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THE GILDED GOLDEN GATE COCKTAIL AT ROUTE 29 IN SAN DIEGO FEATURES TEQUILA, PASSION FRUIT, TURMERIC, CARROT, LIME, EGG WHITES, AND AGAVE.



A Spirited Season

BY BETH DEMMON

The holidays are peak season for bar sales. Here's how to make the most of them.

THE HOLIDAY SEASON is drinking season, which makes holiday cocktails an important component of restaurant bar promotions. "It's very competitive in the restaurant and bar industry around the holidays, and you have

to be part of the game," says Marcelo Amaya, bar manager at Osetra Seafood & Steaks in San Diego, California. "An updated menu for the holidays gets people's attention and motivates them to come in and try something

SUCCESSFUL SPECIALS

Deals that did well.
BY LAURA ZOLMAN KIRK

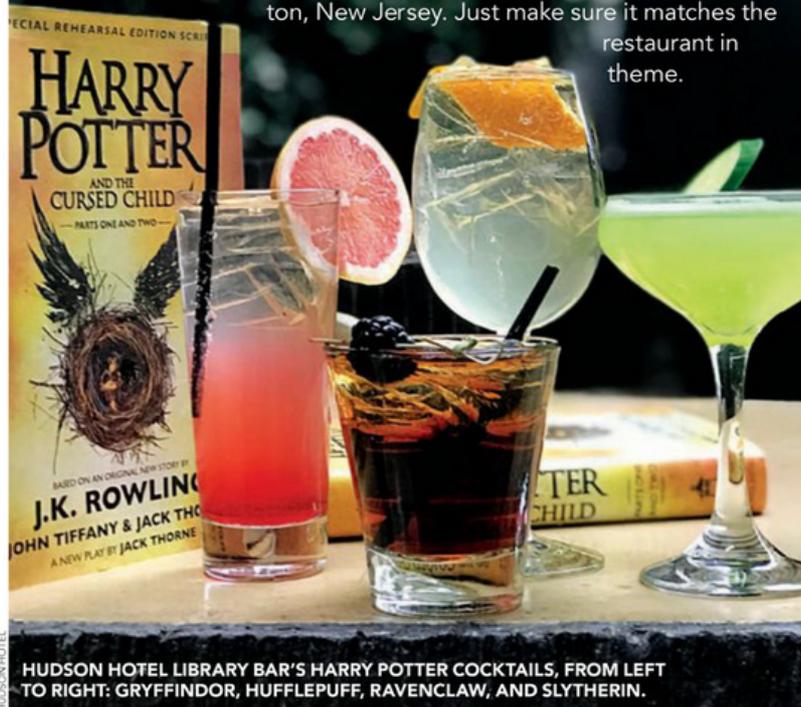
WHETHER IT BE A SPECIALTY, LIMITED-TIME COCKTAIL or a once-a-week offer, restaurants that get creative with beverage specials stand to boost sales by incentivizing customers to order more and stick around longer.

Earlier this year, Hudson Hotel's Library Bar in New York offered a Harry Potter-inspired cocktail menu that created quite a buzz, says Cristine Faunce, food and beverage manager. "The strong tie in with the bar's essence and fanbase of the stories drew crowds for some time after the announcement of the menu. We still have guests asking for the inspired libations," she says.

For Brimstone Woodfire Grill in Doral, Florida, one of its most successful specials—the Coconut Island Mojito—resulted from an informal customer survey. "Taking the time to find out what that customer actually wants helped make this drink special wildly popular," says Gio Celona, general manager.

For ROK:BRGR with four locations in Florida, a regular Bottomless Brunch deal has brought crowds every Saturday and Sunday—positioning weekend days to be the highest grossing—for the past seven years. "The unlimited option delivers really good value to the consumer," says Marc Falsetto, CEO of J.E.Y. Hospitality.

"At the end of the day, people are always curious about specials so I believe that they are a must," says Carlos Ruiz, head bartender of SOMOS Latin Kitchen & Bar in North Arlington, New Jersey. Just make sure it matches the restaurant in theme.



HUDSON HOTEL LIBRARY BAR'S HARRY POTTER COCKTAILS, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GRYFFINDOR, HUFFLEPUFF, RAVENCLAW, AND SLYTHERIN.

new to celebrate the season."

Classic flavors tend to dominate even the most innovative bar programs. Steve Madonna, senior vice president of culinary at the national chain Bar Louie, incorporates festive flavors such as cinnamon, cranberry, and ginger on the menu and adds warm drinks, too, like the Celtic Campfire, which is a twist on hot chocolate featuring Jameson Irish Whiskey, Baileys Irish Cream, and a layer of toasted marshmallow foam on top.

Madonna advises a "quality over quantity" approach for restaurateurs interested in creating new beverage menus for the holiday season. "One or two seasonal cocktails is a great start," he says. "It doesn't have to be a chore."

Different holidays dictate different approaches to celebration. For instance, New Year's Eve is arguably the biggest bar night of the year, making it important for bar managers and mixologists to come up with something appropriately festive. That can range from the use of unique flavors or noteworthy presentations, or both.

Route 29 in downtown San Diego is big on presentation. The restaurant's tequila-based Golden Gate cocktail comes served in a golden chalice and garnished with a slice of dried orange and toothpick spear with a gold bauble on the end. It's a striking composition that evokes an upscale vibe perfect for a New Year's toast.

Diez y Seis, a Mexican restaurant inside Shore Club South Beach in Miami Beach, leans on a blend of flavors in an attempt to maintain its Mexican-forward concept while also embracing the expected American holiday palate. "The fun is taking spirits like tequila and mezcal, both of which have very unique taste profiles, and blending them with the flavors of the holidays like cinnamon, nutmeg, apple cider, etc. to create something that is seasonal, fun, and tasty with mass appeal," says Daniel Lydia, director of food and beverage for Diez y Seis.

For the Manzarita, a half of a lemon is quartered and muddled with a pinch of ground cinnamon in a cocktail shaker, then ice, tequila, elderflower liqueur, and



SIPS APPEAL

SomruS Indian Cream Liqueur

Inspired by an Indian dessert, this liqueur is made with spices like cardamom and saffron, nuts like pistachio and almond, rum, and cream and tastes almost like chai. "It's delicious, smooth, and silky and transports one to India!" says Monica Badlani, partner and COO. She recommends pairing it with rum, scotch, gin, or vodka in place of egg whites to make a fizz, or mixed with strong black tea. "SomruS is to tea and Baileys is to coffee!" she says.

PEWAUKEE WISCONSIN

apple cider are added and shaken well. The cocktail is then strained and presented in a rocks glass as a standard margarita would be with the festive addition of a cinnamon stick, making it a harmonious marriage of seasonality and the restaurant's established brand.

Of course, nothing says New Year's like a Champagne cocktail. The team at Copine in Seattle, Washington, ensures they always have bubbly cocktails on their holiday menu, as well as interesting twists on classic drinks. The restaurant's take on a hot toddy, dubbed The Azteca, uses chocolate bitters, a drizzle of local honey, dark rum, hot water, and lemon twist garnish. "[We] focus on clean profiles that are not too big or bold and match them with menu items," says Ruven Muñoz, Copine's beverage director. Working hand-in-hand with the kitchen is an important consideration when planning a holiday cocktail menu, especially for food-forward events like Christmas.

The fourth quarter is also a great time for restaurants to spread holiday cheer through

charitable giving. Every year, the concepts within the SLS Brickell Hotel in Miami work with nonprofit organizations to get into the spirit of giving, according to the group's publicist, Gabriella Rodriguez. For example, Bazaar Mar by José Andrés, SAAM lounge, and Fi'lia feature a signature cocktail throughout the month of December, the proceeds of which go toward breast cancer research.

Amaya at Osetra Seafood & Steaks' advice for industry professionals is to start planning holiday cocktail menus early. "Think a month to a month-and-a-half ahead of time to not only give yourself time to craft the perfect menu but also for people to see it and keep it in mind all season long."

Ultimately, tapping into that feeling of holiday nostalgia and presenting patrons with something unexpected will spell success for restaurants. "A holiday drink should be inspired by the festivities, gathering people together, traditional holiday flavors and ingredients, and sharing these moments with others," Amaya says. ■



THE 140-SEAT BAZAAR MAR BY JOSÉ ANDRÉS IN MIAMI SERVES COCKTAILS WITH A CAUSE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON.