

Spirits flavor innovation in 2023 focuses on playfulness, new experiences, says IWSR



[IWSR](#) is reporting that spirits flavor innovation in 2023 will focus on playfulness and new experiences.

"Though consumers in many markets remain concerned with health, moderation and the economic environment, they're also looking for unique experiences and fun moments, as well as continuing to seek the comfort of nostalgic serves and flavors," said the drinks market analysis firm.

"Drinks creators are taking advantage of this playful mood, producing new liquids that subvert category norms, and that promote both connoisseurship and accessibility. These liquids appeal equally to knowledgeable consumers looking for experiences, as well as to newer recruits, who are led by brand names and flavor descriptors rather than traditional liquids.

Some bartenders are also shifting to higher-strength serves in the on-trade, and are revisiting the classics to revivify core spirits, or to experiment with dispensing methods and adjuncts that add complexity and mouthfeel. A savory countertrend is also emerging using saline flavors as well as savory serves of classic cocktails."

Playfulness

IWSR explains that after a stressful few years, consumers are prioritizing "fun and escapism," from nostalgic serves with a twist to decadent flavors inspired by comforting treats. Dessert-flavored products have increasingly come to market, including launches such as Stambecco Tiramisu, Baileys Pavlova, Eggo Sippin Cream and 'Shmallow Toasted Marshmallow Bourbon. As well as encouraging and enabling new and playful serves, these products all hint at familiar flavors.

Strong, with a twist

Changing lifestyles and wellness goals have been driving a strong trend for moderation, with consumers choosing to limit their alcohol intake, switch between full and no- and low-alcohol options, or seek out products with functional benefits.

"This will continue to drive product innovation, however, there's also a push towards stronger serves, especially for out-of-home consumption," IWSR reports, adding that, "Offering more punch, mouthfeel and satisfaction, high strength serves offer bartenders a canvas for experimentation and refinement."

It also notes that MSG is also being used as a key ingredient for adding an umami, slightly cheesy flavor to a range of cocktails, particularly the Martini.

Category metamorphosis

As consumers look for unique experiences, brands are responding by creating entirely new liquids that bridge categories. In some cases, this innovation is led by a desire to take brands into different serves, making it relevant to a wider group of consumers and to more occasions.

Monkey Shoulder Fresh Monkey, for example, is a blended grain spirit comprising several new-make spirits that bridge the gap between rum and whisky. Intended by the brand to "challenge category norms," it both sought to take the Scotch brand into serves that typically use rum, as well as create "endless cocktail possibilities" for bartenders.

Meanwhile when Axia spirit launched, it claimed to have created a white spirits category with the first extra-dry mastiha spirit. Not a gin, and not a vodka, it's made from mastiha resin from mastic trees, which is double distilled to give citrus and vegetal notes. It's said to have 30% fewer calories than other white spirits, notes IWSR.

Some products offer a lower-strength option and sweeter taste profile, while still showcasing a key ingredient or flavor. Kranebet Botanic Juniper Liqueur for example is said to offer a slightly sweeter twist on traditional London Dry Gin, and is recommended used in traditional gin serves such as with tonic or in a Negroni.

Saline flavors

A savory countertrend is emerging, with products increasingly focused on saline flavor notes.

"Salt has appeared as a key ingredient in several launches over recent years, from Mermaid Salt Vodka to Guinness Salt & Lime Ale. This trend is becoming more popular, as salted gins, whiskies and other seemingly unlikely categories embrace it as an adjunct," says IWSR.

Currently, salt is being championed as a key cocktail ingredient. A saline solution – a liquid way of adding salt both more thoroughly, evenly and more subtly than say, salting the rim or simply sprinkling salt in – has become a common addition to a few serves. Rather than being overtly salty, the solution helps to amplify the other flavors in the mix.