

Beverage Journal

JANUARY 2025



WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

INSIDE THE TRENDS THAT WILL IMPACT THE WINE, BEER, AND SPIRITS INDUSTRIES





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Cover Credit:
(Top) Courtesy of Brother Wolf
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**WHAT IF
YOUR LIVELIHOOD
DEPENDS ON IT?**

As the Maryland General Assembly prepares to convene on January 8th, the imminent introduction of legislation allowing chain stores and supermarkets to obtain retail liquor licenses again hangs over the industry. Add to that, the budget crises the state faces ... well, there is a very high likelihood the beverage alcohol industry will be in the crosshairs of the General Assembly. On page 11, Beverage Journal staff writer, Teddy Durgin, interviews industry insiders to provide insights on what to expect and how to counteract these potential challenges.

To navigate this legislative landscape effectively, I am again offering the following 'How-To' guide on political involvement and influence:

Stay Informed:

Be proactive in understanding upcoming legislation that could impact your business. Join your county association and the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA.org), which actively monitors proposed legislation affecting its members.

Build Relationships:

Attend local liquor board meetings, and familiarize yourself with your local and state representatives. Use resources like the list of local liquor boards for Maryland available at mdalcohollaws.org/local-liquor-boards. Identify your State Senator and State Delegate(s) by visiting mdelect.

net and entering you or your business' address. Establish connections with your representatives by introducing yourself, highlighting your business within their district, and ensuring they receive your communications.

Communicate Effectively:

Keep your representatives informed about your business and its positive impact on the community. Ensure that you are included in their communications and distribution lists. Sending a personalized, handwritten letter of introduction with a meeting request can be a powerful way to establish a relationship.

Quantify Your Contributions:

Utilize the resources provided by the American Beverage Licensees (ABL) to quantify your business' contributions to the community. Through the 'members only' area of the ABL website (www.ablusa.org), members can generate reports detailing job numbers, tax contributions, and economic impact at the state legislative district level. This valuable data serves as a persuasive tool when communicating the positive influence your business has in the community.

In the face of potential legislative changes, active engagement with state legislators and thorough preparation are essential to safeguarding your livelihood. By following these steps, you empower yourself to effectively navigate the political landscape and advocate for your business interests. ■

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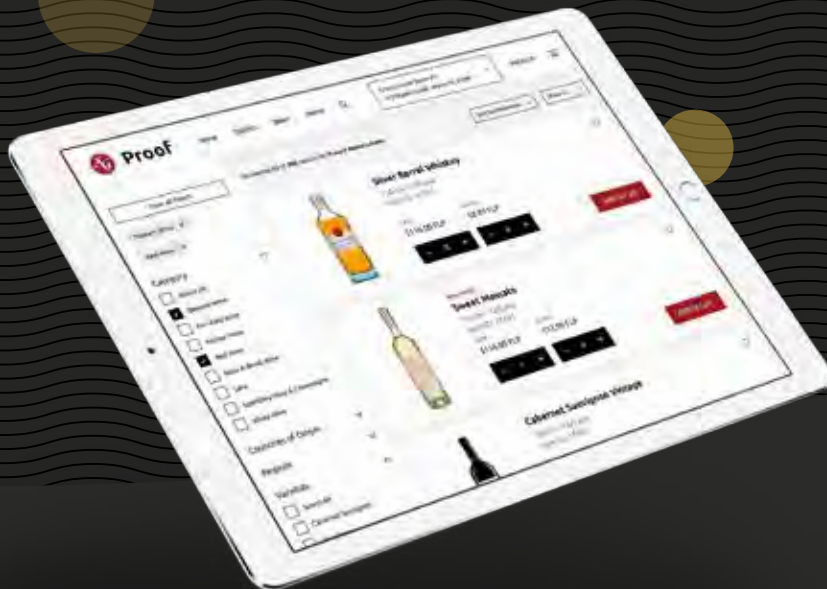
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1. THREE SPIRIT

Botanical-packed Extra Spicy Livener is a limited-edition upgrade of the milder Livener. Bringing together guayusa, guava leaf, green tea, cayenne, schisandra berries, ginseng, and apple cider vinegar, the functional, non-alcoholic elixir adds a fiery twist to Palomas and Margaritas.

\$ SRP: \$39 per 500-ml bottle
us.threespiritdrinks.com

2. BRUGAL

Brugal, the Dominican ultra-premium rum, has expanded its limited-edition sipping range with Colección Visionaria Edición 02, Coffee, a follow-up to the inaugural cacao variety. To make it, fifth-generation maestra ronera Jassil Villanueva Quintana toasts virgin French oak casks with chocolaty arabica coffee beans harvested from the Dominican Republic that infuse the rum with layers of dried fruit, mocha, and clove.

\$ SRP: \$100 per 700-ml bottle
brugal-rum.com

3. INSPIRO

Mara Smith, the founder and CEO of Inspiro, the tequila brand owned, led, and distilled by women, has introduced a limited-edition Special Reserve Añejo. Made from 100 percent blue Weber agave, the liquid is aged for four months in French oak barrels that previously held rosé wine before it's rested for an additional 15 months in a small number of Pinot Noir casks.

\$ SRP: \$129.99 per 750-ml bottle
inspiretequila.com

4. WESTLAND

The ninth, limited edition of Westland Whiskey's Garryana American Single Malt explores, as it always does, the impact of virgin casks fashioned out of *Quercus garryana*, the rare oak indigenous to the Pacific Northwest. This time around, however, instead of balancing the Garryana barrels with ones that previously held Pedro Ximénez sherry, the 100-proof whiskey puts the spotlight on oloroso sherry casks, which lend the liquid a savory dimension.

\$ SRP: \$149.99 per 700-ml bottle
westlanddistillery.com

5. TRES TRIBUS

B Corp-certified mezcal brand Tres Tribus pays homage to a beloved Mexican tradition with a limited-edition ancestral-style expression. First launched during the fall to coincide with Día de los Muertos, the mezcal, produced by fifth-generation mezcalero Juan Antonio Coronel, undergoes a second distillation that embraces marigold flower, orange, tangerine, grapefruit, and quince, ingredients often left as offerings for the deceased on colorful altars found throughout Oaxaca.

\$ SRP: \$179.99 per 700-ml bottle
trestribus.com

6. TIP TOP PROPER COCKTAILS

Tip Top Proper Cocktails closed out 2024 with the whiskey sour, its sixth ready-to-drink release of the year. Marrying bourbon, tart lemon, and demerara sugar, the classic concoction (ABV 25%) developed by bartender Miles Macquarrie exhibits notes of caramelized fruit and orange creamsicle.

\$ SRP: \$19.99 per four-pack of 100-ml cans
tiptopcocktails.com

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Ron S., Frederick County

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Maben K., Anne Arundel County

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- Hideaway Lounge
- Franks Den
- Shop Rite Liquors
- Harpers Choice Liquors
- John’s General Store
- Star Liquors
- Cranberry Liquors
- Woodensburg Market
- Ye Old Packaged Goods
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- Muddy Creek Liquors



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11



12

7. COMPASS BOX

Flavors of honey, pear, and toasted marshmallow mingle in Secrets of Smoke, Compass Box's most recent, limited-edition release. The 104-proof whisky unites Caol Ila, The Peat Monster, and Laphroaig finished in palo cortado sherry-seasoned butts, second-fill red wine casks, and Marsala barriques respectively, yielding an unusually fruity, creamy peated malt.

\$ SRP: \$165 per 700-ml bottle

compassboxwhisky.com

8. FEVER-TREE

Starring a blend of robusta and arabica beans from mountainous regions along the coast of Bali, Fever-Tree Espresso Martini Mix consistently heightens all forms of its namesake cocktail—whether with vodka or a non-alcoholic version—with its fool-proof cloud of crema every time. Free of artificial sweeteners, colors, and high-fructose corn syrup, it contains just 40 calories per two-ounce serve and 84 milligrams of caffeine, the equivalent of a typical cup, while taking the hassle out of home brewing.

\$ SRP: \$7.99 per 500-ml bottle

fever-tree.com

9. OLD GRAND-DAD

Old Grand-Dad arrived on the scene in 1882, and the historic bourbon has been coveted by collectors ever since. Its limited-edition 2024 release, a 100-proof whiskey with a high-rye mash bill aged for a minimum of 16 years, is one such example. Full-bodied, it tastes of tobacco, vanilla, and baking spice.

\$ SRP: \$194.99 per 750-ml bottle

beamdistilling.com

10. HIGH WIRE DISTILLING

Charleston, South Carolina's High Wire Distilling has rolled out the Jimmy Red seven-year-old wheated bourbon, its oldest whiskey yet. The 107-proof spirit highlights a mash bill of 68 percent Jimmy Red heirloom corn rounded out with 20 percent wheat and 12 percent malted barley.

\$ SRP: \$129.99 per 750-ml bottle

highwiredistilling.com

11. MIONETTO

Prosecco producer Mionetto dives into the zero-proof spritz category with Mionetto Aperitivo Alcohol Free. At only 58 calories per five-ounce serving, its base of demineralized water rife with Italian orange and grapefruit extracts, as well as wormwood, licorice, and peppermint is best paired with Mionetto Alcohol-Removed Sparkling Wine and ice in a classy goblet.

\$ SRP: \$20 per 750-ml bottle

usa.mionetto.com/us

12. JOHNNIE WALKER

Once again, Johnnie Walker Blue Label has partnered with Asian-American visual artist James Jean for the dramatic design of the 80-proof 2025 Johnnie Walker Blue Label Lunar New Year Limited Edition bottle. To celebrate the Year of the Snake, Jean juxtaposed a tripartite of snakes shedding their skins, a symbol of renewal, with a backdrop of florals. Each reptile represents wisdom, intuition, and intelligence, attributes that signal a prosperous year ahead.

\$ SRP: \$249.99 per 750-ml bottle

johnniewalker.com



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KOCO'S PUB

ALMOST 40 YEARS IN, AND SELLING MORE
CRABCAKES AND COCKTAILS THAN EVER

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | IMAGES BY ASHLI MIX PHOTOGRAPHY

John and Joanna Kocovinos opened Koco's Pub in 1985. Everyone knew John as "Mr. Koco," so it made sense to endear his new business on Harford Road in Baltimore to the masses with the nickname on the sign out front. The couple's dream was a modest one: operate Koco's as a little, neighborhood "hole in the wall" pub that served Joanna's food, specifically her crabcakes.

Today, their daughter Marcella Knight owns and operates the place, which is the latest to be featured in our ongoing series of articles on bars, restaurants, or taverns in and around Maryland named after their owners. Having grown up in the business, Knight fondly recalls,

"My mom would go to the store every day and pick up a few items to cook, and we'd have a little menu board and she'd write whatever she purchased that day. That's what she would sell for the day. She started making crabcakes, and we'd have a small, tabletop pizza oven that we used to cook them in. We could only cook four crabcakes at a time. I think we sold maybe 12 crabcakes a week back then."

Today, Koco's Pub sells well over 2,000 crabcakes a week! They even ship them all over the country to people who used to be local and still crave Joanna's original recipe (or to people who have heard about how tasty the cakes are and can't make it to Baltimore). As the crabcake making has expanded, so has the pub. A major kitchen installation and upgrade eventually followed, along with a dining room remodel. Before, the space had just a couple of tables and a couple of pool tables.

What's also grown has been Koco's Pub's reputation for customer

Marcella Knight
owner and operator
Koco's Pub



service and good times. Knight said in her recent interview with the Beverage Journal, "I tell my employees all of the time that we have so many good Google reviews and on all of the other social media outlets. So, it's a big responsibility to live up to the hype. People come here and have high expectations. We want everybody to leave here having their expectations met or exceeded. It's not an easy thing to do."

She continued, "Social media is what really expanded our business. We never really do any advertising except on those very rare occasions where we've bought an ad in a magazine. All of our business has been word of mouth and social media. Our first website was actually done by a friend, who was a computer person, as a Christmas present."

Koco's Pub is indeed known for its crabcakes. But the drinks menu has also evolved to be one of the city's best. Margaritas are the big favorite among locals. But Koco's craft cocktails are now drawing rave reviews, too.

"We have hired a bartender/manager, Rob Vogel, who has created lots of craft cocktails," Knight said. "He's incredible. When Rob comes up with



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new recipes, he actually trains our staff in the drink making. Every new cocktail he has us sample first so we can describe it accurately to customers. He came to us from The Atlas Group. He came during COVID. We're closed on Sundays and Mondays. We don't keep late hours. Rob was tired of working late hours and not getting home until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. Our business fit better with his lifestyle. And we were lucky to get him because he is so highly trained."

Working with Vogel is one of the favorite parts of Knight's job, right up there with the customer interaction. But, of course, there are downsides. "We're a small place," she noted. "People want us to expand all of the time. We have really no parking. It's amazing that people still come from everywhere just to eat and drink here. Even where there is no parking, they manage to get in here . . . somehow! And people bring in their family and friends and grandparents from out of town. We're just one of those small, little places that people like to find and claim. They really appreciate that the owner is here working every day. Our employees tend to stay because we treat them like family. It means a lot to our customers."

What Knight tries to do is what Vogel has done: minimize the stress that comes with working in the high-pressure, high-performance hospitality and service sector. She

stated, "You have to have a balance in your life. It just can't be work, and that's one of the reasons why we're closed a couple of days a week. You need to have that balance in your life with family, with fun, and with work. We close twice a year for vacation, and some people look at us like we're crazy. But you know? We've found that creates such a demand! People will come in before we close because they know they won't have their crabcakes for a week. And then when we come back, they all come in to hear about our vacation . . . and get their crabcakes! So, it's not just our employees who have become like family. So have our customers."

Still, Knight acknowledges the challenges faced by anyone reading this just starting out as a proprietor or dreaming of running their own bar or pub one day. She saw them first hand with her dad and mom, both of whom are still alive. "Oh, you have to be dedicated," she said. "There will be a lot of things you give up in your life to run a business like this. For many years, weddings, parties, all sorts of celebrations that happened on Fridays and Saturdays had to be missed. You don't get to participate in those things. But you build your life around your business. And, in the end, it is VERY rewarding!" ■





A BEVERAGE BIZ LOOK AHEAD AT THE MARYLAND 2025

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

Each December, I write up a legislative preview for readers of the Beverage Journal that typically begins with a look back at the wins and losses the Maryland State Licensed Beverage Association (MSLBA) saw in Annapolis over the past year. But as our three interviewees pointed out, sometimes a victory is not a bill being passed or a restriction lifted.

Attorney and MSLBA lobbyist J. Steven "Steve" Wise correctly noted, "Sometimes wins are found in what did not happen. We staved off bills that would have allowed beer and wine sales in supermarkets, lowered lottery commissions to 5.5%, and allowed the direct shipment of alcohol into Maryland from virtually anywhere. That none of those things happened is a win!"

MSLBA Legislative co-Chair David Marberger of Bay Ridge Wine & Spirits in Annapolis concurs, singling out the biggest "did-not-happen" triumph: "Being able to stave off beer and wine sales in grocery stores is always a victory. [chuckling] You can pencil that in for our conversation next year and every year after that!"

(continued on next page)



"The state's budget situation ... could affect the industry in a variety of ways. If the General Assembly's answer to the problem is higher taxes, alcohol tax rates are a concern. If new revenues are considered, the introduction of iLottery would be a concern because of its effect on brick and mortar locations. Or, if reduced spending is the answer, reductions in lottery commissions are of concern."

J. Steven 'Steve' Wise, MSLBA lobbyist

But MSLBA's other Legislative co-Chair Jack Milani is only breathing a small sigh of relief. He stated, "The grocers seem to be pushing it a bit more. You're seeing signage in some stores. Every year, we have to gear back up and put the fight on because this issue is not going to go away. We just have to keep reminding our local senator and delegates of how important it is for that not to happen to us. Every year we hold off the chain store bill is a good year."

Vigilance was a common theme in talking with all three men. Past leaders both real and fictional, everyone from President Thomas Jefferson to Captain Jean-Luc Picard, have referred to vigilance in the face of possible tyranny as the "price we pay." Marberger urged, "Be involved, and pay attention. If you're not paying attention to what your city council is doing or your county council is doing, then you're going to be making phone calls a day or two after things go into effect. And that's going to be too late."

Milani, proprietor of Monaghan's Pub in Baltimore, added, "They're looking for ways to figure out how to balance this year's budget. And our fear is that when they're looking

for money, they are going to come after us. They're going to tax – sales tax, alcohol tax, a 'God only knows' tax."

So what are the one or two biggest legislative issues they foresee impacting Maryland's beer, wine, and spirits business in 2025? Wise was quick to answer. "The state's budget situation, which according to budget analysts is the worst they have ever seen, could affect the industry in a variety of ways," he cautioned. "If the General Assembly's answer to the problem is higher taxes, alcohol tax rates are a concern. If new revenues are considered, the introduction of iLottery would be a concern because of its effect on brick and mortar locations. Or, if reduced spending is the answer, reductions in lottery commissions are of concern."

Wise warned that an "under the radar" issue owners of packaged goods stores, in particular, should keep an eye on is "a bottle bill proposal" making the rounds "that would require retailers to store returned bottles, which is just not a practical solution."

Milani agreed, further noting, "You'd have to have twice as much room if you're going to have that many empties coming back. Most

folks today do single-stream recycling."

All three interviewees went on to offer advice to anyone reading this article who would like to get more involved in the political side. Marberger said to take any questions or concerns directly to the legislators themselves. "When I got involved in this, the last thing that I was – and the last thing, even now, I consider myself – is a political person," he said. "Just by calling your local elected official, whether it's a city council member or a state delegate or a senator, they really do want to hear your opinion. If they are not hearing what you have to say, I guarantee you the opposition has already contacted that same individual and given them their opinion."

He continued, "A lot of times, you won't get the elected official. You'll get a staff member. That's fine! Those staff members work their tails off to be educated and informed about the issues, and they'll have a conversation with you."

Milani further elaborated: "It's so important to make acquaintances with your local elected officials, especially prior to the session. Get to know your senator and your del-

"Just by calling your local elected official, whether it's a city council member or a state delegate or a senator, they really do want to hear your opinion ... A lot of times, you won't get the elected official. You'll get a staff member. That's fine! Those staff members work their tails off to be educated and informed about the issues, and they'll have a conversation with you."

David Marberger, MSLBA Legislative Chairman



“Get to know your senator and your delegates ... make sure they know who you are, and let them know they or their staff can reach you if they have questions. Once you get a relationship with these officials, you’ll find a lot of times they will call you and ask you questions. They have hundreds of bills every year, and they don’t know everything ... if they’ll just hear us out, at least we will have a shot.”

Jack Milani, MSLBA Legislative Chairman



egates. If nothing else, at least have an opportunity to discuss anything that comes up. Don’t wait until you’re up against a wall. Do it before the session, make sure they know who you are, and let them know they or their staff can reach you if they have questions. Once you get a relationship with these officials, you’ll find a lot of times they will call you and ask you questions. They have hundreds of bills every year, and they don’t know everything. We may not always get the result we’re looking for. But if they’ll just hear us

out, at least we will have a shot.”

He added, “The good thing about the MSLBA is we do meet almost weekly once the session starts. The legislative committee meets, goes over every bill, and creates our positions. We come up with talking points and start meeting with individual members. Anyone who has an interest, please contact our office. You will definitely be more in tune with what’s going on.”

Wise concluded by offering praise one last time to Tom “Goose” Kaiser, the beverage in-

dustry legend who passed away earlier this year. “He was the gold standard for someone in the alcohol business who also knew the importance of being involved in Annapolis,” he said. “But folks don’t have to achieve Goose’s legendary status to contribute. If they make the effort to join MSLBA, know their local elected officials, and be involved, they will see the impact on their business in a very short time.” ■

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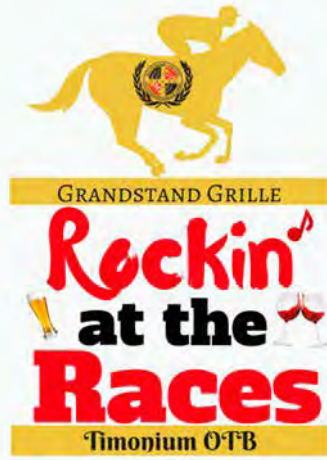
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Tia Polite of Indienne serving guests.

5

WINE INDUSTRY TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

WITH DONALD TRUMP RE-ELECTED, CLIMATE CHANGE EXPANDING, AND A NEW TYPE OF CONSUMER COMING OF AGE, THERE ARE BOTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

BY BETSY ANDREWS



Decreased consumption, proliferating climate disasters, and a change in U.S. leadership that promises to upend business as usual are making for tough times in wine. But, as Adam Casto, the winemaker at Napa's Ehlers Estate, observes, "A sense of destabilization in virtually all categories of a largely staid industry has, as it should, sent us scrambling for solutions and provided need-based opportunities for innovation. While there is not yet a clear consensus on what exactly it is we are running from or to, what is clear is that we need to run." As 2025 unfolds, here's what wine pros forecast for the industry, and ways they plan to respond.

01 | THE EFFECTS OF THE SECOND TRUMP TERM WILL BE PROFOUND

With Donald Trump's reelection, tariffs loom. First will come a rush on imports. "There should be containers coming now

from Europe to hit landfall before Inauguration Day and get wines in at a lower price," says Brian Rosen, the founder and managing partner of the private equity firm InvestBev. If tariffs are enacted, the EU will likely retaliate with its own levies, causing an export slump for American wines. Rosen projects a 13 to 16 percent dip



in imports and a larger decrease of 18 to 22 percent in exports.

Though tariffs are designed to boost American-made products at home, "It's likely sales will fall as capital costs increase for U.S. producers," says Caroline Clark, the director of beverage and hospitality at Colorado's Id Est. "Plus, evidence shows that consumers won't switch to domestic wines, but instead cheaper options like beer."

The administration's social policies threaten consequences for many in wine, including queer folks, BIPOC professionals, and immigrants. "That the lead conversation is even about tariffs instead of about the families that are going to be affected is so reflective of why we're right here," says Remy Drabkin, the founder of Remy Wines and Queer Wine Fest in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Organizations like Unidos Bridging Community are already mobilizing to fight detentions and family separation.



Labor shortages and supply chain disruptions will have a ripple effect, “forcing wineries to make tough operational decisions,” warns Chris Schmid, the senior vice president of strategic partnerships at distributor Prestige-Ledroit. “For queer, trans, and BIPOC professionals, the recent strides we’ve made in visibility and inclusivity could be at risk in a political climate that leans toward regressive policies. If these groups feel marginalized or unsafe, we could lose valuable momentum in building a more representative and diverse wine community.”

02 | CLIMATE CHANGE WILL ACCELERATE ITS IMPACT, AND PRODUCERS WILL ACCELERATE THEIR RESPONSE

Wineries and buyers are going into 2025 on the heels of a year that saw catastrophic flooding in Spanish wine regions and an unprecedented hurricane in Asheville, North Carolina, where Plëb Urban Winery was devastated. “Rising temperatures and unpredictable weather patterns are already impacting the 2025 vintage,” says Schmid. “Smaller producers, especially, face increasing challenges in adapting. Collaborative sustainability efforts and consumer education will be key to navigating these issues effectively.”

At Santa Barbara’s family-owned Pali Wine Co., “That means sharing our organic and regenerative farming techniques, sourcing like-minded partners across the Central Coast, and expanding our green thumb across our operation,” says marketing and ecommerce manager Madison Steinberg.

But everywhere in the wine world, green initiatives are proliferating in response to climate change. Global organic wine sales, now \$12.4 billion, are expected to grow over 10 percent in the next five years. Despite the political backlash in the U.S. against ESG—the environmental, social, and governance responsibility that has become a standard for regulators—California, several nations, and in 2025, the EU, are requiring disclosure of climate risks as part of corporate sustainability reports.

As a result, Angelina Mondavi, the consulting winemaker at Charles Krug, where solar powers 80 percent of production, says “a trend is minimizing our carbon footprint throughout the vineyards, winery, and packaging.” Andrés Valero, the leader of sustainability and corporate social responsibility at Argentina’s Grupo Avinea, predicts increased awareness of biodiversity’s role in winegrowing; increased reuse, recycling, and revaluing waste; and, with pressure from supermarket chains, expansion of Fairtrade.

03 | ALTERNATIVE VARIETIES FROM ESTABLISHED REGIONS, AND ESTABLISHED VARIETIES FROM ALTERNATIVE REGIONS, WILL EMERGE

Amid climate change’s overripening and inflation’s overpricing, pros predict an uptick in established grape varieties from alternative regions. Such wines offer freshness and affordability, but with the cache of familiar grapes.

“If you like Nebbiolo, for example, Alto Piemonte is a sweetheart area,” says

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Adam Casto, Ehlers Estate; Brian Rosen, InvestBev; Caroline Clark, Id Est; and Remy Drabkin, Remy Wines and Queer Wine Fest.

Colin Tuska, the wine director and beverage manager at Chicago’s Monteverde. “We are having great success with La Torretta from the subregion of Ghemme, offering a 12-year-old vintage that’s less than \$200.”

Such alternatives will become more important on-premise when tariffs hit, says Jeff Cleveland, the general manager and sommelier at Birch in Milwaukee. “Those buyers willing to invest time and effort will explore lesser-known areas to discover exceptional wines that are priced more competitively. While some may resort to buying freezes or relying on existing stock, it will be crucial to maintain flexibility in adapting to the evolving circumstances in order to remain competitive in the wine space.”

In a companion trend, “we will soon start to see regions once known for a specific variety being replanted with varieties more conducive to the new environment,” says April Busch, the wine director of Manhattan’s Passerine.

Across California’s established regions, a shake-up is happening, says Daniel Fitzgerald, the winemaker at Avivo Wines, around the traditional big five: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Zinfandel. “The younger generations are more curious,” he says. “They have more information at their fingertips. They’re more diverse. They have varied preferences.” That will shape what’s planted in the near future. “I’m already



seeing a lot more interesting varieties come through the winery, from Pinot Grigio, Vermentino, and Sangiovese to unheard of varieties like Abouriou.”

04 | THE NON-ALCOHOLIC CATEGORY WILL MATURE

“The non-alcoholic category is poised for significant growth,” observes Eugenio Egorov, the head sommelier and wine buyer at The Stafford London. Estimated at nearly \$2.3 billion in 2023, non-alcoholic wine sales should rise by almost eight percent by 2030. Along with greater quantities will come increased excellence. De-alcoholized wines, sparkling whites based on grape juice, sparkling teas, alternative ferments—“As production techniques improve, we can expect to see a wider range of styles and higher-quality options, offering sophisticated alternatives for those seeking the flavor and ritual of wine without alcohol,” Egorov says.

As a result, non-alcoholic wines will “reflect varietal typicity and deliver a genuine expression of terroir,” says Tyler Gomez, the beverage director at Glorietta in Jackson, Wyoming.

The maturation of the category is fueled by consumers, says Andy Chabot, the senior vice president of food and beverage at Tennessee’s Blackberry Farm and Blackberry Mountain. “We’re seeing demand from guests who want to not consume alcohol, but also have an immersive dining experience,” he says. “That coupled with not enough supply makes me think we’ll see more emerging brands or even a shift for current producers to

produce non-alcoholic wines as one of their offerings.”

On-premise pros are poised to serve them. “Many tasting-menu restaurants have begun to include, in prominence, spirit-free pairings,” says Tia Polite, the head sommelier at Chicago’s Indienne. “Ours is popular not just among guests who enjoy a spirit-free lifestyle, but also those who consume alcohol. It is common to see guests share both a wine and spirit-free pairing with their meals.”

05 | SALES WILL BECOME MORE INNOVATIVE, PERSONALIZED, AND EXPERIMENTAL TO CATER TO A NEW GENERATION

“My Gen Z peers are open and eager to try new flavors or half-glasses of wines they haven’t encountered before, as a way to explore their own preferences,” says Polite. “They’re unafraid to say, ‘I’m not familiar with that, but tell me more.’” In response, “the newest generation of sommeliers is redefining the field with an emphasis on approachability, warmth, and openness.”

The rest of the wine world will follow younger professionals’ lead. Producers, retailers, and on-premise professionals will cater sales toward more innovative, experiential, and personalized strategies. Much of the approach centers around storytelling. “People want to know the wine story,” says Huzar. “They want to know what they’re drinking is special. Tell the story, make it interesting. If you’re not invested, people are not going to buy it because it’s boring.”

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Angelina Mondavi, Charles Krug; Andrés Valero, Grupo Avinea; Colin Tuska, Monteverde; Matthew Jacobson, Botanist; and Zwann Grays, Nin Hao.

Sommeliers will leverage technology to help cater to individual customers’ tastes. “Wine lovers will increasingly seek personalized wine pairing experiences,” predicts Matthew Jacobson, the head sommelier at Botanist in Vancouver, Canada. “Virtual wine pairing events, subscription services that offer curated food and wine pairings, and even AI-powered suggestions are on the rise.”

Personalization and storytelling will extend to retail sales, as boutique shops become the “go-to spots for discovering something exciting and new,” says Anthony Lygizos, the owner of the Denver bakery, deli, and wine bar Leven. “It’s all about storytelling and providing value with lesser-known offerings that someone might not find even at restaurants.”

“I think 2025 is going to be the year of newness,” says Zwann Grays, the wine director at Brooklyn’s Nin Hao. Despite the challenges facing the industry, she sees a bright near future for wine with the creativeness of new generations of drinkers. “People want to be at new spaces in which to drink wine. We are going to see more culturally driven and artistic approaches to getting wine into glasses. Wine parties and social events are going to take us there. It won’t be this novelty anymore. People want to have community. It’s going to be in the streets and full blown.” ■



6

BEER TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

A RETURN TO FLAGSHIPS, INCREASED FOCUS ON FOOD, AND EVER-MORE-AROMATIC IPAS ARE SLATED FOR THE COMING YEAR IN BEER

BY JOSHUA M. BERNSTEIN

Warning signals are flashing red in a brewing industry facing slumping sales, closures, consolidations, competition from cannabis and ready-to-drink cocktails, and an existential crisis surrounding alcohol. For aging drinkers, a double IPA a day is not what any doctor ordered.

“We’re seeing a loyal craft audience starting to reconsider their relationship to alcohol,” says Brian Hughes, the PNW director of marketing for 10 Barrel Brewing in Bend, Oregon.

As of October 26, dollar sales of beer declined one percent and volumes fell 3.2 percent from a year earlier, according to data from NIQ. (Non-alcoholic beer, though, grew dollar sales and volumes 26.6 percent and 21.6 percent in that same period.)

Facing headwinds, breweries are tightening portfolios and prioritizing flagship beers. “Focus will be the word of the year,” says Rob Day, the founder of the Better Crafted Business consultancy.



To navigate turbulent trends, “we’ll need to be hyper aware of who we are and what we stand for,” says Alex McNamara, the senior brand manager for Redhook Brewery and Widmer Brothers, based in Seattle and Portland, Oregon. “We can’t be all things to all people.”

Targeted partnerships with local sports teams, tackling TikTok, and seeking placements in convenience stores are important levers to pull as craft beer matures beyond its wild youth.

“No longer is this an industry of just ‘cool’ and ‘fun,’” says Jason Bell, the founder and owner of Living the Dream Brewing in Littleton, Colorado. “It’s 100 percent business, and breweries have to adapt.”

As breweries batten the hatches for a tumultuous 12 months, here are six trends that industry pros believe will point the way forward.

01 | BREWERIES WILL SWAP EXTREMES FOR APPROACHABILITY

Novelty and excess fueled craft beer’s rise, but drinkers are reaching a breaking point for dessert-inspired imperial stouts and extreme beers.

Brewers have beaten “gimmickry, forced creativity, and pun thoroughly to death,” says Jason Oliver, the founding brewmaster at Devils Backbone Brewing



Jason Oliver, Devil's Backbone Brewing Co.

in Roseland, Virginia. The brewery is reverting to traditional beers like its best-seller, the smooth and subtly sweet Vienna Lager. “Our biggest imperative and goal is to reinstate the integrity of craft beer,” Oliver says.

David Deline, the president of Prost Brewing, headquartered in Northglenn, Colorado, sees a “trend back to quality and basic drinkability.” The brewery specializes in no-nonsense, moderate-strength European-inspired lagers like a crisp German-style pilsner.

Avoiding the latest trends can be a smart business move. Living the Dream sees little demand for “out there” beers, says Bell, the founder. “Our customers want beers they can count on to be approachable and enjoyable.”

At its two locations, Living the Dream’s easy-drinking beers, such as cream ale and red ale, cultivate a steady taproom clientele seeking dependability, not a dice roll. “People want to be sure their hard-earned money returns them a beer they know they’ll enjoy,” Bell says.

02 | INGREDIENT PROVENANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENT BECOME SELLING POINTS

Ingredient transparency and provenance will become important, especially under the new presidential administration.

“With the election of Donald Trump, we could see many environmental protections rolled back and natural resources come under greater threat,” says Eric Steen, who founded PR and marketing company Forest Green. “Farmers and suppliers that practice resource conservation should receive greater attention from brewers.”

Last year, Aslan Brewing in Bellingham, Washington, released the world’s first Regenerative Organic Certified beer, an IPA made with perennial grain kernza and organic hops. Ferment Brewing in Hood River, Oregon, teamed up with the



Vienna Lager is Devils Backbone Brewing’s bestseller.

Oregon Wildlife Foundation to make an IPA with Salmon-Safe hops and malt.

Brooklyn Brewery is making a concerted effort to champion fonio, an ancient African grain, in beers like the Fonio Rising pilsner and Fonio Stout, a recent collaboration with Guinness. “Traditional beer may be challenged, but the consumer has given us permission to explore, and that always creates new avenues for growth,” says Eric Ottoway, Brooklyn Brewery’s CEO.

03 | TRUSTED FLAGSHIP BEERS BECOME PARAMOUNT

Promiscuous drinkers are seeking monogamy in the beer aisle. “We see them less interested in new or hard-to-source beers,” says Adeline Druart, the CEO of Lawson’s Finest Liquids in Waitsfield, Vermont. “Veteran beer lovers are returning to flagships.”

In 2025, Lawson’s is planning activations to support the 10th anniversary of its still-growing flagship double IPA, Sip



Rob Tod, Allagash Brewing

of Sunshine, which is stored and shipped cold to maintain freshness. “Beer quality and consistency will be a table stake with consumers,” Druart says.

Allagash Brewing in Portland, Maine, is doubling down on its flagship witbier, White. “We think we can be the go-to white beer at home and away,” says founder Rob Tod.

For Topa Topa Brewing of Ventura, California, up to two-thirds of its sales are its flagship IPA, Chief Peak, while lager brands Montucky Cold Snacks and Eight only sell a single SKU apiece. Magnify Brewing in Fairfield, New Jersey, is prioritizing its flagship hazy IPA, Maine Event, by packaging it in 12-packs of 12-ounce cans sold for \$25.

“We see a shift in more customers purchasing things they know and have become familiar with at lower, more everyday prices,” says Eric Ruta, the founder and owner.

04 | BREWERIES WILL CONTINUE TO EXPAND BEYOND BEER

As demand for traditional beer flatlines and falls, established breweries will evolve into total beverage companies.

A strong brand can play in different categories, and “consumers don’t need you to fit a mold anymore,” says Dan Abel, the CEO and cofounder of Pilot Project Brewing, based in Chicago and Milwaukee.

TailGate Brewery, which operates nine locations across Tennessee, offers beer alongside housemade hard seltzer, non-alcoholic sweet teas, and hard cider. “I



FROM LEFT: Pilot Project Brewing in Chicago and Milwaukee; Chicago-based Moody Tongue Brewing.

can't understand why we'd say no to trying anything," says Wesley Keegan, the founder and owner.

Expanding into other beverages can fill "holes in the local market," says Colin Vent, the head brewer at Seventh Son Brewing in Columbus, Ohio. Seventh Son now makes Kitty Paw hard seltzer, canned Oso cold brew coffee, and partners with Echo Spirits Distilling on ready-to-drink cocktails. A hard lemonade line is also planned.

Fieldwork Brewing, which was founded in Berkeley, California, is known for expressive IPAs, but the brewery is branching into sodas, hop water, non-alcoholic beers, and the zero-proof Supertonic line. "We look at ourselves more as a beverage company," says CEO Barry Braden, adding that its non-alcoholic beers are sold in chain grocery stores—a first for the taproom-focused brewery. "We have the opportunity to go into new channels."

05 | FOOD IS AN ESSENTIAL TAPROOM DRAW

No one needs to drink beer daily, but eating is essential. To draw customers, breweries are becoming destination restaurants that happen to make good beer.



Adding smash burgers to the menu at Side Project Brewing in St. Louis has encouraged visitors to try more adventurous beers.

In 2014, Moody Tongue Brewing began as a Chicago production brewery. A decade later, the brewery runs a Michelin-starred restaurant in Chicago and a sushi spot and newly opened pizzeria in New York. (Moody Tongue is planning another sushi restaurant in West Palm Beach, Florida.) "We find ourselves becoming restaurateurs," says Jared Rouben, the founder and a former chef.

Last summer, Switchback Brewing Company in Burlington, Vermont, opened a new beer garden and tap house serving pickle-brined chicken wings and mussels in butternut broth alongside cocktails made with its Essential Spirits line. "To keep up, breweries need to continue to expand their vision," says Amy Lieblein, who runs marketing and events.

Offering food can draw locals that might not typically visit a brewery taproom. "There are swaths of people that live less than a mile away who have no idea who we are," says Drew Durish, the head brewer at Side Project Brewing in St. Louis.

Last March, Side Project introduced a new menu featuring smash burgers, finding that "food can help ease drinkers into beers they might not try," Durish says. The brewery focuses on fruited beers with restrained acidity "that mesh well with salty foods and snacks that keep butts in seats."

06 | NEW HOPS AND PRODUCTS WILL MAKE MORE VERSATILE IPAS

The ever-popular IPA will become more targeted to both seasons and moments, no time a bad time to sip something hoppy.

At its core, the IPA is a delivery mechanism for flavor and fragrance, the bigger the better. Brewers will look beyond Citra and Mosaic hops for new varieties that help entice drinkers at first sniff.

Skip Schwartz, the head brewer at WeldWerks Brewing in Greeley, Colorado, likes Elani, a wild hop that mixes mango with passion fruit and cantaloupe, chased by undertones of pine and marijuana resin. "This hop has incredible flavor and aroma," Schwartz says.

Another promising hop is the newly released Krush. Look for its fruit-cocktail flavor—ripe guavas, peaches, berries, and oranges—in Krush Hazy IPA, from Buoy Beer in Astoria, Oregon, and the Interstellar Kush collaboration between Half Acre Beer and Roadhouse Brewing.

"The biggest trend we are focusing on is how to use and integrate new hop products into our beers," says Max Shafer, the brewmaster for Pure Madness Brewery Group in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. (It produces Roadhouse and Melvin beers.)

High-tech innovations are also intensifying flavor and fragrance. In 2024, Haas introduced Euphorics, a potent aromatic amplifier derived from hops and botanicals. Yakima Chief Hops developed the concentrated HyperBoost, which delivers varietal-specific hop flavor, while Abstrax Hops uses terpenes to produce Skyfarm fruit flavors—no fruit pureés required.

The latest hop products can "create even hoppier beer that's still wonderfully drinkable and bursting with aromatics," says Evan Price, a cofounder and brewer at Green Cheek Beer, which operates four locations across Southern California. "That's what our customer base is most excited about." ■

6

SPIRITS AND COCKTAIL TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

FROM SKEPTICISM OF LUXURY SKUS TO THOUGHTFUL SESSIONABILITY, CONSUMER BEHAVIOR WITH CONTINUE TO SHIFT IN THE YEAR AHEAD

BY SUSANNAH SKIVER BARTON

Spirits consumption trends have taken quite the rollercoaster ride over the last few years, and 2025 looks set to hold more ups and downs—potentially a lot more downs. Among the forces shaping the near future: declining sales across core spirits categories; a smaller percentage of drinkers among Gen Z compared to other generations; potentially restrictive recommendations in new U.S. dietary guidelines, driven by misunderstanding of health and alcohol; proposed tariffs set by the incoming presidential administration; and regular cannabis user numbers exceeding their alcohol-consuming counterparts. We spoke to retailers, bar professionals, and industry leaders to discuss the trends that will shape sales in 2025.

01 | CELEBRITY AND LUXURY SPIRITS UNDER SCRUTINY

Exploration drove much of the growth in spirits in the last decade and fueled the



genesis of hundreds of new brands, many in the luxury tier or boosted by a celebrity endorsement. But as inflation ballooned, the trend ebbed, and in 2025, consumers will be less inclined to splurge, embracing everyday standbys instead.

“The expendable cash and the assistance that people were getting during times of COVID, being at home, has certainly leveled off the luxury purchases,” says Mark Roy, the director of marketing, merchandising, and warehousing at the New Hampshire Liquor Commission, noting that premium and super-premium spirits are seeing more demand as luxury-priced marques fall. SipSource data from the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA)



FROM TOP: Shinji in New York City; Brother Wolf in Knoxville.

bears this out: A recent report forecast a down shift toward the \$17 to \$24.99 and \$25 to \$49.99 ranges over higher tiers.

Adding to this will be growing skepticism of celebrity spirits. “[Consumers are] really diving into the facts of what’s in the bottle, who’s really behind it, and if it’s worth their money,” Roy says. “Celebrities, no matter who they are, need to realize that people are doing the research. You’ve got to be different, you’ve got to be passionate, and you’ve got to have the liquid in the bottle.”

Michael Lowry, the vice president of global spirits sourcing at Total Wine & More, has also seen more consumers turn away from celebrity spirits to trusted names, with tequila particularly under scrutiny for its use of additives. “There’s a greater awareness now of what is quality, truth-y tequila, and what is some celebrity brand that’s filled with sugar,” Lowry adds.



02 | FOOD SALES ARE INCREASINGLY VITAL TO BARS' BOTTOM LINES

A bowl of peanuts doesn't cut it anymore. Food is of growing importance to bar-goers, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. Consumers spent \$8.6 billion on food purchases at bars in 2023—an increase of 14.8 percent over 2022, and more than double the amount 10 years prior.

In 2025, cocktail bars will increasingly focus on food as a part of the total experience—and a way to increase check size. “Food is the best way to keep people in the seats, spending longer,” says Jonathan Adler, the beverage director of Shinji's in New York City. The sibling to sushi restaurant Noda, it offers handrolls and small plates alongside its drinks menu, a synergy Adler says is key to maximizing the bar's 18 seats.

Likewise, Brother Wolf in Knoxville, Tennessee, shares a kitchen with Italian fine-dining venue Osteria Stella, which helps the bar offer upscale dishes at a reasonable cost. “We try to focus on small plates, things that can be shared and eaten while still socializing,” says co-owner Jessica King.

03 | THOUGHTFUL SESSIONABILITY BECOMES A PRIORITY

Building off the interest in low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinking, consumers will embrace offerings they can enjoy over a long period of time without undesirable side effects—a trend Lowry calls “sessionability.” This could mean interspersing low- or no-alcohol options with higher-ABV drinks, something that Kevin Beary, the beverage director at Three Dots and a

Dash in Chicago, sees happening. “People are combining those experiences,” he says.

Lowry emphasizes that the alcohol-free menu items must match the standards of those with alcohol. “You need to have something that's a little more thoughtful than soda water or Coca-Cola,” he says.

On-premise, bartenders will increasingly highlight such options and train their staff to discuss them with interested patrons—a growing group. Nielsen reports that a quarter of on-premise consumers have tried non-alcoholic drinks, and the segment overall is up nearly 31 percent in the 52 weeks ending October 1, 2024. King links the trend to self-care. “The customer has gotten smarter about taking care of themselves more and non-alcoholic cocktails fit right into that,” she says. Brother Wolf plans to add more alcohol-free options to its menu.

04 | TARIFFS WILL DISRUPT SPIRITS TRADE

Just weeks after Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential elections, he was already proposing a raft of new tariffs, including a 25 percent tariff on all items coming into the U.S. from Mexico and Canada, as well as an additional 10 percent tariff on goods from China, above any universal tariffs such as the 10 to 20 percent he proposed during the presidential campaign.

With Canada the second-largest export market for American spirits, and U.S. sales of tequila and mezcal totaling \$6.5 billion in 2023, all of this is bad news for the spirits industry, which is still feeling the ramifications of the trade war President-elect Trump began during his first term in office. American whiskey faces the return of the retaliatory 25 percent tariff

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: A New Hampshire liquor store; Tip Top Proper Cocktails; Chris Swonger, the CEO of DISCUS.

on exports in March 2025 if the U.S. and EU can't come to an agreement.

The Distilled Spirits Council of America (DISCUS) has spoken out against the tariffs. “At the end of the day, tariffs on spirits products from our neighbors to the north and south are going to hurt U.S. consumers and lead to job losses across the U.S. hospitality industry,” DISCUS CEO Chris Swonger said in a statement.

05 | HOME COCKTAILING OFFERS CONTINUED GROWTH POTENTIAL

At-home cocktails will continue to be a major driver for off-premise sales, especially in the form of ready-to-drink options, one of the few growth areas in beverage alcohol in the past two years. That bright spot is set to continue shining in 2025, according to a report from IWSR.

Hands-on home cocktailing is also proving important. “It's a primary vehicle for exploration,” Lowry says, pointing to a boom in sales across Total Wine's stores of sweet liqueurs and modifiers.

Specific cocktails will act as catalysts for this trend. Lowry points to how the spritz is having a huge moment, with consumers encountering it on-premise and then trying to make it at home. The retailer's response is to merchandise all the necessary ingredients together. “We're trying to create a scenario at the store where you can add three things into a basket and build your cocktail,” Lowry explains. “Having that sort of easy entry point to cocktails is probably one of the most important things that we're doing right now.” ■