

# Cheers

THE BEVERAGE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS AND BARS

**19 TRENDS  
THAT CHANGED THE  
BEVERAGE INDUSTRY**

**THE TOP 10 COCKTAILS  
OF THE PAST 25 YEARS**

**THE 10 MOST  
INFLUENTIAL  
INDUSTRY PEOPLE**

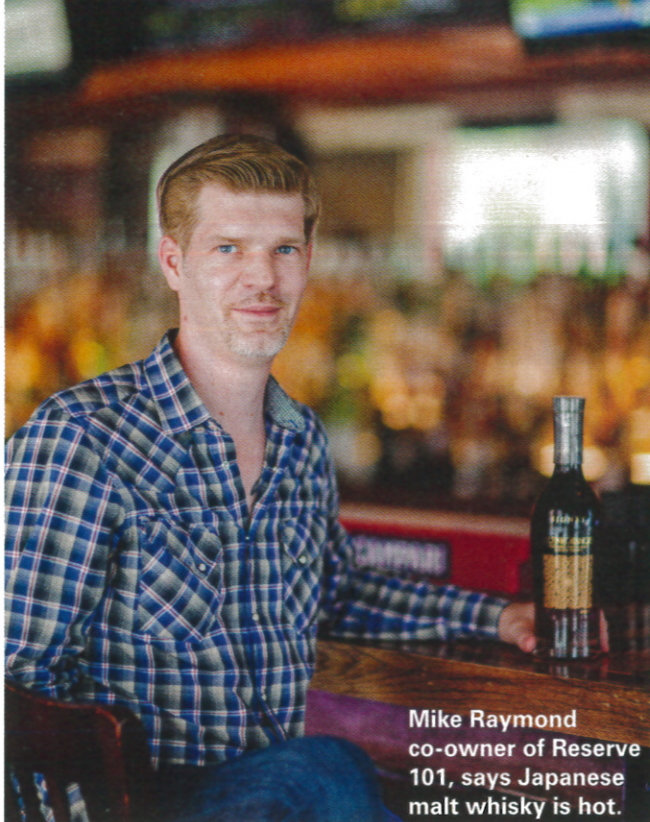
**THE TOP 10 BAR/  
RESTAURANT  
CONCEPTS**

**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Holiday  
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whiskey update





Mike Raymond  
co-owner of Reserve  
101, says Japanese  
malt whisky is hot.

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

Despite the local in its name, the bar's collection of 220 whiskeys focuses on single-malt Scotch, with substantial depth in Japanese malts and Canadian, Irish as well as American whiskeys. 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 quaff 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 Riefel.

## NEW WHISKEY ENTHUSIASTS

Whiskey is garnering interest beyond hard-core aficionados chasing after rare bottles; its appeal is broadening to a wider demographic. "Popularity with women and millennials is leading the growth of whiskey," 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 fondue-chain concept, which has more than 130 restaurants in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, has been seeing more calls for whiskey-based cocktails.

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

Consumers are following different paths to the whiskey 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

whiskey-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-approachable Irish whiskeys. "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 whiskeys."

Also enticing millennials is the rapidly growing sub-segment of flavored whiskeys, 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 whiskey—a training-wheels approach," notes Raymond.

Reserve 101 attracts a diverse mix of customers, thanks to its proximity to the House of Blues nightclub, 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 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 whiskeys neat in tulip-shaped Italian crystal glassware designed to deliver maximum aroma. The whiskeys 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-in. solid ice ball at no extra charge.

## EVENTS AND EDUCATION

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

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

With a focus on craft beer, the bar started with about 30 whiskeys, 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 of three 1-oz. pours, for \$10 and \$15. "Most people could find

PHOTO BY A WRANGLER



# 85%

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ten bucks to try three different whiskeys."

The Malt House also holds themed, guided tastings on Thursdays once a month, featuring six ½-oz. pours for a fixed price accompanied by tasting notes. Whiskies are mostly Scotch, with a few Irish, a couple of Canadian and three Japanese malts, as well as a French whisky finished in Cognac barrels. Pours range from \$5 to \$30; the latter for Johnnie Walker Blue Label.

To further focus on whiskey, Rogers also pulled out whiskey offerings from the beverage menu; the separate listing gives him room to add a description of each whiskey. "So the menu acts as a silent salesperson," he says.

As an educational and promotional event, The Malt House held a ticketed event that contrasted a 41-year-old The Macallan with the distillery's standard 12-year. "We packed the bar for that, and it was instructive to taste the two whiskeys side by side," says Rogers, who plans a similar event during the holiday season.

At Local, there's been a learning curve for both the bar's staff and its customers. "Since we opened December 2012, it has been an evolving process, picking up on the trends, figuring out how to utilize various whiskeys in cocktails," Riefel says.

The learning process has been bolstered with staff tastings and promotions led by brand reps and distillers. A couple of whiskey dinners are planned for the fall, and Riefel is setting up whiskey flights exploring regions such as Speyside and Islay, with descriptors and specialized tasting glasses.

"We are also upping the ante on cocktails to showcase more imports," he says, such as a Moscow Mule variation made with the top-shelf Laphroaig Quarter Cask. To alleviate the higher price points on Scotch, bartenders will use the pricier whiskeys as a rinse or use an atomizer to add a hint of smokiness to the nose. Local promotes its cocktails and rarities through social media, as well as with a chalkboard of specials, peppered with a "whiskey quote of the day."

The educational effort has been worth it, says Riefel. "Our collection definitely brings in customers. There isn't another place like ours in the area." Local's selection of international whiskeys "provides us with a point of differentiation," he adds.

For its part, Reserve 101 is in the process of revamping its Whiskey Society, a rewards program aimed at fostering trial of its collection among regulars. The restaurant also reworked the layout of its beverage list.

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 "Whiskey 101" section on the list. "If people want to know more about whiskey, they are going to find our bar," concludes Raymond. \*

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

# MELTING POT PROMO CELEBRATES WHISKEY WOMEN

To capitalize on the popularity of its whiskey 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 whiskey-based cocktails and a customizable whiskey flight, says Paul Brown, beverage manager for parent company Front Burner Brands.

The cocktails he designed for The Melting Pot's fall promotion span a range of styles, from the Buck Be a Lady, which mixes Jameson Irish whiskey with muddled strawberries and ginger beer, to the Preservation League, with a base of Monkey Shoulder Scotch, Cointreau, apricot preserves and fresh citrus. Drink prices vary by location.

The Melting Pot created a menu wrap for the promotion that features the cocktails on one 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 whiskeys 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 concurrent Ladies Night event series includes whiskey-infused fondues, a cheese and two chocolate desserts, all designed to pair with the cocktails. "We suggest to guests that they drink the spirit used in the fondue or select one of the flights associated with the chocolate fondues," says Brown.

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

