodies are calling for an urgent review of Australia's spirits tax settings after research found illicit alcohol was being sold in licensed venues across Melbourne.

Researchers identified contaminated spirits that did not comply with the Food Standards Code, including products containing methanol above allowable limits.

Spirits & Cocktails Australia, Retail Drinks and the Australian Distillers Association say Australia's high excise rates are driving demand for cheaper illicit products. The industry has warned the spirits tax will rise again in August to more than \$110 per litre of pure alcohol.

Spirits & Cocktails Australia executive director Steven Fanner described the findings as unacceptable and urged the Federal Government to review tax settings that may be encouraging illicit trade.

Retail Drinks CEO Michael Waters said illegal alcohol was an increasing concern, while Australian Distillers Association CEO Kylie Lethbridge warned illicit products pose risks to public safety, consumer confidence and legitimate businesses.

### Expedition Trade expands portfolio with new global spirits brands

Expedition Trade has expanded its portfolio with three new exclusive distribution partnerships, bringing American single malt whisky, Irish whiskey and tequila brands to Australia from June 2026.

The new additions include Virginia Distillery Co from the United States, Dublin's Own Irish Whiskey from Ireland and Tequila Camarena from Mexico.

Leading the release is Virginia Distillery Co, which is described as the most awarded American single malt whisky distillery. Its Australian launch will feature the American Single Malt range and the Courage & Conviction collection, made using 100 per cent North American malted barley and aged for a minimum of four years.

Also joining the portfolio is Dublin's Own Irish Whiskey, a blend of malt and grain whiskeys aged in bourbon casks, alongside Tequila Camarena, produced by the Camarena family in Jalisco using agave grown in volcanic soil.

The brands will be available through Expedition Trade and wholesale partners Paramount Liquor, ALM and Liquid Mix from June 2026.



## Headlines & Stuff



### Jeremy Shipley Joins Spirits Platform as National Brand Ambassador for ABM Brands

Spirits Platform has appointed well-known industry figure Jeremy Shipley as National Brand Ambassador for ABM Brands, with Shipley officially commencing in the role on 1 May 2026.

Known across the Australian bar scene for his work spanning venues, education and brand-facing roles, Shipley will work alongside the Spirits Platform team to help represent and grow the ABM Brands portfolio nationally.

The appointment comes as Spirits Platform continues to ramp up its investment in trade engagement, events and education initiatives across the country, further strengthening its presence within the hospitality and bar industry.



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

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## Headlines & Stuff

### Hospitality turns to AI to tackle mounting admin pressure

Australia's hospitality industry is increasingly turning to artificial intelligence to manage one of the sector's biggest behind-the-scenes challenges: receipts, invoices and bookkeeping.

As venues continue to battle rising costs, labour shortages and tighter margins, operators are adopting AI-powered finance systems to reduce administration time and improve accuracy across day-to-day operations.

According to Steven Blaine from Decimal, the volume and complexity of supplier invoices flowing through venues has made bookkeeping a growing pressure point for hospitality businesses.

"Running a hospitality business is a real grind at times," Blaine said. "However technology is changing this, and many venues are capitalising on new ways of working by leveraging AI."

Hospitality businesses often process dozens of invoices each week covering food, beverages, cleaning products, fuel levies and operational costs, with operators requiring detailed visibility into where money is being spent.

Rather than consumer-facing AI platforms like ChatGPT or Claude, venues are increasingly using "agentic AI" tools such as Dext AI Assist, which uses computer vision to read receipts and invoices — including handwritten documents — before extracting and categorising the data into bookkeeping systems automatically.

Blaine said hospitality operators require more granular financial reporting than many other industries, particularly when suppliers provide multiple categories of goods under the same invoice.

"One of the use cases I always talk about is when kitchens are buying food from wholesalers who also sell them cleaning supplies, chemicals



or glassware," he said. "A hospitality business must understand exactly how much they're spending on each of those categories — they don't want everything dumped into one catch-all bucket."

He said AI-powered automation was allowing venues to separate those expenses more accurately while significantly reducing manual administration.

Decimal has also used the technology to automate more complex bookkeeping tasks for hospitality clients, including separating invoices between bar and kitchen departments when both order from the same supplier, and isolating fuel levy charges from food costs during periods of rising diesel prices.

"AI now can seamlessly code everything to the right expense account, without any manual input from us or the venue," Blaine said.

The growing adoption of AI is also being driven by compliance requirements, particularly around supplier verification and Australian Business Number checks.

"If the ATO audits a venue and they have got cancelled ABNs from suppliers, that becomes a serious issue," Blaine said. "Now AI can do that for you."

Beyond bookkeeping, AI is increasingly being integrated into reservations, customer service systems, analytics and point-of-sale platforms across hospitality.

Blaine pointed to AI-powered reservation agents as one example

already being adopted by venues, allowing bookings to be handled automatically without staff needing to stop service to answer phones.

Modern POS systems are also beginning to use AI-driven analytics to help operators better understand customer behaviour, menu performance and repeat spending habits.



### Melbourne's Bar Clara reworks signature cocktails for new winter menu

Hidden beneath Melbourne's Chinatown, Bar Clara has launched its new Autumn/Winter 2026 cocktail menu, Greatest Hits: Remix, reimagining some of the venue's most popular drinks from the past seven years.

Described by the bar as "a conversation with the original", the menu revisits cocktails that "raised eyebrows, drew a smile on that first sip, and cemented themselves in our memory", updating them with new techniques and ingredients.

Highlights include the signature Banoffee Special, Kiwi Cloud and Good Mimes, alongside returning favourites such as Pineapple Express, Fire & Earth and Major Tom. The venue's cult-favourite mulled wine, Mull It Over, has also returned for winter after first launching during Melbourne's lockdown delivery era.

Each cocktail is paired with a song that inspired the drink, with guests able to listen along via an old-school MP3 player at the bar.

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## Headlines & Stuff



### Australians are buying into brands, not just drinks, says Amber Beverage Australia

Australians are increasingly swapping standard spirit orders for more premium and culturally driven drinks choices, according to new Q1 2026 figures released by Amber Beverage Australia.

The distributor, whose portfolio includes Stolichnaya, 818 Tequila, Lyre's, Fernet-Branca and Tenjaku, reported strong growth across premium spirits and non-alcoholic categories as Australian consumers continue trading up and seeking more curated drinking experiences.

The company said the results reflect a broader shift in local drinking culture, with consumers increasingly buying into brands tied to lifestyle, social occasions and global culture rather than simply defaulting to familiar spirit orders.

Managing Director Uliana Linenko said Australians were becoming more intentional with what they drink.

"Australians aren't just buying a drink anymore, they're buying into a brand and a cultural moment," Linenko said. "They're more curious, more considered, and more willing to trade up than ever before."

The tequila category continued to outperform during the quarter, driven by growing demand for premium and super-premium expressions, while the non-alcoholic segment also continued its rapid growth trajectory.

### MUCHO Group appoints Daisy Tulley as CEO

MUCHO group has just appointed Daisy Tulley as Group CEO, officially stepping into the top role overseeing the operator behind venues including Cantina OK!, Tio's Cervceria, The Cliff Dive, Bar Bridge, Bar Herbs, Centro 86 and Bar Planet.

Tulley's appointment marks the next chapter for the independent group, which has several new projects currently in development. While the title is new, Tulley has been part of MUCHO's growth for more than a decade, first joining The Cliff Dive during its redevelopment phase.

Initially working across marketing, branding, and creative direction, Tulley

helped reshape the once-struggling venue into one of Sydney's longstanding nightlife spots, later moving into the role of Group General Manager before taking on the CEO position.

Before hospitality, Tulley spent years touring internationally as a musician with her band Bridezilla, performing alongside acts including Florence and the Machine, Coldplay, and Nick Cave. Raised in an Australian



Army family and moving internationally throughout her childhood, she said those experiences shaped the way she approaches culture, creativity, and leadership.

"At the heart of everything we do is a desire to bring more joy to Sydney," Tulley said. "I'm incredibly proud of what we've built at MUCHO so far, and excited to continue evolving alongside our teams, guests, and communities. We want to keep creating venues that feel welcoming, inclusive, and deeply connected to Sydney's cultural fabric, and as we continue to grow, that people-first approach remains at the centre of everything we do."

## Headlines & Stuff



### Love Tilly Group connects portfolio through new digital hub

As hospitality groups grow, the challenge is no longer just filling seats – it's connecting customers with the wider portfolio. Love Tilly Group has taken that approach online, launching a new platform that brings its 11 Sydney venues together under one digital home while preserving the individual identities that made each venue successful in the first place.

Developed by digital product studio Nightjar, the new platform consolidates the group's collection of restaurants, wine bars and bakeries, including Love Tilly Devine, Dear Sainte Éloise, Ragazzi, Palazzo Salato, Letra House, four Fabbrica pasta bars and two Fabbrica Bread Shop bakeries.

Until now, each venue operated its own website, making it "difficult for guests to discover other venues within the group" and creating additional complexity behind the scenes. The new platform places the Love Tilly Group brand at the centre while allowing each venue to maintain its own voice, aesthetic and booking experience.

Designed with future growth in mind, the platform allows new venues to be added as the group expands and creates opportunities for group-wide marketing

initiatives, customer loyalty programs, and cross-venue promotions.

Love Tilly Group co-founder Matt Swieboda said the business had reached a point where its digital presence no longer reflected the scale of its operations.

"Since 2010, we've been creating venues that each have their own personality, their own menus, teams and regulars," said Swieboda.

"As we've grown, we found our digital presence had become difficult to navigate, and it was time to bring everything together under one Love Tilly Group platform. We'd like guests to easily find information about their favourite bar or restaurant, while also discovering somewhere new,"

Nightjar Chief Product Officer Ahmed Meer said the project was designed to strengthen connections between guests and the broader Love Tilly portfolio.

"The challenge with a collection like Love Tilly Group is that the venues aren't just brands – they're places with history, personality and genuine followings," says Meer.

"Our job was to build a platform that earns the trust of those existing communities while opening a door to the wider group."

### Hellyers Road unveils new hands-on whisky experience

Hellyers Road Distillery has launched Distillers' Choice, a new Cellar Door experience that gives visitors the opportunity to bottle and label their own cask-strength whisky straight from the barrel.

More than a year in the making, the experience allows guests to taste and select from 14 casks aged between eight and 22 years before drawing their chosen whisky using a traditional Copper Dog and filling a personalised 500mL bottle to take home.

Inspired by the whisky experiences of historic distilleries, Distillers' Choice features casks sourced from regions including Madeira, Sicily, Spain and France's Armagnac region. Hellyers Road says the offering is the most comprehensive direct-from-cask whisky experience available in Australia.

The project also showcases Tasmanian craftsmanship, with custom Copper Dogs and trays produced by Launceston workshop Rankin & Bond, while signage and leather goods were created by local makers including AL's Custom Signage, Rob van Tholen and Maka Leathergoods.

The launch adds a new tourism offering to Tasmania's whisky scene, giving visitors rare access to mature Australian single malts directly from the cask.



# BITTERS, BALANCE AND THE NEW ERA OF DRY JULY

What was once viewed as a the month of abstinence has evolved into one of the biggest opportunities in the modern drinks landscape.



Dry July now sits at the centre of the rapidly growing no- and low-alcohol movement, with younger consumers increasingly seeking sophisticated alternatives to traditional full-strength serves.

According to a 2025 Finder survey, 31 per cent of Millennials and 29 per cent of Gen Z consumers planned to go alcohol-free during July, highlighting just how mainstream moderation has become.

For bars and venues, the shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Guests no longer want soft drinks masquerading as alcohol alternatives. They want drinks with texture, balance, bitterness and complexity – serves that feel considered and grown-up.

That's where Angostura comes in.

For more than 200 years, Angostura has played a defining role behind bars around the world. The brand's iconic bitters have become an essential tool for bartenders, adding depth, spice and structure to cocktails ranging from the Old Fashioned through to the Manhattan and countless modern classics.

Despite its global status, much of Angostura's mystique remains intact. The exact recipe behind the brand's signature Aromatic Bitters is still known only to a select few employees, with the blend of herbs, spices and botanicals remaining one of the drinks industry's most closely guarded secrets.

What is clear, however, is the role bitters continue to play behind the bar.

In traditional cocktails, bitters help tie flavours together, balancing sweetness while adding complexity and length. In no- and low-alcohol serves, those

same characteristics become even more important. Without the weight and structure alcohol naturally provides, non-alcoholic drinks can often feel thin or overly sweet. Bitters offer bartenders a way to rebuild that structure using ingredients they already have on hand.

It's one of the reasons Angostura's Dry July campaign is resonating so strongly with venues across Australia this year.

Rather than encouraging operators to completely reinvent their menus, the campaign focuses on simple, flavour-driven serves that elevate non-alcoholic drinking occasions beyond juice and soft drink territory. For bartenders, it presents an accessible way to create sophisticated alcohol-free options without introducing significant cost or operational complexity.

In many ways, Australian drinkers are already deeply familiar with the concept.

The Angostura Lemon Lime & Bitters has long held a unique place within Australian drinking culture, becoming one of the country's most recognisable non-alcoholic serves. Ordered by generations of pubgoers, diners and designated drivers alike, the drink remains a staple across bars, restaurants and pubs nationwide.

Its enduring popularity speaks to something larger than nostalgia alone. Australians increasingly expect non-alcoholic options that still feel social, flavourful and considered – particularly in premium hospitality settings.

For venues, that expectation represents a growing commercial opportunity.

As consumer moderation habits continue to evolve, non-alcoholic serves are no longer limited to a small section at the back of the menu. Guests are actively seeking out bars and venues that treat low – and no-alcohol drinks with the same level of care and creativity as traditional cocktails.

Importantly, bitters-led serves also make operational sense. Bartenders can build complex drinks using existing citrus, syrups, sodas, herbs and fresh ingredients already stocked behind the bar, without the need for large investments into dedicated non-alcoholic spirit ranges.

That flexibility is particularly valuable



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**Moderation no longer means compromising on flavour, complexity or the overall drinking experience.**

//

during busy service periods, where speed, familiarity and consistency remain critical.

The rise of moderation also reflects broader changes in consumer behaviour. Younger drinkers are increasingly approaching alcohol consumption with greater intentionality – drinking less frequently, alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic options, or seeking

balance across a night out rather than abstinence entirely.

For the hospitality industry, adapting to that shift is becoming less about trend-chasing and more about meeting changing guest expectations.

Few brands are better positioned to support that transition than Angostura. With two centuries of cocktail heritage behind it, the brand remains as relevant today as ever – not simply because of tradition, but because of its versatility behind the bar.

As Dry July continues to evolve, one thing is becoming increasingly clear: moderation no longer means compromising on flavour or experience.

And for bartenders willing to rethink what non-alcoholic drinks can look like, bitters may be one of the most powerful tools already sitting on the back bar.

To learn more about Angostura's Dry July activations and serves, contact your local brand ambassador. 📍

## Bar Bruno

18-20 York St, Sydney  
@barbruno\_sydney

Odd Culture Group has opened a new all-day neighbourhood osteria in Sydney's CBD, with Bar Bruno on York Street. Sitting above Razz Room, the recently opened underground daiquiri bar and discotheque, Bar Bruno marks Odd Culture Group's second CBD venue launch this year.

Located at 18-20 York Street, the venue is led by Odd Culture Group chief executive officer Rebecca Lines and takes its cues from the casual, familiar nature of Italian osterias, with a focus on approachable food, aperitivo-style drinks, and all-day hospitality.

"We see 'neighbourhood' as less about geography and more about connection," says Lines.

"Bar Bruno will always offer guests – no matter whether they are regulars or first-time diners – the same, consistent experience of thoughtful food and genuine hospitality."

The drinks offering has been shaped by Odd Culture Group beverage manager Jordan Blackman, who describes the menu as "a celebration of aperitivo culture," leaning heavily into bitter flavours, spritzes, amaro, and Italian classics with a playful edge.

Cocktails include Bruno's Negroni with Four Pillars olive leaf gin, rockmelon, olive, and house vermouth; a Strawberry & Radicchio Spritz with gentian and velvet falernum; and a Margarita Italiano mixing Patrón Silver Tequila with amaretto and limoncello. There's also a Pine Nut Old Fashioned made with bourbon, Cynar and toasted pine nut, alongside a Grasshopper topped with Mapo's fior di latte gelato and a classic Caffè Corretto served with grappa, amaretto or Strega.

Aperitivo staples feature heavily across the menu with Milano-Torinos, Aperol Spritzes and Negronis, while the non-alcoholic list includes a No-Groni, Crodino Spritz, T.I.N.A 3.0 with hōjicha green tea and pink guava, plus alcohol-free wine, and beer options.



"The wine list will be very unapologetically Italian, of course – why drink Petit Chablis when you can enjoy Etna Bianco or Soave?" says Blackman.

The concise 100-bottle wine list will rotate regularly and focus on Italian producers, emerging winemakers, and Australian producers working with Italian varietals, alongside rare Barolo bottlings, and back-vintage Etna wines.

In the kitchen, Odd Culture Group executive chef Tony Gibson has designed a menu that moves throughout the day, starting with Genovese coffee and house-made pastries before shifting into an à la carte offering focused on seafood, crudo and meat dishes over heavier

pasta-driven fare.

Designed by Sarah Watt of Studio Vista, the space leans into the building's heritage details with exposed brick walls, high ceilings, exposed beams and hammered glass windows inspired by New York warehouse spaces. Booths, bar seating, and communal tables sit alongside walls lined with artwork and hand-painted ceramics, creating a venue designed equally for quick solo coffees, long lunches, late-night cocktails and after-work catch-ups.

Bar Bruno is now open at 18-20 York Street, Sydney, operating from 10am until late Monday to Friday and from 12pm until late on Saturdays.

## Opens

# Julietta

220 Toorak Rd, South Yarra  
@julietta.melbourne

Julietta has opened on the corner of Toorak Road and Chambers Street in South Yarra, a 35-seat neighbourhood Italian restaurant and bar from the team behind Mamasita, led by owner Joss Jenner-Leuthart alongside Executive Chef Jimmy Garside and Operations Director Merilin Nogo.

The cocktail list digs a little deeper than a straight classics run, but never loses the core. Led by Beverage Director Eduardo Conde, he keeps the structure familiar, then nudges it with small, deliberate tweaks, while drawing from 1960s and 1970s classic builds.

The dedicated Negroni section is the anchor – not just a token inclusion, but a full spectrum of styles that move from spirit-forward and dry through to brighter, more playful builds. The ‘Andalucian’ leans savoury with shiraz gin and cream sherry adding weight and salinity, while the ‘Guilty Rosita’ flips things lighter, layering tequila with strawberry campari and white cacao for something that drinks softer but still holds bitterness. Beyond that, it’s a tight edit of Italian-leaning classics and aperitivo-style serves designed to slot straight into how people actually drink.

Inside, it’s built to feel like it’s been there longer than it has. European awnings, pavement seating, and a dining room that leans into worn-in trattoria hues – lime-washed ceilings, brass lighting, burgundy banquettes, and shelves stacked with Italian bottles, house pickles, and pantry staples.

Food follows that same logic. Garside’s menu centres on hand-made pasta, produced daily and kept to a tight eight-dish lineup. It moves from straight classics – cacio e pepe, tagliatelle with sausage or short rib ragu. Antipasti set the tone early with burrata, crudo and cured meats, while desserts stick to the brief – semifreddo, citrus-driven cake, and chocolate with olive oil – clean finishes, no overthinking it.





## The Gopher

40 The Corso, Manly  
@gophermanly

Beneath Manly Corso, a new Irish-inspired basement bar has opened, The Gopher. Created by Manly local and co-owner Matt Clifton, the late-night venue leans heavily into atmosphere, live music and a drinks list built for long nights underground.

The cocktail offering balances classic Irish pub drinking with sharper modern serves. Signatures include the Hells Bells, a butter-washed martini built with a richer, savoury edge, alongside The Sinner, a pineapple and habanero margarita that pushes sweet and spicy flavours. Guinness and Kilkenny sit on tap, while a rotating UK beer of the month keeps the beer offering moving beyond the standard Irish pub formula.

Rather than recreating a traditional pub, The Gopher takes a darker and more cinematic approach. Guests descend below street level into a low-lit basement filled with worn textures, reclaimed century-old lighting and vintage fixtures sourced internationally. The venue draws influence from early 1900s Ireland but filters it through New York dive bar energy and late-night music culture.



The name itself comes from the Gopher Gang, an Irish-American street crew from Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen, with references threaded throughout the venue through storytelling details, an honours board and its own "100 Pint Club." Live bands will play most nights from early evening until late, leaning into the venue's focus on bringing proper late-night energy back to Manly.

Despite sitting metres from the beach, The Gopher feels intentionally disconnected from the outside. The space is designed to feel discovered rather than obvious – more basement drinking den

than polished coastal retreat.

The food offering follows the same approach. Irish pub staples are reworked into smaller share-style dishes designed to keep people drinking and staying longer. Pulled beef yorkshire pudding pies, black pudding scotch eggs, slow-cooked roast lamb shoulder and Irish spice bags all feature across the menu.

With live music running most nights, cocktails built for late sessions and doors open until 3am on Fridays and Saturdays, The Gopher is positioning itself as a proper late-night venue beneath Manly Corso rather than just another beachside bar.

## Jude's Basement Bar

15 Bayswater Rd, Potts Point  
@judesbasementbar

Potts Point is getting another late-night addition, with underground cocktail bar Jude's opening beneath Bayswater Road today. The 30-seat basement lounge comes from Watering Hole Hotels, bringing together old-school Potts Point glamour with the rougher edge of Kings Cross in a dimly lit, retro-inspired space built for cocktails, music and nights that drag on longer than planned.

Hidden underneath Penny's Hotel, the venue leans hard into nostalgia. There's mirrored walls, suede curtains, velvet lounge chairs, marble tables, and a disco ball hanging from the exposed ceiling, while a playlist stacked with classic tracks sets the tone. Guests can settle in beneath windows overlooking the street above, though the idea is clearly that nobody stays seated all night.

Jude's licensee Tayla Holborow says the venue is designed as an escape from the pace outside. "Great cocktails, music and an escape from the fast-paced outside world is what we all need a little bit of right now," she says.

The drinks list has been created by Matthew Cridge, with every cocktail pulling from retro references and reworking them through a more modern lens. The signature Hey Jude combines elements of a lychee martini and spicy margarita, mixing Belvedere vodka, lychee, lemon, and chilli for something sweet upfront with a lingering heat behind it.

There's also the Smokin' Paps, named after Cridge's grandfather, where smoked wood chips are trapped beneath an inverted Nick and Nora glass before the cocktail is poured with Jack Daniel's Honey, Sazerac Rye, and orange bitters. The Vesper Blush goes heavier on theatre, using liquid nitrogen to rapidly chill a mix of Tanqueray gin, Grey Goose vodka and Lillet Rosé.

"Every cocktail on the list draws inspiration from the past, reimagining classic flavours and familiar serves



through a modern lens while retaining a sense of nostalgia," Cridge says.

Bringing the drinks to life each night is British bartender Danny Renwick, whose background includes London rooftop bar Pergola and Michelin-starred UK restaurant House of Tides.

Beyond cocktails, the venue's wine list moves between classic European regions and Australian producers, with Champagne, Chablis, German Riesling and skin-contact wines all making an appearance alongside reds from Portugal, Spain and Italy.

Food stays firmly in "girl dinner" territory. Tables are greeted with complimentary soy-glazed pepitas (pumpkin seeds) before moving into truffle fries, baked camembert with hot honey, charcuterie boards, battered artichokes with nduja aioli and cheese plates. There's also a \$10 vanilla crème brûlée for anyone still standing by the end of the night.

Jude's opens Thursday to Saturday from 5pm until late, operating on a walk-in-only basis.



## Opens



## Benetti's

2 Princess St, Brighton-Le-Sands  
@benettis.italian

Brighton-Le-Sands has a new Italian restaurant on the water, with Benetti's now open inside The Brighton Hotel Sydney. Open daily from midday through to midnight, the venue leans into long lunches, late dinners and aperitivo culture, with house-made pasta, woodfired pizza and big-format cocktails designed to keep the table going well into the evening.

The drinks list is where Benetti's really settles into its identity. Built around Italian aperitivo drinking, the menu keeps things sharp, bitter, and easy to drink. The Benetti's Negroni for Two – lands as the centrepiece, combining Never Never Oyster Shell Gin, Campari and dry vermouth with a saline edge that gives it a coastal feel without trying too hard. There's also the Arancello Spritz with Marmio Arancello and prosecco, built for afternoons that accidentally become dinner, while the Paloma alla Veneziana mixes mezcal, Select Aperitivo and grapefruit soda for something smoky and slightly bitter.

It's a list that knows exactly where it is. Beachside drinking without frozen cocktails and gimmicks. Italian influence



without becoming a theme park. The kind of menu designed for ordering one round too many because everything is built to stay light enough to keep moving.

Inside, the venue shifts with the day. Designed by Paul Papadopoulos of DS17, the room pulls from Amalfi Coast tones at golden hour, with soft peach, blush and white across lime-washed walls, textured plaster finishes and marble surfaces inspired by Italian modernist interiors. By day it plays relaxed and sunlit, but as the night rolls in and DJs take over, the energy lifts without losing the laid-back feel.

In the kitchen, Puglia-born Head Chef Mariocristian Carella leads a menu focused on Southern Italian cooking and share-style dining. A La Monferrina pasta machine imported from Italy produces fresh pasta daily using Molino Casillo flour, while a Marana Forni woodfired oven handles the pizza offering.

With strong cocktails, house-made pasta, and a beachfront location, Benetti's is shaping up as an all-day spot built for long lunches, late dinners and everything in between.

## Dr Goodes

27-33 Oxford Street, Paddington  
@drgoodes

Taking over the former El Primo Sanchez site on Oxford Street, Dr. Goodes has officially opened in Paddington, bringing a music-led pizza and cocktail bar to Sydney's Inner East.

The new venue is the work of a group of Sydney hospitality veterans, with head of beverage Brandon Martignago of Dulcie's Kings Cross helping shape the drinks and overall direction of the space.

"The concept of Dr. Goodes draws on the spirit of disco not as a theme, but as an influence brought into a modern context through a nostalgic filter," says Martignago.

"It's about creating a space that feels open, unpretentious and built around people, music and atmosphere."

By day and early evening, the venue leans into pizza, cocktails, and relaxed drinks, before shifting into what the team calls a "boogie den" later in the night, with DJs and dance-focused programming taking over the room.

The food offering centres around New York – and Roman-style pizzas, ranging from classic Margherita and Pepperoni to more left-of-centre options like Prawn

Saganaki and 'Nduja, plus a Wagyu Pastrami pizza with gruyere and pickled cabbage. There's also snacks, desserts and an "ultimate cheese toastie" on offer.

"Pizza is the ideal dish for Dr. Goodes as it's designed to work with the venue – starting as a substantial offering early on before becoming a great sharable, snackable option as the space unfolds into the more social, late-night vibe," Martignago says.

Drinks focus on approachable cocktails designed for easy drinking and the dancefloor, with tap cocktails including spicy margaritas, espresso martinis, palomas and spritzes, alongside signature cocktails, wine, beer and non-alcoholic options.

"The Dr. Goodes drinks menu is full of recognisable styles but with some fun, modern riffs designed to taste great and be a fun yet easy partner for the dancefloor," says Martignago.

Music sits at the centre of the venue, with Sydney DJ Richy Penny curating a rotating lineup of local and guest DJs across Thursday to Saturday nights.

"Music evolves with the space at Dr. Goodes," says Penny.

"It starts with more relaxed, groove-led sets earlier in the evening before



building into higher-energy selections as the night progresses."

Inside, the venue takes cues from a 70s-inspired boogie lounge, combining velvet upholstery, timber, leather and steel finishes with booths, lounges and bar seating designed to shift naturally from dinner into late-night dancing.

Dr. Goodes is now open at 27-33 Oxford Street, Paddington, operating as a takeaway pizza shop during the day before transitioning into a pizzeria and late-night bar through the evening.



# The Long Pour.



*Guide*

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# A match made for the palate

Jeff Schroeter, restaurateur, chef, and now owner of Darling Glebe at Sydney's historic Darling Mills site, has cooked in Michelin-starred restaurants to private meals for Madonna and the late Queen Elizabeth II. He is passionate about the whole dining experience, ensuring a partnership between cocktail and food that makes your mouth sing.


**Words by Kim Berry**  
**Photography by Christopher Pearce, David Li**

Darling Glebe, Sydney  
@darlingglebe

Chef Jeff Schroeter is drawing upon 40 years of experience in his new venture, Darling Glebe, located in the historic – and iconic – Darling Mills site, reflecting the decades he spent in Michelin-starred kitchens and world-class dining rooms, including London's The Savoy, The Royalton Hotel in New York, and Sydney institutions Bistro Moncur and Bayswater Brasserie.

Schroeter – who has cooked privately for everyone from the late Queen Elizabeth II to Anna Wintour and Madonna – says Darling Glebe's menu is the culmination of everything he's learned.

"It's 40 years of discipline and instinct moving between kitchens around the world and bringing it home. I'm still on the pans every night because that's where the joy is for me," he says.

Schroeter's cult-like Chef's Martini makes its anticipated return to the cocktail list, which is served from the elegantly curved bar that has been curated by award-winning bartender, Charlie Ainsbury. 

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It's 40 years of discipline and instinct moving between kitchens around the world and bringing it home. I'm still on the pans every night because that's where the joy is for me.

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### Chef's Martini × Oyster Rockefeller

The Chef's Martini is a chef-built martini, embodying an early style revival shaped by palate, not dogma. Plymouth gin and vermouth in deliberate balance, with just enough olive brine to draw out its savoury edge without ever announcing it.

Oyster Rockefeller is an 1890s ghost, brought back to life. A recipe half lost to time, reconstructed with patience, instinct and one very determined chef.

Most modern Oyster Rockefeller recipes are heavy handed, with too much cream, too much theatre and not enough memory. This version leans into restraint. The mineral clarity of the oyster is preserved, the herbaceous butter is sharpened and the structure tightened so it feels like the original might have.

The martini meets it there. It's not aggressively savoury, but poised. The higher vermouth ratio softens the spirit, allowing the oyster's salinity and the green, almost anise-like lift of the herbs to echo through the glass. It's architecture, not garnish.

#### Chef's Martini

- 60ml Plymouth gin
- 30ml dry vermouth
- 5ml olive brine

1. Combine ingredients and shake
2. Pour into a Nick & Nora glass
3. Garnish with three olives



### Martinez × Escargots en Cocotte

The Martinez is the martini's more indulgent ancestor. Aromatic, rich, quietly showing off.

Escargots en Cocotte is as French as I get, or at least a rebellious moment captured. The shells are gone but the flavour isn't.

The innovation here is deceptively simple. Removing the shells isn't laziness, it's focus. Everything that matters, from the garlic butter, to the tomato Provençal, spinach and pastry is concentrated into a single, sealed environment. The steam, fat and acidity are all trapped and intensified.

The Martinez steps in like it belongs to that world. Sweet vermouth and maraschino don't sweeten the dish, they round it. They pick up the tomato, soften the garlic and turn what could be rustic into something almost plush. A classic reimagined meeting a classic that never quite behaved.

#### Martinez

- 50ml gin
- 20ml sweet vermouth
- 10ml maraschino liqueur
- 2 dashes orange bitters

1. Stir with ice
2. Pour into a Nick & Nora glass
3. Garnish with an orange coin

### Sunset Serenade × Strawberry Foie Gras

The Sunset Serenade is dark, rich and a little dramatic, while the Strawberry foie gras was a mistake of the best kind. It was born in New York, refined over the years, and now entirely intentional.

Foie gras demands tension. Without it, it collapses under its own luxury.

The strawberries bring brightness, the balsamic brings depth, but the real trick is balance and knowing exactly how far you can push the sweetness before it turns against you.

The cocktail mirrors that knife edge. Cherry and chocolate flirt with excess, then the verjus slices clean through it. The result isn't heavy, it's calibrated. Decadence with discipline. The kind that makes you pause mid bite, mid sip and quietly reassess your life choices.

#### Sunset Serenade

- 30ml dark rum
- 15ml chocolate liqueur
- 15ml cherry liqueur
- 10ml verjus
- 2 dashes chocolate bitters

1. Stir with ice
2. Pour into a Nick & Nora glass
3. Garnish with a cherry





**Gibson × Duck à l'Orange**

The Gibson has no interest in being liked by everyone. It's a sharp suit with a briny spine. Sharp suit. Briny spine. No.

Our Duck à l'Orange is a classic, recalibrated with a modern hand. The sweetness is dialled back, the citrus sharpened, and the whole dish drawn into cleaner, more precise focus.

Traditional duck à l'orange can drift into sweetness, where it's nostalgic, but a little blunt. This version reins it in. The citrus is tighter, the glaze is more controlled and the duck remains the main character rather than a vehicle for sauce.

The Gibson acts like a scalpel. Its briny, umami edge cuts cleanly through the richness of the duck, while grounding the citrus so it stays taut and savoury rather than drifting into softness. It's not just contrast, it's control. A dish and a drink both refusing to be predictable.

**Gibson**

- 50ml gin
- 10ml dry vermouth
- 10ml onion brine
- Pinch MSG

1. Stir with ice
2. Pour into a Nick & Nora glass
3. Garnish with cocktail onions

**Sgroppino × Peach Melba**

Sgroppino is technically a cocktail but emotionally a gelato.

When I worked at The Savoy in London, I served Peach Melba to the late Queen Elizabeth II. There are some dishes you don't reinvent. You honour them, plate them perfectly and let them speak in their original language.

Peach Melba is about clarity. Perfect fruit, cold cream and sharp raspberry, with nothing to hide behind. The discipline is in restraint. The confidence is in not adding more.

The Sgroppino understands that instinctively. It lifts rather than layers. The acidity brightens the peach, the bubbles reset the palate, the temperature keeps everything precise. It doesn't decorate the dessert, it escorts it.

If a dish has already survived royalty, the least you can do is give it a partner that knows how to behave in the presence of a crown.



**Sgroppino**

- 1 scoop sorbet
- 30ml vodka
- 60ml Prosecco
- Touch of malt

1. Build in a glass
2. Garnish with lemon zest

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*From the BOTY*

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## Discovering Australia through ingredients and sustainability

Australia's unique native ingredients and diverse landscapes have reshaped the way bartenders think about flavour, seasonality and sustainability.

For our 2025 Bartender of the Year, Tanguy Charbonnet, the country's rich produce has inspired a more creative and environmentally conscious approach to cocktail making.

**Words by Tanguy Charbonnet**  
**Photography by Brody Bloom**

When I arrived in Australia in 2017, I discovered a completely new way of looking at ingredients.

Coming from overseas, I thought I already understood fresh produce and seasonality. But Australia felt different. The land itself seemed to shape flavour in unexpected ways. Markets, gardens, were filled with ingredients I had never seen before, bright marigold flowers, salty pigface growing along the coast, tart Davidson plums, native herbs, wild citrus, and leaves carrying aromas I couldn't compare to anything else.

Living in Victoria introduced me to river mint, native thyme, and coastal herbs that slowly changed the way I approached drinks behind the bar. But the more I travelled around Australia, the more I realized every state tells its own story through ingredients.

Tasmania offered pepper berry, leatherwood honey, and wild cherries shaped by cool forests and clean air.

Queensland brought tropical intensity through lemon myrtle, Seville oranges, and even green ants with their sharp citrus flavour. South Australia introduced dry, earthy flavours like quandong, saltbush, and bush tomato, while Western Australia balanced coastal freshness with desert ingredients such as coastal rosemary and desert lime. In the Northern Territory, Kakadu plum and rosella reflected both tropical heat and desert resilience.

Everywhere I went, ingredients carried the identity of the landscape around them, and as a bartender, that changed the way I think about flavour.

Australia has incredible richness and abundance, but learning about the environment also taught me something equally important: respect for seasonality. Ingredients need time to grow naturally, and when they are used in the right season and with care, quality becomes far more important than quantity.

That mindset has started influencing bars across Australia. Instead of relying on imported citrus year-round, many



venues are exploring fermentation, shrubs, vinegars, and preservation techniques to create acidity and balance in cocktails while reducing waste.

Bars like Byrdi helped push this conversation further by showing how local ingredients and sustainable practices can completely reshape modern cocktails. Fermentation and lacto-fermentation not only reduce waste but also allow bartenders to extend the life of seasonal ingredients and create new layers of flavour long after harvest season has passed.

For me, sustainability is not about limitation. It is about creativity.

One of the books that inspired this approach was *The Noma Guide to Fermentation*, which opened new possibilities for preserving ingredients, building flavour, and rethinking waste. 🍷

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For me, sustainability is  
not about limitation. It  
is about creativity.

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### Purple Carrot Paloma

For this drink, I wanted to reinterpret the classic Paloma through an Australian seasonal lens while reducing waste where possible.

- Finger lime soda
- Lacto-fermented grapefruit cordial
- Act of Treason Agave spirit
- Purple carrot wasted wine

1. Carbonated 45 PSI
2. Finished with a pickled purple carrot garnish, the cocktail balances bright acidity, salinity, fermentation, and earthy sweetness while giving a second life to ingredients that might otherwise be discarded.

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*The Classic*

# The Gimlet

Bright, crisp and effortlessly refreshing, this modern take on the classic Gimlet balances the botanical bite of London dry gin with fresh lime juice and a touch of sweetness for a clean, citrus-forward serve.

## **The Gimlet**

- 60ml London dry gin
  - 30ml fresh lime juice
  - 30ml simple syrup
1. Fill a shaker with ice and add all ingredients
  2. Shake vigorously for 15-20 seconds
  3. Strain into a chilled coupe glass
  4. Garnish with lime wheel

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# Jack Bar.

*Profile*

# Zachary Godbolt & Sebastian Keys

What began as a side project for Festival of Doom has evolved into Doom Juice Cellar Door. We spoke with co-founders Zachary Godbolt and Sebastian Keys about the venture and doing things differently.

## **How did Doom Juice start – planned, or accidental?**

Zachary Godbolt: We started Doom Juice in early 2021 as a bit of a side project that would be available at my annual music and arts festival “The Festival Of Doom” – I would say somewhat planned but it becoming our jobs feels a little more accidental.

Sebastian Keys: We started Doom Juice to give our mates a fun way to enjoy wine for a big party. And nothing’s really changed since.

## **Where did both your journeys begin within the hospo industry?**

ZG: I came from pretty much cooking then to cocktail and wine establishments. A fun tit-bit is that I was taught how to make cocktails at the Little Guy in Glebe by the owners Dan & Dynn, who are now some of my business partners in The Bat & Ball Hotel.

SK: Dishy to then the front of house in the early days, then working in wine distribution for six years at Single Vineyard Sellers. There, I was able to cut my teeth in the industry, learning in depth about wines from all over the world and understanding what wine people actually want to be drinking.

## **Did you think the market was missing something with the opening of Doom Juice Cellar Door?**

ZG: I wouldn’t go as far to say missing,

there’s plenty of incredible wine bars in Sydney. Although, in the immediate area us offering a fully dedicated wine space (with of course a few beers) is pretty unique and so far it seems like the punters are enjoying a little change up as they make their way through the incredible Marrickville Ale Trail.

SK: We definitely wanted to break the mould and reimagine what a “wine bar” can be. We let our imagination go wild with all the elements of the Cellar Door and just tried to make it as exciting as possible.

## **What is it like to build something like Doom Juice Cellar Door and what did you learn from the build and process of it all?**

ZG: It is a journey that’s for sure, it’s a huge mix of excitement and pure terror. The project was super collaborative, we have artworks from mates like Shane Salvador’s huge 5 metre tall oil painting or Taz’s massive skull disco ball – we also had family members that work in trades come and help, shout out to Jezza & Shane (my father / in-law). When you’re building any bar I feel like it doesn’t become real or look any good until the final hours, you need all the shit out, everything’s everywhere and you sometimes take 45 minutes just to find a hammer and not many mention how many times you have to go to Bunnings just because you forgot one little thing, painful.

SK: If you need us to drill a hole

somewhere, we can do it now! I have a whole new appreciation for the trades and am really thankful for all the learnings from the process. We got into it so much that we got on a first-name basis with most of the team at Bunnings Alexandria.

**If someone wants to start a label or venue – where do they start and what advice would you give based on your own learning?**

ZG: I think for beverage I would highly recommend going against the grain and carving out your own community, if you enjoy something or vibe with it, there will most likely be others out there that do also. For a venue if you're lucky enough to have people that have done it before you should listen, observe and get help from them, I have been very fortunate to have this network.

SK: Definitely agreed there. You have to know exactly what you're offering and know why you'd expect folks to spend their hard-earned cash at your venue, compared to the many great ones out there. What is your point of difference that builds your community?

**How important is branding vs product in your perspective?**

ZG: Always product, you can have the best branding in the world but if you're product does not match that standard then you will not create a business that has return customers. In the past some have assumed that Doom Juice's wine is not good because it has good branding and socials, that sentiment couldn't be further from the truth, I don't think we would've made a job out of it if the wine tasted bad to be honest.

SK: Branding vs product go hand in hand. Our wine is well made designer social lubricant. When you pull out a bottle of Doom Juice at party, it signals that you know what's up!

**Scooby Doo references... and any other references or inspiration, how did you come up with this concept?**

ZG: I used to collect Scooby Doo props when I was younger, also had dreams of owning a "Spooky Island-Esque theme park". Reference wise very much a little hint of church, mixed with goth and a touch of industrial really was the brief. Our dear friend Taz has been making disco balls for years and it only seemed

right to get her onboard to make the 90KG skull disco ball you see hovering over the bar; it is truly a spectacle.

SK: We were keen on something big! Zac's idea to get the Scooby Doo ball is just one of the many crackers! You may be able to predict our next moves in the future because I'm sure Zac just wants to open a circus at some point.

**Feeding off the previous question – what do you want people to feel when they walk in?**

ZG: I hope that it really is a unique, slightly mind-blowing moment, we spent so much time on making it a pretty out of the ordinary space, especially for a "Cellar Door", all of this complemented by our very warm and friendly staff is pretty much the vibe.

SK: I want people to feel like they are in the coolest cellar ever and never want to leave.

**Zach – how do your different venues feed into each other – are they separate worlds or part of the same universe?**

ZG: I think while they're very different (pub verses slightly satanic cellar door) we always still have a bit of jazz here and there, while the Bat & Ball has a vintage tea-towel museum in the pool room, the cellar has a collection of Mexican devil masks... or the red boiler suits at the cellar while we have the custom vintage workers jackets at the pub.

I love being able to collaboratively decorate a new space and come up with new ideas that hopefully stay with the guest, every venue should have a couple of quirks.

**What role does community play in all of this – especially being in Marrickville Ale Trail?**

ZG: After living here in Marrickville for most of my 20's I'm just stoked we are a part of it to be honest, the role we play is up to how the customer wants to perceive it, a wine option on the way through or a spot to spend the whole evening after a few crafty schooners, choose your own journey I say!

SK: Community is everything. We are only here because people find it fun place to kick back with friends and have a good time. We want to continually make it exciting for every person that walk through the door and make them feel as welcome as possible. 🍷



If you enjoy something or vibe with it, there will most likely be others out there that do also. For a venue if you're lucky enough to have people that have done it before you should listen, observe and get help from them, I have been very fortunate to have this network.







## Profile

# Forging a career in luxury

The beverage manager at Conrad Seoul, Jacob Jang, reflects on his love of hospitality and what it has taught him so far.

37Bar, Conrad Seoul  
@conradseoul

### Tell us about your time in hospitality

I was drawn to the hospitality industry while still in high school. I studied Hotel Management at university in Korea and Switzerland, and I have now been in the industry for around 13 years.

I'm currently beverage manager at Conrad Seoul, where I oversee all beverage operations and offerings provided to guests across the hotel. I joined Conrad Seoul about 2.5 years ago and have worked with Hilton for about five years. Prior to this, I worked at several international hotel groups, including Four Seasons, JW Marriott, and Accor, gaining experience in luxury hospitality environments.

Knowing that my work can contribute to someone's happiness brings me great fulfillment, and I take immense pride in what I do.

Working at various international hotels and studying in different countries, I have developed a deep respect for diversity and cultural understanding. Experiencing cultures and meeting people from a wide range of backgrounds taught me that while the world is vast and perspectives can differ greatly, greater happiness comes from understanding and respecting those differences.

### What do you see as the major differences between a hotel and independent bar?

Independent bars operate within smaller organisations, which means fewer layers

of complexity in terms of stakeholder interests. This allows for faster decision-making and greater agility, making it easier to adapt quickly to change. In today's rapidly evolving food and beverage industry, this flexibility can be a significant advantage.

In contrast, hotel bars operate within much larger organisational structures, where multiple stakeholders are involved. Particularly within luxury hotel brands, maintaining brand integrity and adhering to established standards is essential, which can make it more challenging to introduce new concepts as quickly as independent bars. However, hotel bars benefit from well-established systems and structured decision-making processes. These frameworks help reduce risk when implementing new ideas, ultimately lowering the likelihood of failure.

### Do you have a favourite spirit to work with?

I personally have a strong appreciation for whisky. While I currently work as a beverage manager, I have served as a head sommelier. What I find particularly fascinating about whisky is that much like wine, it offers a wide range of styles shaped by production methods and regional characteristics. Compared to wine, whisky tends to present more immediate and pronounced flavours and character, which gives it a sense of approachability along with a bold, stimulating appeal.

### And what about a go-to cocktail?

My personal favourite cocktail is the Old Fashioned because it reveals both the character of the base spirit and

the bartender's philosophy within a very simple structure. For that reason, whenever I visit a new bar, it is always the first drink I order.

### For the hotel's signature, what is it and how did it come about?

Conrad Seoul's 37Bar offers stunning views alongside an extensive whisky selection and a high level of cocktail craftsmanship. The bar features 20 signature cocktails, including the most popular, Beauty and the Beast. Guests are initially drawn to its striking visual presentation. It is particularly popular among female guests because of its well-balanced profile of tropical fruit flavours and rum.

It was created in 2024 when the bar was completely renovated and inspired by the movie, expressing the story through its presentation, colour, and flavour profile.

It is presented with a rose placed at the centre and served under a glass dome, referencing the enchanted rose in the film. The cocktail has a soft yellow hue, drawn from the heroine's iconic dress, while its sweet and tangy flavour profile symbolises the romantic relationship between the two characters. Together, these elements create a cocktail that is both visually striking and thoughtfully composed, embodying the bar's renewed identity.

### What's the bar scene like in your city, where do you like to go?

I'd recommend is Bar Cham, it's known for its distinctly Korean approach to cocktails, blending tradition with contemporary creativity. 🍷

Venue

# Bar Clara

In the middle of a busy city centre, Bar Clara offers a quiet reprieve with service .

**Words by Alexandra Zinghini**  
**Photography by Kit Edwards**

87 Little Bourke St, Melbourne  
@barclaramelbourne

Down neon-lit stairs and through a curtained doorway in Melbourne's Chinatown, Bar Clara offers respite from the city noise. Since opening in 2019, owner and general manager, Joel McKenzie, has built its reputation for consistency, restraint, and connection.

McKenzie's approach is grounded in early experiences around the table.

"Special dinners with family and friends were a highlight growing up," he says, pointing to a childhood shaped by the produce and wine culture of the Yarra Valley. A job in a city wine bar while studying sealed it.

"I fell in love with the special intimacy that sharing good food and drink provides – and the rest is history."

Opening Bar Clara just before the world shut down due to Covid was not part of the plan.

"It's been a ride. The pandemic wasn't something we could ever have planned for. I jumped in my car and delivered our now famous mulled wine while waiting to reopen almost two years later."

When the doors did reopen, the surge was immediate. "Everyone was super thirsty for about 18 months," he says, before the reality of rising costs set in. The response was measured.

"Staying lean where we could while still providing the experience of welcome

and authenticity people need allowed us to see it through."

The venue's location is no accident and is central to the experience.

"Melbourne has always championed the hidden gem. When guests step down those neon lit stairs and through the curtained door, it removes them from the hustle of everyday life and sets the mood. Rock'n'roll and hanging off the ceiling can be a lot of fun, but with Bar Clara we wanted to create a space that promoted genuine connection. For us, excellence in that is an expression of care."

It is a philosophy that is carried by the whole team.

"Having people on board who are genuinely welcoming and committed to an excellent experience because they care is the secret sauce," he says.

Technical skill matters, but it's not the priority. The goal is simple: make people feel looked after without overworking the room. Behind the bar, that same thinking applies to the drinks.

"Working with quality produce has always been important to us," McKenzie says. "Ingredients like beetroot, fennel, or sesame oil are challenging and inspiring all at once." At Bar Clara, cocktails are treated as complete experiences. "Concept definitely plays a part... story is where emotional connection is built."

Some drinks have gone further than expected. The Banoffee Special, originally just one option on the opening list, has become a fixture.

"People started coming back for it and haven't stopped. I suppose pie in a glass is hard to resist."

It remains on every menu iteration – along with one ongoing issue: "People need to stop stealing the travelling spoons."

The current menu, Greatest Hits: Remixed, reflects on the past without standing still. McKenzie explains the returning drinks are not a simple rehash, but redeveloped to reflect where the bar is now.

"We are at a point of looking ahead to what's next and in that, we wanted to celebrate where we have come from."

A curated playlist runs alongside the menu, reinforcing the bar's broader, sensory-driven approach. "I think it is going to be a lot of fun," he says.

Service at Bar Clara walks the line between structure and flexibility.

"I am a big fan of taking the lead in service, allowing guests to relax and feel like they are being looked after. But we do often mix it up – working with guests on a custom drink or bringing the bill early so they can get to a show."

McKenzie says they are always refining to provide "an enduring place of warmth and connection while always keeping an eye to how we can bring the experience to the next level".

He is also considering expansion but only if it aligns. "One of the challenges there is finding people who share our particular vision of good hospitality that prioritises human connection and sees excellence as care."

In a bustling city, Bar Clara sticks to what works – tight execution, genuine hospitality, and no interest in being the loudest room in town. 🍷



# Nick King

Opening a speakeasy in regional NSW isn't the obvious play - but for Nick King, that was the point. With wife Anna Wealands, he's carved out a space between a pub and fine dining, bringing a unique cocktail experience to Wagga.

**Words by Harry Kooros**  
**Photography by Matt Beaver**

Basement, 24 Fitzmaurice Street,  
Wagga Wagga  
@barolivette

For Nick King, opening a bar in regional NSW wasn't about chasing a trend but about filling a gap he'd experienced firsthand. Wagga Wagga is better known for pubs than polished late-night drinking, so he and wife and business partner Anna Wealands created Olivette, a subterranean, speakeasy-style cocktail bar.

"Historically, whenever we wanted to go away for a weekend, Wagga didn't have much beyond pubs and a couple of restaurants.

"So, we'd go to Melbourne and visit bars like Caretaker's Cottage and Nick & Nora's. Those venues are tight, service-driven, with great drinks and not pretentious pricing," King says.

When a basement space became available beneath a local hair salon, the idea clicked into place.

"We already had a business plan for a speakeasy elsewhere, so we just pivoted and adapted it to this space, leaning into the prohibition theme."

More than two years on, King and Wealands have refined the concept without losing sight of its original vision. The food offering has expanded, operations have tightened, and the venue has found its rhythm.

"Having a full-time bar manager has

helped a lot. It's allowed us to build more structure around drink rotations and keep improving what we do."

King's path into hospitality wasn't traditional, but it wasn't accidental either. Time spent working at the family-run Thirsty Crow gave him exposure to operations, bookkeeping, and venue management.

"COVID also turbocharged our interest in cocktails and more elevated drinking experiences," he says. "When the opportunity came up, we just ran with it."

Opening a concept-driven cocktail bar in a regional market might have felt like a gamble a few years ago, but King and Wealands could see the local hospitality scene evolving.

"There's been a lot of maturing in Wagga's venues - better standards, better food and drink, more consistency," he says. "We wanted to fill that middle space... somewhere with table service, elevated drinks and food, but still relaxed and approachable."

Even with strong support from locals early on, building awareness of Olivette has been a slower process for King and Wealands.

"There are still plenty of people in Wagga who don't know we exist. It's hard to promote a speakeasy - you can't exactly put up a big flashing sign. We lean on word of mouth, social media, and steady community engagement. It's a slow burn," he says.

What Olivette has done, though, is offer an alternative.

"It gives people an option beyond pubs, offering somewhere you can go

for a good drink, with table service, relaxed atmosphere, good music. People who come here are usually here for the experience, not just cheap drinks."

Like most venues, shifting consumer habits have been impossible to ignore.

"People just don't have the same disposable income. Nights out are more selective now. The late-night trade is still there - helped by a 2am licence on weekends - but it's more measured."

Behind the scenes, the reality of ownership is less about cocktails and more about logistics.

"People management is constant. Balancing business needs with staff flexibility is tricky. And then there's the ongoing push to get people through the door. Marketing is a big one," King says.

That push has led to closer ties with local tourism and council groups - anything that builds visibility.

"Anytime there's an opportunity, we say yes."

And then there's the detail work. In a metro city, certain things are a given. In Wagga, they're not.

"You can't really get good ice out here, so, we make it ourselves." It's a small detail, but it sums up the approach: if you want a certain standard, you build it yourself.

Olivette isn't trying to replicate Melbourne or Sydney wholesale. It's translating that experience - tight rooms, strong drinks, considered service - into a regional context that's still evolving.

For King, that's the point. Not bigger. Just better and built for where it is. 🍷





## *Business of bars*

# Beyond the Bar: Career pathway of a brand ambassador

Being a brand ambassador might look like endless parties, travel and free booze, but role demands serious people skills, resilience and industry knowledge.

By **Alessandro Nardini**

### **What is a brand ambassador?**

Drinks on me! Sick merch, guest shifts behind the stick, fun events and dinners, maybe a special coin to toss around or a cheeky mini Jäger to sling your way.

Sounds like the best job on earth, right? Well... yes and no. The role of a brand ambassador is probably one of the most romanticised jobs in hospitality.

From the outside, it can look like endless parties, travel, and free booze. But behind the cool jackets and company cards sits a role that requires real skill, emotional intelligence, professionalism, and honestly, a pretty ridiculous amount of energy.

A brand ambassador is the living face of a brand. They are often the first person bartenders and consumers associate with that product. They educate, advocate, organise events, build relationships, support venues, and help brands stay relevant within the industry.

Most come from bartending backgrounds. Usually, people who have spent years behind the stick, built strong industry relationships, maybe competed a little, maybe won a few

things, but most importantly developed a real passion for hospitality and spirits.

And no, contrary to popular belief, it's not just about being "the cool bartender".

In fact, some of the best ambassadors I've met weren't necessarily the flashiest bartenders in the room. They were just incredibly reliable, approachable, knowledgeable, and easy to work with.

### **People skills vs cocktail skills**

Being an amazing bartender does not automatically make you a great brand ambassador. Of course, cocktail and spirits knowledge matters, but the real skill for a brand ambassador is people.

Can you speak in front of a room without sounding terrified? Can you hold a conversation with a bartender, a venue owner, a consumer, and a marketing manager all within the same hour? That adaptability is everything.

Great ambassadors know how to read a room. They know when to be technical and when to keep things approachable. They understand that not every venue is a World's 50 Best style cocktail bar serving clarified milk punches in seashells. Every brand and every account has a different identity, audience, and purpose.

## Knowledge never stops

One thing people underestimate about this role is the amount of studying involved. The journey of a brand ambassador is basically one endless learning curve. You never really stop.

You are expected to know every detail about the brands you represent. Production methods, recipes, founders, dates, flavour profiles, regions, history, serves, cocktail applications, and market positioning. Sometimes this involves an entire portfolio of 50+ brands.

Some ambassadors can switch from talking about agave production to Scotch whisky maturation and coffee liqueurs within the same afternoon.

It takes years of learning, tasting, researching, and staying curious.

## Go, Attend, Participate (GAP)

If you wish to become an ambassador, you need to adhere to GAP – go, attend, participate. The people who usually get these opportunities are the ones already investing heavily into the industry before they even apply.

Some young bartenders think the role simply appears after winning one cocktail competition or posting enough cocktails online. But it is more than that. Networking in hospitality simply means becoming part of the community. The industry notices people who consistently show up.

Attend masterclasses, tastings, guest shifts, trade shows, portfolio nights, and education sessions. Spend time around other professionals who care about the craft and build genuine relationships.

And participate in cocktail competitions, not necessarily because you'll win, but because they teach you how to work under pressure, hone your presentation and storytelling skills, and build resilience. Some of the best opportunities in hospitality come from the people you meet during competitions, not the trophy itself.

And most importantly: work with people, not against them. Hospitality can become very competitive but the best ambassadors are usually the people lifting others up, sharing opportunities, introducing people to one another, and contributing positively to the industry around them.

## Visibility and presence

Brand ambassadors often seem to be everywhere – events, launches,

competitions, trade shows, trainings, and guest shifts. It's not because they're chasing free drinks, but because visibility matters in this role. You are representing a brand at all times, whether you realise it or not. That also means professionalism is key.

In Australia, the industry is smaller than you think and your reputation follows you everywhere. It means if you are unreliable, arrogant, disorganised, difficult to work with, or equally, if you are respectful, organised, supportive, and consistent, people notice.

Similar to brand representatives, ambassadors have to deal with rejection constantly. There is always a newer product, a trendier category, or a cooler brand entering the market. Consumer habits shift. Venues change direction. Trends evolve quickly.

You can spend weeks building activations, relationships, and strategies only for priorities to suddenly change.

It takes resilience to not take those things personally and to keep showing up with energy and professionalism.



The journey of a Brand Ambassador is basically one endless learning curve. You never really stop.



## The fun part

There are definitely perks to the job. The travel opportunities can be incredible – one week learning about tequila in Mexico, the next visiting distilleries in Scotland or wineries in Italy.

You get access to training sessions, amazing spirits, events, industry dinners, and a lot of branded merchandise.

There is also the professional rewards of educating others and watching them learn, apply that knowledge, and develop your own passion for products, flavours, and categories. Again, being a part of a community can be very fulfilling.

## The challenges

Ultimately, brand ambassadors are a marketing expense for a business. And unfortunately, when business is underperforming, it is often marketing that is the first to feel the pressure of budget cuts and redundancies. It is an instability not often discussed.

The company you work for determines everything. Some companies have large budgets that carry comprehensive support systems, travel opportunities, brand activations, and expense accounts. Others have far tighter margins, impacting what ambassadors can realistically achieve throughout the year.

And then there is the brand ambassador lifestyle – a lot of travel, late nights, early flights, endless events, and constant social interaction.

You are expected to educate, entertain, host, present, and socialise regularly, often while balancing reporting, planning, admin work, and internal meetings behind the scenes.

It sounds glamorous – and sometimes it is – but it can also be exhausting. Learning how to manage stress and “switch off” is important if they want longevity in the industry.

## In the End

This role overall can be one of the most rewarding career paths in hospitality. It requires curiosity, humility, consistency, emotional intelligence, resilience, and genuine passion for people.

If you're a young bartender wanting to move toward this side of the industry, start now.

Introduce yourself to people and ask questions. Participate in events and competitions and learn from others around you. Build relationships naturally, stay humble and reliable.

Because long before you are offered a brand ambassador role, the industry has decided if you already act like one. 🍷



# Staffies.



Bar Benfiddich, Tokyo Japan



Benetti's



Door Knock



Doom Juice



australianbartender

#btstaffies



ozbartendermag



Bar bridge



Choya Ginza Bar, Tokyo Japan



The Press



Bar Livet, Tokyo Japan



Ramblin Rascal



Apollonia

## 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. The Espresso Martini was created in London during the 1980s by which legendary bartender after a customer requested a drink that would “wake me up and then mess me up”?

2. Which aperitivo brand is most traditionally associated with the Venetian Spritz?

3. Which New Orleans cocktail, created by Henry C. Ramos in the 1880s, combines gin, citrus, cream, egg white, orange flower water, and soda water, famously requiring an extended shake?

4. By law, bourbon must be matured in what kind of barrel?

5. Which famous Renaissance artist commissioned to paint the fresco of the Madonna dei Miracoli in Saronno is connected to the origin legend of Disaronno?

6. What is the original classic recipe for a Godfather cocktail?

7. What are the two essential ingredients in a classic Dry Martini?

8. Which document contains the earliest surviving written record of Scotch whisky?

9. Which whisky region has the highest concentration of distilleries in Scotland, currently operating with fifty one distilleries?

1. Dick Bradsell. 2. Select Aperitivo. 3. Ramos Gin Fizz. 4. New charred oak barrels. 5. Bernardino Luini. 6. 2 parts Scotch whisky, 1 part amaretto liqueur. 7. Gin and Dry Vermouth. 8. The Scottish Exchequer Rolls. 9. Speyside.



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