

# Beer: Shaken or Stirred

What's on Tap is Now in Cocktails

BY ALIA AKKAM

Drinking beer has always been a relatively simple affair. Pull up the tab and drink it straight from the can after work. Sip it out of a no-frills plastic cup at the baseball game. Order a Guinness on draft with the expectation it will taste exactly like the one you've nursed in bars across the world. But as beer drinkers have become more adventurous—exploring craft brews, and pairing them with dinner courses with as much gusto as wine—it's only natural both bartenders and customers would turn to beer cocktails next.

Todd Thrasher, the cocktail wizard in Alexandria, VA, who helms the beverage programs for the restaurants of the Eat Good Food Group, has introduced a number of approachable “Hoptails”—beer-infused cocktails—to the menu at the company's newest outpost, Virtue Feed & Grain. Here, inspired by the restaurant's two porch swings looking out onto a large open window, the eponymously named drink features Negra Modelo, pineapple, tamarind and dark rum. The Smooth As Velvet—with a Guinness reduction, Ribena blackcurrant drink, Irish whiskey and sparkling wine—is another option, as is the What I Drink, combining Amstel with lemon, soda and dark rum.

According to Jay Willard, general manager of The Dandelion in Philadelphia, a reversion to classic cocktails has opened up the minds of guests to new experiences, hence the restaurant offering an autumnal Beer Flip with bourbon, honey, egg and pumpkin purée. “Our guests are extremely beer savvy, having many great breweries around the area to educate them on good beer,” he says. “So the jump to beer in cocktails was a relatively easy one.”

## Novelty Act

For years, stalwarts have dominated the beer category, yet one way smaller breweries have been able to find success is by offering a range of nuances and styles. This growth of beer, adds Willard, “has opened the door to inclusion in cocktails, as they add a broad array of flavors. The novelty of it does the selling. When a guest opens up the menu and reads the ingredients to one of our beer cocktails, it always sparks up a conversation with the server/bartender. We have a great beer program here and almost every guest tries a beer in one form or another, whether a beer cocktail, cask ale or draft.”

Jacob Grier of Portland, OR, also regales his guests at Metrovino with a flip, the Avena Stout. “I'd been playing a lot with beer cocktails and a friend who was visiting the bar asked me to make her something new. The Avena was there, the stout was there and it all came together nicely,” he recounts. Because the restaurant doesn't have many taps, Grier is limited with the number of beer cocktails he can concoct, but he always reserves a place for one on the menu. “The best way is for guests to see one being made and have their curiosity piqued,” Grier suggests.

## HERE COMES THE SUN

- 1½ oz. Siembra Azul tequila
- 1 dash Angostura bitters
- 2½ oz. orange juice
- 2 teaspoons maraschino juice
- 1 bottle Green Flash IPA
- 1 wheel preserved orange

In a shaker, combine the tequila, bitters, and orange juice, and ice. Shake and strain into a Pilsner glass filled with ice. Add maraschino juice and top with beer. Garnish with preserved orange.



At JoeDoe in NYC, Jill Schulster serves beer concoctions like the “Here Comes the Sun”

## Food's The Thing

In Paris, sipping a Picon Biere—a shot of Amer Picon (an aperitif orange bitter spirit)poured in a cold glass of Pilsner—is a common custom. Because Amer Picon is not available in the U.S., however, Ted Gallagher of Craigie on Main in Cambridge, MA, reinterprets the classic with a replica made in-house. “It's a delicious, beautiful cocktail, certainly one on the lighter side. The housemade Picon acts as an interesting extension of the more bitter hop notes, as well as the fruitier, sweeter notes of the malt and yeast. The first person to order one here was a chef,” Gallagher shares. Because Craigie on Main is a bistro, Gallagher feels the Picon Biere meshes with the restaurant's vision: “We absolutely create the beer program with food in mind; it's an extension of the philosophy of our wine program, in every sense. We opt for versatility, beers that will highlight and not overpower foods. As the cocktail renaissance and the craft beer movement move forth, beer becomes what it's already been—something else behind the bar to play with. It's a wide world of flavors.”

Beer cocktails acquire a different spin at neighborhood spot JoeDoe in New

York City. Co-owner Jill Schulster offers a Prepared Beers menu, in which glasses of beer get gussied up with ingredients ranging from frozen marshmallows to peanut dust. “The prepared beers were invented out of necessity. JoeDoe is a true mom and pop, and when Joe and I opened the restaurant we couldn’t afford a huge, impressive wine list. I needed a creative and cost-effective way to ‘beef’ up my beverage program,” Schulster explains. Now, customers turn to favorites like The Honey Beer with Dale’s Pale Ale, DH Krahn gin, fresh lemon and salted honey. “Joe uses a lot of spice and acid in his cooking so they pair very well,” Schulster continues. “Everything at JoeDoe is taste-driven. All beverage items on the menu are carefully thought out to pair with the JoeDoe menu. It is much more challenging to pair prepared beers with a meal because of the many ingredients and flavors, and the result is an interesting and tasty experience.”

## Knowledgeable Beer-Tending

Lucas Paya, who is responsible for the beverage components at all of Jose Andrés’ ThinkFoodGroup properties, is the mastermind behind the exotic Cold Tea for Two cocktail at Chinese-Mexican restaurant China Poblano at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. It melds green tea, Dos Equis lager, reposado tequila, lemon juice, St-Germain and Sichuan peppercorns. “This drink really blends together the flavors of both cultures we are representing as well as a little bit of our own history,” Paya explains. “The idea stems from a late-night Chinese restaurant in DC that Chef used to go to after service where they would discreetly serve beer to industry people inside of tea pots even though it was after hours.”

The cocktail is an extension of China Poblano’s already comprehensive beer program. Featuring quality products on a menu isn’t enough, Paya warns: “Having knowledgeable staff is the key

BEER-BASED  
COCKTAILS ARE AT  
ONCE CHALLENGING  
AND INTRIGUING;  
ADVENTUROUS  
DINERS ARE OPEN  
TO NEW OPTIONS,  
BUT HAND-SELLING  
IS OFTEN REQUIRED

element here as most guests are always looking to try something new and are very adventurous these days, but they only do this in a setting where they feel the staff is well versed and outgoing.”

Newly opened SmithHouse Tap & Grill in Los Angeles is another restaurant serious about its beer, with over 120 offerings on tap. In addition to beer flights, there are also SmithHouse Original Blends, created by Adam Schenck, which offer playful combinations. “It started with the Beer Royal which is a play on the Kir Royale—Champagne and Chambord,” says Schenck. “Some Belgian blonde ales are very effervescent and light in body like a Champagne, as are the Lambics we use to add that touch of raspberry. After getting that down I started to play with different combinations and eventually found that the Lambics blended well with chocolate stout as well. And who doesn’t like chocolate and fruit?”

Schenck admits Los Angeles has long been a wine and cocktail town, but his goal is to “create ways to open people’s minds about the scope of beer. I think using a classic cocktail as inspiration makes it a more comfortable thing to try. I love it when I meet a guest who thinks they don’t like beer—to me it’s an invitation to introduce them to something different and new.” ■



## FORGET ABOUT THE JUG

No, real cider is not the apple juice one lugs home from the u-pick pumpkin patch as soon as it becomes October. The hard stuff is dry, and as sophisticated and as nuanced as beer and wine. Consider Bloomington, IN-based Oliver Winery. Its artisanal Beanblossom Hard Cider, also available in peach and raspberry varieties, is crafted from gently pressed fresh Midwestern apples and natural flavors.

To introduce New Yorkers to the complexities of hard cider, Sara Grady, in charge of special projects at the Glynwood Institute in Cold Spring Harbor, NY, will unveil Cider Week. Cider Week is part of Glynwood’s larger “Apple Project,” which aims to support the production of cider apples, hard cider and apple spirits in the Hudson Valley—and prove Calvados isn’t the only high quality stuff. It runs from October 16<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> with restaurants and stores offering tastings.

Cocktails, of course, are another popular way to introduce customers to cider, and Joe Campanale of Anfora in NYC is doing just that with The Szarlotka, which simply pairs cider with ZU Bisongrass vodka. At both Boqueria locations, the Basque Autumn Sangria with Isastegi Basque cider, apple-infused bourbon, lemon juice, Gran Torres orange liqueur and ginger beer is another example.

The trend extends beyond New York, too. At 360 St. Louis, overlooking Busch Stadium, guests can sip a Cidertini, marrying cider with E & J Brandy and splashes of Myers Rum and fresh lemon juice. Beyond intriguing flavor profiles, Tony Poole, GM and beverage director of 360 St. Louis, adds, “Cider is a comfort drink; it provides a good sense of backdrop within a cocktail.”