

Beverage Journal

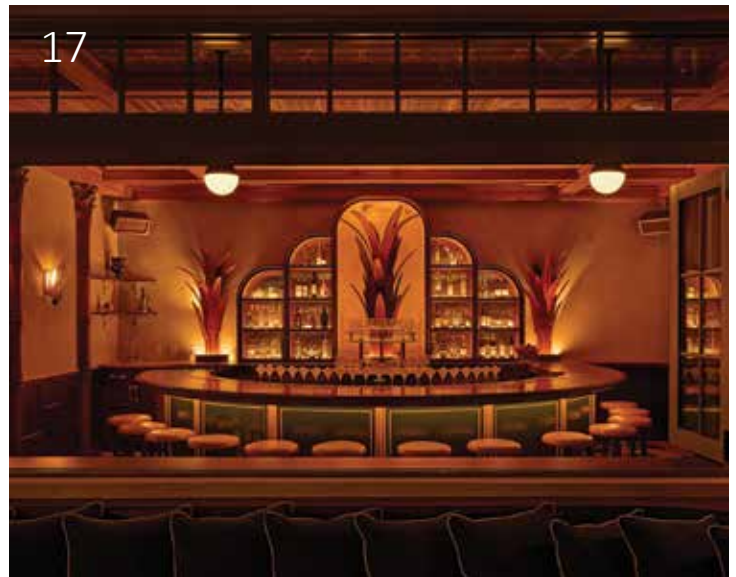
FEBRUARY 2025

**THE
TRADE
WARS
ARE
BACK**

CAN THE U.S. ALCOHOL
INDUSTRY WITHSTAND THE
RETURN OF TARIFFS?



ON-PREMISE
SALES INSPIRATION



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**SOME HISTORY BEHIND
SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY ...**

For this column each month, I try to cover a pertinent topic and/or offer ideas for potential promotion opportunities. I was doing a little research on such promotions for Valentine's Day and I came across the below column written by Father William Saunders, which was originally published in the Arlington Catholic Herald.

"In the early martyrologies, three different St. Valentines are mentioned, all sharing Feb. 14 for a feast day. Unfortunately, the historical record is sparse. The first St. Valentine was a priest and physician in Rome. He along with St. Marius and his family comforted the martyrs during the persecution of Emperor Claudius II, the Goth. Eventually, St. Valentine was also arrested, condemned to death for his faith, beaten with clubs, and finally beheaded on Feb. 14, AD 270. He was buried on the Flaminian Way. Later, Pope Julius I (333-356) built a basilica at the site which preserved St. Valentine's tomb. Archeological digs in the 1500s and 1800s have found evidence of the tomb of St. Valentine. However, in the thirteenth century, his relics were transferred to the Church of Saint Praxedes near the Basilica of St. Mary Major, where they remain today. Also, a small church was built near the Flaminian Gate of Rome which is now known as the Porta del Popolo but was called in the 12th century "the Gate of St. Valentine," as noted by the early British historian William Somerset (also known as William of Malmesbury, d. 1143), who

ranks after St. Bede in authority.

The second St. Valentine was the Bishop of Interamna (now Terni, located about 60 miles from Rome). Under the orders of Prefect Placidus, he too was arrested, scourged, and decapitated, again suffering persecution during the time of Emperor Claudius II.

The third St. Valentine suffered martyrdom in Africa with several companions. However, nothing further is known about this saint. In all, these men, each named St. Valentine, showed heroic love for the Lord and His Church.

The popular customs of showing love and affection on St. Valentine's Day is almost a coincidence with the feast day of the saint: During the Medieval Age, a common belief in England and France was that birds began to pair on Feb. 14, "half-way through the second month of the year." Chaucer wrote in his "Parliament of Fowles" (in Old English): "For this was on Seynt Valentyne's day, When every foul cometh ther to choose his mate." For this reason, the day was dedicated to "lovers" and prompted the sending of letters, gifts, or other signs of affection."

Father William Saunders is a Catholic priest who serves as the pastor of Our Lady of Hope Church in Potomac Falls, Virginia and holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from the College of William and Mary and a master's degree in sacred theology from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. Additionally, he has a doctorate in education administration from the Catholic University of America. ■

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6

1. KNUDSEN VINEYARDS

For the first time, historic, woman-led Knudsen Vineyards has released a blanc de blancs.

The 2020 sparkling wine, born from fruit grown in the Willamette Valley's Dundee Hills AVA, was aged en tirage for four years and opens with aromas of freshly baked brioche and lemon zest.

\$ SRP: \$72 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 knudsenvineyards.com

2. EL GUAPO

El Guapo has expanded its line of zero-proof, New Orleans-made cocktail bitters, syrups, and mixers with a lush demerara syrup. Developed in partnership with the Alma Sugarcane Mill in Lakeland, Louisiana, it's buoyed by a touch of dried orange peel that makes it ripe for a Sazerac or Old Fashioned.

\$ SRP: \$14.99 per 8.5-oz. bottle

🌐 elguapobitters.com

3. WOODFORD RESERVE

The latest limited-edition release in Woodford Reserve's Batch Proof series showcases a whopping 119.5 proof straight from the barrel, which complements the sorghum butter, clove, and nutmeg on the palate. This annual bottling was brought to life by batching more than 100 different Woodford Reserve casks together.

\$ SRP: \$149.99 per 700-ml bottle

🌐 woodfordreserve.com

4. WILDERTON APERITIVO CO.

In the wake of its recent rebrand, the non-alcoholic Hood River, Oregon, distillery Wilderton Aperitivo Co., known for zero-proof Bittersweet Aperitivo, delves deeper into spritz culture with the debut of a booze-free Citrus Aperitivo variant. This time around, a sweet, bright profile emphasizes fresh flavors of lemon, yuzu, and blood orange to ramp up breezy club soda libations.

\$ SRP: \$36.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 wildertonaperitivo.co

5. SEASN

Ben Branson, the founder of Seedlip, has dipped into cocktail bitters territory with Seasn. The first creation from Pollen Projects, Branson's venture studio dedicated to the non-alcoholic category, the zero-proof bitters derived from the King of Bitters plant comprise Light and Dark options. Crafted with ingredients like fresh grass, lime, rosemary, and kombu, the former is ideal for Margaritas. With flavors of smoked cherrywood, star anise, and cinnamon, the latter works well in an Old Fashioned.

\$ SRP: \$21.50 per 5-oz. bottle

🌐 seasnyourdrinksus.com

6. BOUCHAINE VINEYARDS

Bouchaine, the oldest continuously operating winery in Carneros, has unveiled its inaugural Alsatian Blend composed of 50 percent Pinot Gris, 30 percent Pinot Blanc, 10 percent Riesling, and 10 percent Gewürztraminer. The use of multiple vessels, including a concrete egg, clay amphora, and neutral oak barrels, lend the 2023 white wine textural heft.

\$ SRP: \$50 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 bouchaine.com

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7. VENTESSA

With a Pinot Grigio and Pinot Grigio rosé already under its belt, Ventessa has made its first foray into red wines. Joining the collection of 90-calorie, low-ABV varieties produced in Trentino is a union of native Italian Schiava and Teroldego grapes, a juicy, food-friendly blend rife with blackberry, raspberry, and blueberry notes.

\$ SRP: \$11.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 ventessa.wine

8. SAVOIA

Giuseppe Gallo, the founder of Italicus, first kicked off sister vino aperitivo brand Savoia with Americano Rosso, a vegan-friendly red bitter. Now, he's followed that up with Orancio. The orange wine takes inspiration from Marco Polo's 13th-century adventures on the Silk Road through spices like saffron and ginger that mesh with citrus and fruit flavors.

\$ SRP: \$24.99 per 500-ml bottle

🌐 casa-savoia.com

9. TESLA MEZCAL

Its first release was a hit, and now the second batch of Tesla Mezcal, a collaboration between tech giant Tesla and Nosotros Tequila and Mezcal, is here. The smoky, limited-edition spirit, a fusion of Espadín and Bicushe agaves, is housed in a hand-blown glass bottle. Designed by Javier Verdura, Tesla's director of product design, its sleek black finish is evocative of Oaxaca's barro negro pottery.

\$ SRP: \$450 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 teslamezcal.com

10. INMAN FAMILY WINES

Led by owner and winemaker Kathleen Inman, Sonoma County's Inman Family Wines is illuminating on-the-rise Lake County to the north with its rich, spicy G&T 2022. Marrying 35 percent Grenache and 65 percent Tempranillo from Two Brothers Vineyard in Clear Lake, where the terroir is informed by well-draining volcanic soil, the grapes were fermented separately with natural yeasts, then blended after 17 months of barrel aging.

\$ SRP: \$42 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 inmanfamilywines.com

11. STAUNING WHISKY

A limited-edition rye finished in hand-selected Pedro Ximénez and palo cortado sherry casks marks the first exclusive U.S. offering from Danish distillery Stauning Whisky. Distilled from Danish rye and barley in small, direct-fired copper pot stills and mellowed in heavily charred new American white oak casks, the 101-proof whisky is rife with notes of Seville orange, cardamom, and black tea.

\$ SRP: \$74.99 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 us.stauningwhisky.com

12. EL TEQUILEÑO

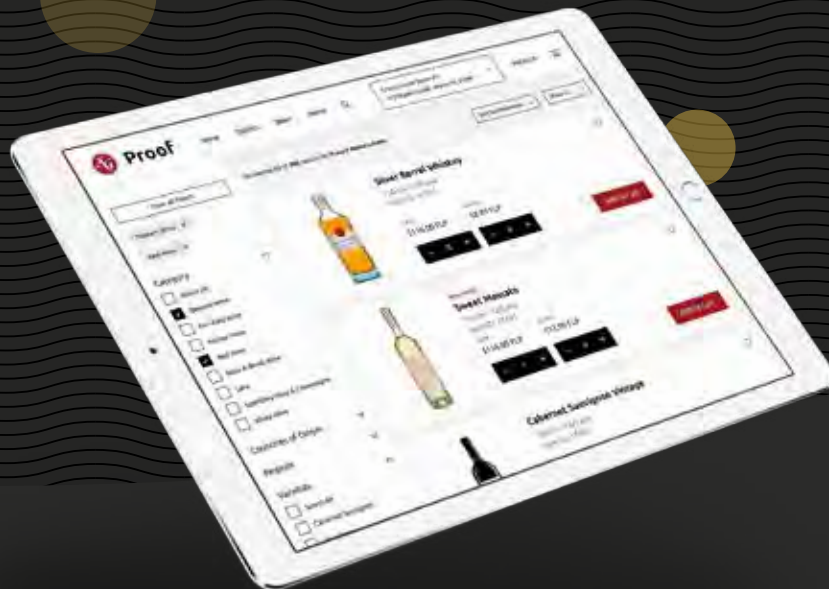
Gran tequilero Juan Antonio Salles and third-generation master distiller Jorge Antonio "Tony" Salle, the father-son duo currently behind El Tequileño, have released a limited-edition, 65th anniversary extra añejo, the second incarnation of the distillery's most premium tequila yet. The blend, matured for three to four years in American oak, new French oak, and French oak barrels, elicits layers of cooked agave, salted caramel, and stone fruit.

\$ SRP: \$800 per 750-ml bottle

🌐 tequilenos.com

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

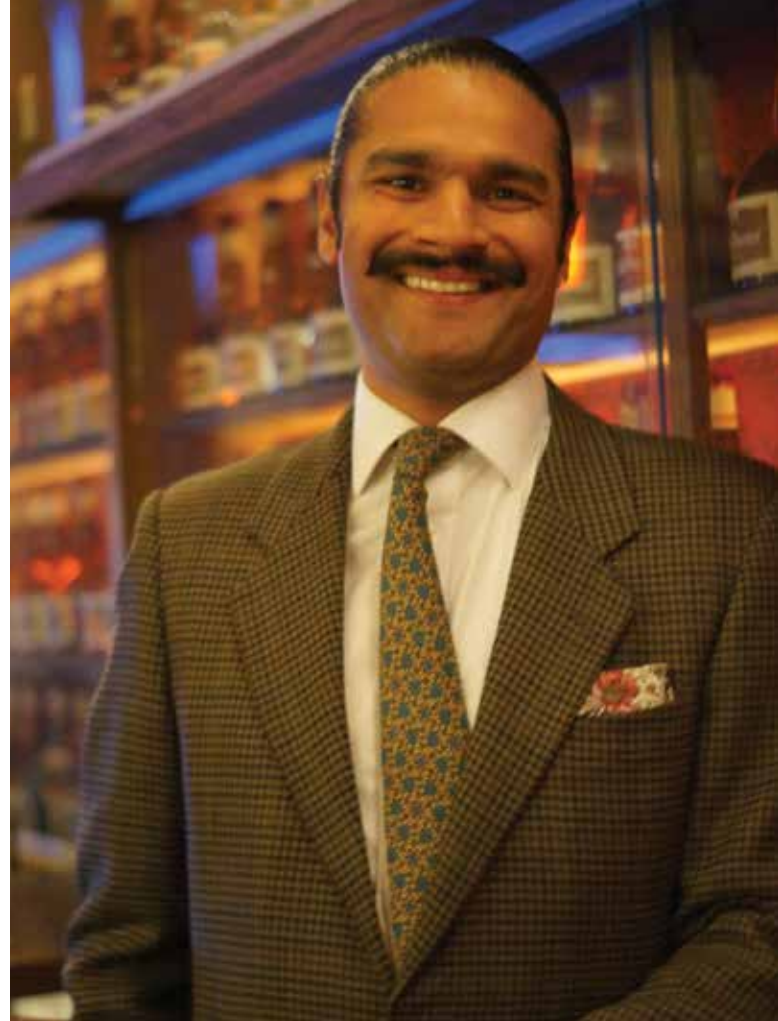
WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN

Usually, I interview owners, operators, and managers of bars, pubs, taverns, and restaurants before or between busy periods at their establishments. In the case of One-Eyed Mike's owner Akbar Vaiya, I got him to sit down and chat right after he finished playing golf. Fresh off the driving range, we laughed and agreed that he would need to be careful not to throw in too many golf metaphors and references when answering my questions.

After all, it would be so easy to say that this bar and restaurant in Baltimore's historic Fells Point neighborhood boasts customer service that's so consistent, you might say it's "always on par." Or, there's nothing like Happy Hour at One-Eyed Mike's when "it's in full swing." But Vaiya was focused throughout, and he was a great interviewee to kick off this new series of articles on restaurants, bars, pubs, and taverns throughout Maryland and Washington, D.C., with funny or quirky names.

We talked about the name right away. It didn't originate with Vaiya. "The original owner and founder named the bar, and his name was Mike [Michael Maraziti]. And, yes, it initially had a pirate theme, which we have kind of moved away from. But with the kind of staying power

Akbar Vaiya
owner and operator
One-Eyed Mike's



One-Eyed Mike's has had over the years, there's never been any reason to rename it."

One-Eyed Mike's is best known for its Grand Marnier Bottle Club, which has grown to a global community of more than 3,500 members. The club is a prime example of history and a shared love for a beverage coming together to create something truly special and interconnected as evidenced by a collection that extends beyond One-Eyed Mike's first-floor showcase with a fully stocked basement and new additions located upstairs.

Vaiya, a French-trained chef who was born and raised in Washington, D.C, remarked, "We have people who have had bottles there for over 20 years. I know for a fact that we have members from all 50 states. We have a bunch of international members, as well. We have, for example, folks who live in Kentucky and come in for Preakness every year. We had some people this past week who come in for a conference annually this time every year."

Food wise, One-Eyed Mike's is known for its fresh crab cakes, savory mussels, and locally sourced Black Angus steaks and burgers. From a drinks standpoint, the beverage menu includes craft cocktails and 11

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rotating craft beers on tap.

Vaiya, who has owned One-Eyed Mike's since 2016, acknowledged, "People know us as the 'Grand Marnier Bar.' Even if they forget the name, they'll say, 'Oh yeah, the bar with all of the Grand Marnier bottles on the wall.' But we're a lot more than that. In recent years, we've devoted ourselves to a more craft-oriented approach. At least one ingredient in all of our cocktails is scratch-made, like the fresh ginger juice that we put in our Perfect Storm, which is a riff on the Dark and Stormy."

One-Eyed Mike's biggest fans and most loyal customers are members of the 1827 Club. Membership is \$200 per year, billed

quarterly. Members get an engraved card with their name and their Grand Marnier bottle number. They can present that card to the bartender, and the bartender will grab the club member's bottle from its allocated shelf designation. The bottle must be purchased by the member as well, and the cost will vary depending on the iteration of Grand Marnier chosen. Membership also gets them discounts and, most importantly, invites to One-Eyed Mike's social events. "We have a social calendar that includes wine dinners, golf outings, cigar-rolling events, an annual holiday party, and so forth," said Vaiya.

In addition, One-Eyed Mike's has become extremely well known for Shot in the Dark.

No, it has nothing to do with the Ozzy Osbourne song from the 1980s. Vaiya describes Shot in the Dark as "the last, last call in the neighborhood. When everyone else turns their lights up and kicks you out of their bar at 1:40 or 1:45 a.m., we turn our lights down and invite you in for one last drink before 2 o'clock. Shot in the Dark is usually around 1:55 a.m. every night. We kill the lights, our bartender hops up on the bar, gives a toast, and then kicks everyone out."

Part of One-Eyed Mike's old-school charm is that it's not located among the other taverns and eateries in the heart of Fells Point. It stands alone on a cozy block of Bond St. The Shot in the Dark tradition is so popular that local bartenders and managers from that core of the neighborhood will kick their customers out at 1:45, lock their doors, rush down to One Eyed Mike's, do Shot in the Dark, and then return to their establishment to finish cleaning up.

Whether it's rival proprietors, first-time newbies, or long-time club members, Vaiya says he and his staff put customer service first. He noted, "One of our philosophies is 'You're a stranger here but once.' It's really important that we learn first names. I personally love engaging with our guests. We have a really great community. A lot of people who started out as first-time curiosity seekers have become good friends. That's true for me and for the staff, as well." ■



FEBRUARY COCKTAILS



COMING UP ROSES

2 oz. Empress 1908 Elderflower Rose Gin
 ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
 ½ oz. Lillet Rosé
 ½ oz. raspberry syrup
 egg white

Method: Add all the ingredients to a cocktail tin and shake without ice to emulsify egg white. Add ice to the tin and shake again. Strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with fresh raspberries.

SMOKEHEAD'S MANGO GLOW

21 oz. Smokehead Sherry Blast whisky
 9 oz. lemon juice
 3 oz. dry vermouth
 12 oz. mango chutney syrup
 10 ½ oz. water
 10 dashes orange bitters
 4 dashes cardamom and raisin bitters

Method: Place all the ingredients into a punch bowl or other serving device without ice. Stir for 20 seconds. Pour over ice into a large rocks glass. Serves 12.



FREIX AND FLUERTY

Freixenet Alcohol-Removed Rosé Sparkling Wine to top
 2 oz. Fluère Raspberry
 1 oz. lemon juice
 ¾ oz. simple syrup

Method: In a mixing glass, combine the Fluère Raspberry, simple syrup, and lemon juice. Stir well. Pour into a coupe glass and top with Freixenet Alcohol-Removed Rosé Sparkling Wine. Garnish with a strawberry.



BAILEYS CHOCOLATE-DIPPED STRAWBERRY MARTINI

2 oz. Baileys Chocolate Liqueur
 1 oz. Don Julio Blanco
 ½ oz. simple syrup
 3-5 fresh strawberries, sliced
 2 dashes Peychaud's Bitters

Method: Add the strawberries to a cocktail tin, and then the other ingredients. Shake vigorously and fine strain into a coupe glass. Garnish with a chocolate-dipped strawberry.

ORANCIO NEGRONI

2 oz. Savoia Orancio
 1 oz. London dry gin

Method: Fill a rocks glass with ice. Add Savoia Orancio and gin. Garnish with green and red grapes on a skewer.



ROSA

2 oz. Partida Blanco
 1 ½ oz. guava nectar
 ½ oz. strawberry purée
 ½ oz. fresh lime juice
 1 ½ oz. sparkling rosé
 3-5 fresh strawberries

Method: Muddle the fresh strawberries in a cocktail tin, and then combine all the ingredients except the sparkling rosé. Shake and strain into a wine glass. Top with the sparkling rosé and garnish with upward cut strawberries.

WHISKEY: WHAT'S NEW



RESTORATION PROJECT

During the early 20th century, the once-dominant American chestnut tree was destroyed by fungal blight. To bring attention to this unfortunate history, **The Obscure Distillery** in Los Angeles has partnered with The American Chestnut Foundation to roll out the 94-proof Rites of Fall. Sales of this Ohio rye bolstered by wood from fallen chestnut limbs will support the foundation's research efforts to revive the iconic tree.

SRP: \$150 per 750-ml bottle



GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

In 1973, the Fuji Gotemba Distillery opened in the shadow of Japan's storied Mount Fuji. To celebrate five decades in the whisky-making business, **Fuji Whisky** has released a limited-edition, 50th anniversary single malt. Master blender Jota Tanaka united a series of malts aged in a variety of cask types—including one from the very first 1973 distillate—that capture the terroir of Mount Fuji over the decades, culminating in a complex, 104-proof whisky that tastes of dried pineapple and white peach.

SRP: \$500 per 700-ml bottle



PORTUGUESE SEND-OFF

The 2024 iteration of the **Angel's Envy** limited-release cask strength whiskey was finished in a combination of ruby and tawny port barrels. As a result, the 118.8-proof Kentucky straight bourbon, distilled in 2016, flaunts nutty, caramelized fruit notes that play off classic oak and toffee flavors.

SRP: \$229.99 per 750-ml bottle

SMALL-BATCH DUO

Two new, limited-release expressions of Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey matured in 12-month air-dried, new, American oak casks reflect the innovative spirit of **Hirsch Selected Whiskeys**. The third edition of The Single Barrel Double Oak, underpinned by a toasted caramel layer, comprises both a 10-year-old and a nine-year, eight-month-old with a proof range between 110 and 115. While the fourth edition of The Single Barrel Silver, falling between 105 and 126 proof, showcases two different mash bills.



SRP: \$135 (double oak) and \$90 (silver) per 750-ml bottle

FOR THE BETTER

Following its inaugural 2021 release, **Good Deed Spirits** has unveiled Good Deeds Whiskey Batch #2, a fusion of WhistlePig straight rye and bourbon from Black Button Distilling, expressing baking spices and fruit on the palate. Like its predecessor, all profits from the 90-proof limited-edition expression will go toward the STEPUP Foundation (the Spirits Training Entrepreneurship Program for Underrepresented Professionals), to champion diversity in the craft spirits industry through training and internship opportunities.

SPR: \$95 per 750-ml bottle





THE RETURN OF TARIFFS

WITH PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP PROMISING WIDESPREAD TARIFFS, THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY BRACES TO BECOME, ONCE AGAIN, COLLATERAL DAMAGE IN A BROADER TRADE WAR

BY BRIAN FINK
WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY TYLER WETHERALL

When Becky Harris cofounded Catoctin Creek Distillery in 2009, she believed her target market went beyond Loudoun Valley and its rolling northern Virginia hills. Though most business would come from the mid-Atlantic region, she also set her sights on customers across the Atlantic.

“We worked really hard,” Harris says of eking out a distribution network and gradually building a consumer base in the

European Union. “Just about the time we started to make progress in the market was when the tariff battle really accelerated. And it basically killed our business there.”

It was 2018. The EU had just imposed a 25 percent tariff on American whiskey in retaliation for tariffs imposed by the United States on European steel and aluminum imports.

In the tumultuous years that followed, Catoctin Creek Distillery and countless

other members of the U.S. beverage alcohol industry would find themselves collateral damage in transpacific and transatlantic industrial trade wars.

A détente between the U.S. and EU eased the feud, but the return of Donald Trump to the White House this year risks upending that. In posts on his social media platform, he claimed that upon tak-

This issue went to press on January 10 and may not reflect the latest developments in this story.



ABOVE: Becky Harris, the cofounder of Catoctin Creek Distillery, lost business during the last trade war with the EU.

ing office he would immediately order a 25 percent tariff on all items coming into the U.S. from Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10 percent tariff on goods from China. He has also threatened BRICS nations with 100 percent tariffs. These countries will no doubt retaliate, marking the return of the trade wars, which some fear will destabilize an already precarious beverage alcohol market.

HOW A QUARREL OVER ALUMINUM AND STEEL HURT U.S. WHISKEY

Trade wars are fought with different weapons, but in recent years it is tariffs that have inflicted the greatest damage on the industry. “A tariff is a tax on imported products. It’s a tax on the people in the country, and it’s collected at the border,” explains Mike Veseth, an economist whose books and blog, *The Wine Economist*, cover the global wine market. “Tariffs are used to protect a specific industry in certain cases and for tit-for-tat retaliatory measures in certain situations.”

For decades, American and EU companies enjoyed tariff-free trade of beverage alcohol with one another. But in March 2018, President Trump imposed a 10 percent tariff on aluminum products and a 25 percent tariff on steel products imported

“At a time when consumers are already cash-strapped, asking them to shoulder the burden of these tariffs could have irreversible consequences for the wine industry.”

– Doug Shaw, M.S. Walker

from most countries, including the EU, out of concern for “national security,” and, among other reasons, because American metals manufacturing was in decline. In retaliation, the EU in June 2018 introduced tariffs, including a 25 percent tariff on American whiskeys. Not until 2022, under then-President Joe Biden, did the two trading partners begin to suspend the tariffs, with both parties agreeing in late 2023 to extend the suspensions until March 31, 2025, pending further negotiations. That date is fast-approaching.

Damage to the American beverage alcohol market had been done. By the end of the nearly five-year trade war, the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) estimates that American whiskey exports to the EU fell by 20 percent,

from \$552 million to \$440 million, between 2018 and 2021.

Many craft producers effectively lost future business opportunities altogether. “Through those four years, we were blocked out of the European market,” Harris says. “Before the tariffs, we were one of the only American rye whiskeys in Europe. During the four years of the tariffs, European rye whiskeys entered the market. By the time the tariffs were lifted, there were a lot of European rye whiskeys. We went from making gains and anticipating growing in the EU to essentially nothing.”

If bolstering American metals manufacturing motivated the president and his trade representative to impose tariffs on imported aluminum and steel, why would it seemingly punish other American producers in its efforts? “It’s always important to bear in mind the international political game is tit-for-tat,” Veseth explains. “The EU put a tariff on Kentucky bourbon. [Senator] Mitch McConnell represents Kentucky and the tariff was meant to punish.” He adds, “It’s not just politics—it’s dirty politics.”

China also implemented a 15 percent tariff on American wine (on top of existing import taxes) in retaliation for the U.S. tariffs on imported aluminum and steel. In 2016, U.S. wine exports to China peaked at \$88.3 million. Although China remains amongst the top 10 importers of American wines, the U.S. Department of



ABOVE: Tablas Creek Vineyard's Jason Haas has spoken out about the harm new tariffs could cause the wine industry.

Agriculture reported that 2023 exports totaled \$63.86 million, a loss of nearly 28 percent from 2016.

AIRCRAFT DISPUTE THREATENED IMPORTED WINES AND SPIRITS

For more than 20 years, the U.S. has accused the EU of subsidizing airplane manufacturing in violation of international trade agreements and to the detriment of U.S. interests. In October 2019, Trump imposed a 20 percent tariff on certain wines and spirits imported from France, Germany, Spain, and the U.K., and even threatened a 100 percent tariff in late 2019. The parties eventually agreed to pause the dispute, and Biden suspended these tariffs in July 2021 for a period of five years.

During that dispute, however, importers and distributors had to respond quickly to the sudden price increases. “The most immediate impact was a price increase that we passed [on to buyers] to cover the cost of the tariffs,” says David Kenney, the partner and vice president of Uncorked, an importer and distributor of French wines in New Orleans. “We did not initially pass along the full cost of tariffs, choosing to reduce our profit margin, along with our importer partners doing

“We have made a lot of investment in the export market and our exports are bigger than they ever have been in history. We’d be more exposed to more risk if tariffs happened again.”

– Jason Haas, Tablas Creek Vineyard

so as well. As the timeline progressed, we eventually raised our prices to cover the full tariff cost.”

According to Veseth, these tariffs fell hard on U.S. importers and distributors. “They were at the front line. They had to pay the tariffs. They found themselves paying for them on products they contracted for months before or even years before. And they found retailers were hesitant to raise prices. They were caught in a squeeze.”

Tariffs on imported wine and spirits don’t necessarily benefit domestic producers, either. Jason Haas, the partner and general manager of Tablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles, California, submitted a public comment to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative in December 2019 in opposition to the then-proposed increase of the tariffs of up to 100 percent. “In my experience, distributors react to the loss of a major supplier (a similar impact to these tariffs) by attempting to source new wines for their portfolio, rather than by selling more wine from their existing suppliers, many of whom are unable to increase production in the short term,” Haas wrote.

Today, Haas remains concerned. “For us, I just found the distributors were a little more distracted than usual,” he says. “What you ended up seeing was people trading down to lower-price wines in the same category.”

A RENEWED TRADE BATTLE WILL STRIKE A LESS RESILIENT MARKET

Trump’s proposed tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports, coupled with broader blanket tariffs on all imported goods, could threaten nearly 100,000 American jobs and result in \$5 billion in lost tax revenue, according to the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA). It would drive up the cost of imported spirits, especially those which cannot be produced elsewhere, such as tequila, mezcal, and Canadian whiskey—and the response from other countries remains to be seen. Ontario, Canada’s most populous province, might bar American-made alcohol altogether. A trade war such as this could devastate the U.S. beverage alcohol industry.

“Unlike in 2019, when the first round of tariffs was introduced, we are now navi-

BELOW: Doug Shaw, the president of M.S. Walker.



gating a market fraught with challenges,” says Doug Shaw, the president of wine and spirits for importer and distributor M.S. Walker. “Back then, our industry was able to insulate consumers from price hikes by absorbing some of the costs, thanks to a stronger economy and a more resilient marketplace.”

As Veseth points out, “That was a period when the U.S. dollar was rising.” That, coupled with historically low inflation, generally meant the U.S. economy was strong and resilient. Fast forward to today, and the outlook dims significantly. “Today’s economic environment is vastly different,” says Shaw. “Inflation, the high cost of doing business, and the financial

“The entire industry—from suppliers to importers to distributors to retailers—is under immense pressure, with little room to absorb or distribute the cost of additional tariffs.”

– Dina Opici,
Opici Family Distributing



strain on consumers mean that any additional burden, such as tariffs on products like French wine, would inevitably be passed on to them.”

In its recently published report on U.S. craft spirits sales, the American Craft Spirits Association found, for the first time since it began its reporting in 2016, the U.S. craft spirits market volume decreased year over year. And it is no secret that U.S. winemakers are seeing declines in domestic consumer demand and an oversupply of planted vineyards.

For many craft producers, options for offsetting losses may be limited.

As Haas wrote in his public comment, the U.S. three-tier system has established controls in place, in particular franchise laws and restrictions and limits on direct shipments to retailers, that can make it difficult for domestic producers to quickly adjust to sudden economic changes. Increasing exports is one of the few ways they can increase revenue.

If the U.S. is unable to resolve its trade conflicts, the next round could result in even higher tariffs that would affect all tiers of the U.S. beverage alcohol industry. “At a time when consumers are already cash-strapped, asking them to shoulder

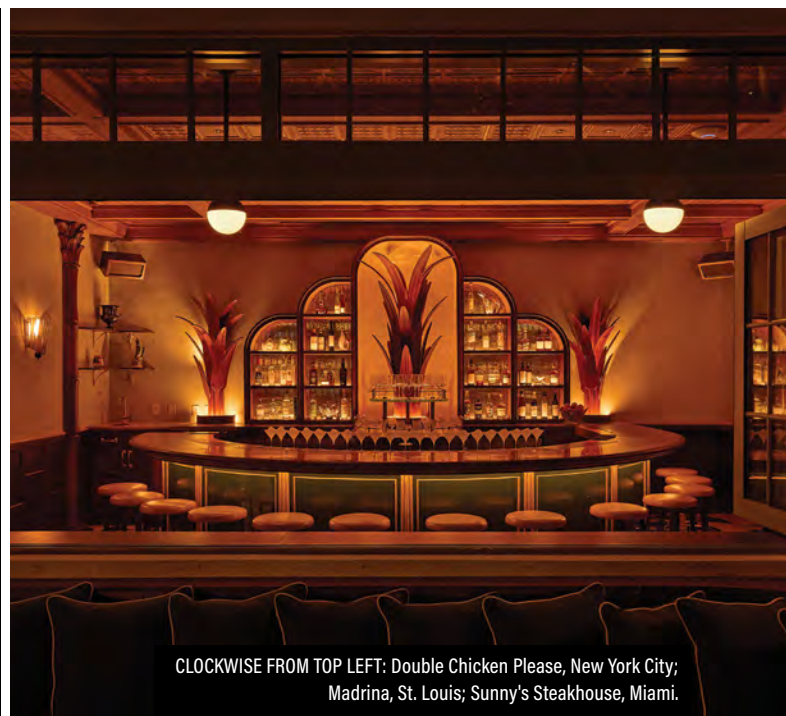
the burden of these tariffs could have irreversible consequences for the wine industry,” says Shaw. “If these tariffs are reinstated, we risk putting the industry on a trajectory from which it may not recover.”

Dina Opici, the president of Opici Family Distributing, agrees. “Any new tariffs on wine and spirits in today’s economic climate would be extremely disruptive,” she says. “The entire industry—from suppliers to importers to distributors to retailers—is under immense pressure, with little room to absorb or distribute the cost of additional tariffs. Passing these costs onto consumers would only exacerbate the already fragile state of the wine market, leading to further deterioration.”

DISCUS plans to push for an exemption to any universal tariffs for imported spirits, as so many have geographic designations, and WSWA is urging its members to reach out to policymakers and engage in industry-wide advocacy to communicate how tariffs will damage the industry and hurt consumers and businesses alike.

Despite the uncertainty ahead, both Harris and Haas are carefully building their markets abroad. “We have made a lot of investment in the export market and our exports are bigger than they ever have been in history,” says Haas. “We’d be more exposed to more risk if tariffs happened again.” ■

LEFT: Dina Opici, the president of Opici Family Distributing



SALES INSPIRATION FOR 2025

FIND OUT WHICH WINES AND SPIRITS ARE SELLING AT SIX NEW AND NOTEWORTHY BARS AND RESTAURANTS ACROSS THE U.S.

BY BEVERAGE MEDIA EDITORS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Double Chicken Please, New York City; Madrina, St. Louis; Sunny's Steakhouse, Miami.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GN CHAN / MADRINA / SUNNY'S STEAKHOUSE

There is no question that the alcohol industry is in a period of flux. Consumer habits are changing, with many drinkers embracing better-for-you options or cutting back on alcohol entirely, and thanks to inflation, everyone is tightening their wallets. These shifts in how and what people drink are impacting both on- and off-premise establishments—which means it's more important than ever to stock up thoughtfully and curate a menu with both price point and consumer preferences in mind.

Looking at what some of the top bars, restaurants, and retailers are selling is one way to discover what consumers want right now and find fresh inspiration for the future. With that in mind, *Beverage Media* spoke to buyers at new and noteworthy establishments across the U.S., from Miami's much-anticipated opening Sunny's Steakhouse, to New York's Michelin-starred fine dining restaurant Saga, to ask which bottles filled were their biggest sellers of the moment. (All products are listed with suggested retail price per bottle.)

SAGA
New York City
Eun Hee Kwon, sommelier

When Eun Hee Kwon graduated from the intensive sommelier course at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City, she didn't anticipate that wine would quickly become her career. "I had always been enamored with food and beverages in the context of dining in general," says Kwon, "and was curious to learn more about wines."

Since diving into the world of wine, Kwon has accumulated over 74,000 followers on TikTok, where she shares her wine knowledge and documents her life as a sommelier. Last year, she became a sommelier at Saga, a fine dining restaurant on the 63rd floor of 70 Pine St.

"Saga is truly a New York restaurant," Kwon says. "Through a tasting menu, Saga presents a modern New York cuisine, showcasing various influences from different cuisines with a nontraditional fine dining style of service." Guests must choose from two experiential tasting menus: the Seasonal Tasting Menu, priced at \$298 per person, or the Short Story, an abridged Saga dinner for \$198 per person.

■ **Alfredo Egia 'Rebel Rebel' 2020, Bizkaiko Txakolina, Spain; \$68**

While Txakoli is known to be light and bright, Rebel Rebel is "bigger and more intense—but in the best way possible," says Kwon, who recommended this wine for guests who wanted to try something different. Alfredo Egia practices biodynamic farming with low intervention, and uses techniques like lees aging and intentional



oxidation to create unique wines. "I was a little nervous pouring it," Kwon recalls, "but I love Alfredo Egia's wine and trusted that the adventurous palate would come around to it."

■ **Pascal Agrapart 'Minéral' Blanc de Blancs Extra Brut 2017, Champagne France; \$155**



Agrapart is the producer Kwon jumps to when it comes to grower Champagnes, and it was perfect for a table of two celebrating an anniversary. "It's one of those precise, mineral-driven, doesn't-get-old Champagnes that never fails to woo anyone who drinks it," she says. The fourth-generation producer specializes in blanc de blancs cuvées such as the Minéral, aptly named for its racy, mineral-driven character.—**Vivian Beltran/Caitlin A. Miller**

SUNNY'S STEAKHOUSE
Miami

Matt Whitney, director of operations

The story of Sunny's began back in 2020. The COVID-era pop-up started out serving tacos and cocktails, but with a lot of competition in that category—and guests' clear desire for a fine-dining experience—the team soon reimagined the concept as an outdoor steakhouse. "Why not throw some white tablecloths on picnic tables, serve steaks and Martinis, and see where it goes?" says director of operations Matt Whitney. It was an instant hit.

Fans of the restaurant were devastated when it closed in 2022, but it had always intended to reopen in a permanent home. Now, after a two-year wait, guests can

finally return to Sunny's in its beautiful new space—complete with a new and improved beverage program. "We're upping our game across the board," says Whitney. "We now have a full wine program. So it's really taking what was just thrown together as a pop-up and this fun outdoor thing, and now ... building more of an established restaurant."

■ **Domaine Trapet 'Ostrea' Gevrey-Chambertin 2015, Burgundy, France; \$120**

While there have been many popular wines since opening, the top seller during the first two weeks of service was Domaine Trapet. "[It's a] great vintage from a great producer," says Whitney. "The wine is a great complement to how we've seen people interacting with the menu. People are sharing everything ... entrée courses to share, a lot of mid-course pastas. And '15 Gevrey definitely has a little bit more structure to it, a little bit more power behind. It can stand up to some of the heartier fare, but not overpower some of the lighter stuff."



■ **Muchada-Léclapart 'Lumière' Palomino 2017, Jerez, Spain; \$50**

Whitney loves introducing guests to new, unexpected wines, such as those from Muchada-Léclapart, which is a partnership between Alejandro Muchada and grower Champagne producer David Léclapart. "It's a Palomino not made in the fortified sherry style," says Whitney. "You can sell this to the person who's looking for something funky, and maybe on the natural wine front, but it's also just something really delicious and different. We've been able to introduce people to this, which has been really, really fun." —**Caitlin A. Miller**



DOUBLE CHICKEN PLEASE

New York City

Tako Chang, manager of brand marketing and communications

This fall, Double Chicken Please (DCP), an award-winning bar in New York City, debuted a new, boundary-pushing concept. Free Range took over the front space to “redefine the possibilities of what a cocktail bar can offer,” explains Tako Chang, the manager of brand marketing and communications at DCP. “Our goal with this new concept is to create a platform where our bar team members can collaborate in crafting their own drinks and collectively shape the entire cocktail menu.”

The cocktail menu at Free Range fuses classic cocktails with classic cartoons. “Each member of our bar team selected a classic cocktail and paired it with a nostalgic, well-known cartoon character that holds personal significance for them,” says Chang. A playful menu, designed by in-house designer Turkie Tsai, ties it all together. A whimsical roller coaster crosses the menu, filled with several carefully selected riders—each cartoon character represented on the menu. The task of matching each rider to its drink is tricky, and a lot of fun.

■ Pocket of Sweet

Kavalan Distillery Select Whiskey, Suntory Toki Whisky, amontillado sherry, red bean, corn, barley tea, and lychee

Based on the Japanese children’s show Doraemon, the flavors used in Pocket of



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GN CHAN

Sweet are inspired by dorayaki—a pancake sandwich, the title character’s favorite food—and assembled as a twist on an Old Fashioned.

■ What’s Up, Doc?

Patron Silver Tequila, Amaro Santoni, mastiha, carrot, orange, hazelnut, and yogurt



Based on the Bugs Bunny character from Looney Tunes and his iconic catchphrase always said with a carrot in hand, ‘What’s Up Doc?’ offers a twist on a Garibaldi. (A non-alcoholic version is also available.)

—Caitlin A. Miller

MADRINA

St. Louis

Alisha Blackwell-Calvert, wine director

Alisha Blackwell-Calvert has become one of the best-known sommeliers in the St. Louis area, but until she became the wine director of Madrina, which opened November 2023, she had never written a wine list from scratch. The Italian-American restaurant’s 116-bottle wine list is almost entirely composed of bottles from Italy and the U.S., and for each Italian option, there is a similarly styled American wine listed alongside.

Most guests opt for Italian wine, says Blackwell-Calvert. “We’re blessed to have a clientele that’s up for trying something new and different, and the setup makes that easy for guests to pick something they might not be as familiar with,” she

says. Most of the bottles sit at accessible prices as well; many are under \$70, and few are over \$100.

Though the wine list is tailored, Blackwell-Calvert aims to diversify the options at the same time. She tries to feature as many of Italy’s subregions as she can, and likes to highlight bottles from many wine states—even her home state of Missouri.

■ Keenan Merlot 2019, Napa Valley, California; \$44

“As much as I like to focus on Italian wine, I like to give people a shock when they tell me they don’t like something,” says Blackwell-Calvert. So when a table insisted they didn’t like Merlot, she challenged their assumptions about the grape.

“This Merlot is a Cab drinker’s Merlot—high elevation where it’s cooler, so you get smaller berries and higher tannins but a silky smoothness,” she says. “They said, ‘We didn’t know Merlot could be so good!’”



■ Dal Forno Romano Amarone della Valpolicella 2017, Veneto, Italy; \$450

Though most bottles on Madrina’s list are under \$100, Blackwell-Calvert does include some worthwhile splurges, like this Amarone della Valpolicella from an iconic producer. She recommended it to an Amarone-loving four-top as a “treat yourself” option.

The table loved the Dal Forno Amarone so much they bought a second bottle, and it reminded Blackwell-Calvert that upselling can provide value to the guest as well as the restaurant. “I think the challenge there was stepping out of my comfort zone and not thinking about what’s in my wallet,” she says. —Courtney Schiessl Magrini



EXPERIMENTAL COCKTAIL CLUB**New York City***Xavier Padovani, partner*

Quality over quantity isn't exactly a new approach, but consideration to the craft, terroir, and provenance of each bottle has become a calling card of French cocktail bar Experimental Cocktail Club, which in September 2024 celebrated its return to New York City after an eight-year hiatus.

"The idea is not to have a massive back bar, but to have a back bar of interesting spirits," says Xavier Padovani, a partner in the Experimental Group. "We've always tried not to educate, because it's not the right word, but to introduce spirits that consumers are not super aware of. And the consumer in the U.S.— even more than anywhere in the world—is extremely educated."

As with each of its now seven locations worldwide, Padovani helped build out the spirits list, including the bar's trademark collection of rare French spirits and liqueurs.

■ **Laurent Cazottes Organic Tomato Liqueur; \$70 per 375-ml bottle**

Laurent Cazottes comes from a wine-making family and it shows in the work he's doing at his farm and distillery in



France's Occitanie. With fruit from organic and regeneratively farmed orchards and vineyards, he makes eau de vies and natural wines. "The pear [eau-de-vie] is out of this world, but the tomato is my favorite, and it's a bit more fun," says Padovani. "I drink it, sipping. We use it in different cocktails, in the Bloody Mary. It's too easy to drink."

■ **L. N. Mattei Cap Corse 'Quinquina' Blanc; \$25**

This 19th-century Corsican vermouth was suffering a slow demise, when, in 2016, three Corsican entrepreneurs stepped in to revive the historic brand, now distributed in the U.S. by Haus Alpenz. "It carries a little bit of originality in France," says Padovani, who is from Corsica himself. "This is one of the rare ones using quinine, which is difficult to find. If you have the opportunity, try it on ice. It's simple, it's not overpriced, and it's super, super good." —Tyler Wetherall

**WHOOPIE DAISY****New York City***Conor McKee, co-owner*

After successfully launching the retail store Fiasco! in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, its three beverage industry owners—Piper Kristensen, Ivy Mix, and Conor McKee—set their sights on a wine bar. While Whoopsie Daisy and Fiasco! share similar philosophies—selling wines from small-production, family-run estates that are organic, biodynamic, or natural—their offerings are distinct. "We saw this as an opportunity to increase the availability of wines in the neighborhood and to be able to sell some wines that might be a little bit more bar appropriate. We do carry a large selection of wines under a

certain price point to meet the needs of the neighborhood."

Indeed, price-consciousness is an important element of their program. "We want everyone to come in and feel welcome and not feel intimidated," says McKee. "We'll take a slimmer margin on things we feel are worth having and want people to try. We also look for those diamonds that offer excellent quality for the price."

■ **Sierras de Bellavista Pinot Noir 2020, Colchagua, Chile; \$33**

If you want Burgundy-level quality for half the price, Sierras de Bellavista's Pinot Noir is McKee's go-to recommendation. "It's a small, family project; they don't make a lot of wine," says McKee. "When I tried it, it brought me right back to red Burgundy. It [has] Bing cherry with some minerality to it. It has medium tannins that just catch you on the back. It's really, really stunning."



■ **Foradori 'Lezèr' Teroldego 2023, Trentino Alto-Adige, Italy; \$30**

Foradori's 'Lezèr' Teroldego offers a delicious, affordable way to introduce "young drinkers to a producer that's become a force in winemaking," says McKee, referring to winemaker Elisabetta Foradori. "This [wine] was first made in 2017 because she lost most of her crop to hail just before harvest. So, making lemonade out lemons, she took the fruit she had, vinified and aged it in a variety of vessels—stainless steel, concrete, amphora, neutral oak—and blended it together to create this super dynamic, light, juicy red." —Tyler Wetherall/Caitlin A. Miller ■

