out their smartphones to access tasting notes about whichever whiskey they are drinking," notes Tim Riedel, general manager at Local Whiskey in State College, PA. "It makes people less intimidated to try new whiskies."

Despite the local in its name, the bar's collection of 229 whiskies focuses on single-malt Scotch, with substantial depth in Japanese malts and Irish whiskies. Import prices range from as little as $5 for a shot of Bushmills to $25 for a glass of Yamazaki 18-year-old.

The most expensive whisky is The Macallan 'Flask' 22-year-old for $150 a shot. "Only 400 bottles were released, and we were lucky enough to get a bottle," says Riedel.

NEW WHISKEY ENTHUSIASTS

Whisky is garnering interest beyond hard-core aficionados chaising after rare bottles; its appeal is broadening to a wider demographic. "Popularity with women and millennials is leading the growth of whisky," says Paul Brown, beverage manager for Front Burner Brands, the restaurant management company for The Melting Pot.

Brown notes that 85% of Melting Pot guests are women, and two-thirds of its clientele are ages 18 to 39. The foodie-chain concept, which has more than 136 restaurants in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, has been seeing more calls for whisky-based cocktails.

Fully half of the 17 whiskies on the chain's core list are imports. "I think whisky will play a bigger part in our beverage program in the future," predicts Brown.

Consumers are following different paths to the whisky trail, operators say. Some discover the brown spirit in a cocktail; others take an easy-drinking route with smooth Irish whiskey or flavored variations. "There is a younger, educated consumer embracing the cocktail culture," says Raymond. At Reserve 101, orders for whisky-based cocktails have jumped dramatically. "The foodie culture has helped; it mirrors the craft beer, cocktail and artisan distilling scenes. It's a perfect storm of trends," he says.

Indeed, "the craft beer scene has sparked interest in new flavor profiles, including hand-crafted spirits," agrees Brown. "That has opened up minds and palates." The Melting Pot is rolling out a new Irish whiskey cocktail nationally next year, and possibly more.

THE APPEAL OF IRISH AND FLAVORED VARIETIES

Leading an interest in imports among younger drinkers are the more-appreciable Irish whiskies. "Mostly thanks to its marketing efforts, Jameson has really taken off in the U.S. market, especially among the younger generation," says Raymond. "And that has encouraged trial of other Irish whiskies."

Also enticing millennials is the rapidly growing sub-category of flavored whiskies, appealing to their sweet tooth. Canadian Fireball Whisky is hot, and Paddy's, Bushmills and Dewars have all recently debuted honey variations. "They are geared toward attracting a newer, younger crowd, to introduce them to whisky—a training-wheels approach," notes Raymond.

Reserve 101 attracts a diverse mix of customers, thanks to its proximity to the House of Blues nightlife, a Four Seasons Hotel, convention center and sports-entertainment complex. "We get concert-goers—the Jameson and Fireball crowd—and out-of-towners, as well as whiskey geeks who come to check out the latest and greatest," says Raymond.

For those geeks, this fall Reserve 101 is debuting a rare single malt, a 1978 Glenmorangie Pride, which will sell for $750 a pour. About a year ago, the bar had offered a vintage 1963 Glenmorangie for $550 a shot; Reserve 101 sold it out of it within 60 days. "We got the word out with a media blitz; a rare whisky like that appeals to a particular audience," Raymond says.

Reserve 101 serves whiskies poured in tulip-shaped Italian crystal glassware designed to deliver maximum aroma. The whiskies also come with a carafe of filtered water so that customers can add a few drops to open up the bouquet. Rocks drinkers can opt for a 2.5- or 5.0-full bar at no extra charge.

EVENTS AND EDUCATION

Rested and bar operators are working hard to intrigue and educate their customers, no matter their approach or level of interest in the world of whisky.

"Madison wasn't much of a whisky town when we opened six years ago," recalls Bill Rogers, the Malt House in Madison, WI. "We had a lot of educating about whisky to do with our public."

With a focus on craft beer, the bar started with about 30 whiskies, but that collection has more than doubled in response to increasing customer interest, to about 80 labels, half of which are imports.

"The first thing we did was to create two build-your-own-flight menus," explains Rogers. There are two price tiers: two times three of 1-oz. pours, for $19 and $15. "Most people could find

85% of Melting Pot guests are women, who are leading the growth of whisky.

The 12-page extensive list has been paired down to an easier-to-comprehend, five-page menu, which breaks down by regions, highlights rarities and specialties. Reserve 101 also now includes an educational "Whisky 101" section on the list. "If people want to know more about whisky, they are going to find our bar," concludes Raymond.

Thomas Henry Storck is a Brooklyn-based writer who writes about all things drinkable.

Melting Pot Promo Celebrates Whiskey Women

To capitalize on the popularity of its whisky cocktails, casual-dining chain The Melting Pot in September launched a promotion featuring "Cocktails That Celebrate Women and the Revival of Whiskey." The limited-time offer spotlights five whisky-based cocktails and a customizable whisky flight, says Paul Brown, beverage manager for parent company Front Burner Brands. The cocktails are designed for The Melting Pot's fall promotion open a range of styles, from the Buck Be A Lady, which mixes Jameson Irish whisky with muddled strawberries and ginger beer, to the Prohibition League, with a taste of Manley Shovel Scotch, Cynar, apricot preserves and fresh citrus. Drink prices vary by location.

The Melting Pot created a menu wrap for the promotion that can sit on cocktail cups or as side and tasting notes for the flight on the other. The chain also promoted the offer with posters and check presenters as well as social media. The producers of each of the five whiskies used in the specialty cocktails have recorded videos "to educate guests. 'They tell a great story, and educate but are still entertaining,'" says Brown.

A recent Ladies Night event series includes whisky-infused fondue, a chessecake and two chocolate desserts, all designed to pair with the cocktails. "We suggest to guests that they think the spirit used in the fondue or one of the flights associated with the chocolate fondue," says Brown.

Early results for the fall promotion, which was scheduled to run through Nov. 22, were positive. Sales were up 31% to 40% over the previous year. "Women and Whisky resonated with our demographic, and really drove traffic to those locations," says Brown.

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