

Game, Set, Batch & TAP

Shake together craftsmanship, speed of service, novelty and consistency, and you may just serve up the latest cocktail trend

THE PAST DECADE HAS brought about big innovations behind the bar, mostly led by the handcrafted and high-quality mixology movement. Now that the standard for creative infusions, muddles, blends and drink recipes has been set, and consumers' expectations have been raised, the trend to making well-crafted cocktails in higher volume batches is a logical next step. After all, speed of service and consistency are often hallmarks in this segment. If done well, batched cocktails can hasten delivery while also calling out artisanship. This movement is the evolution of craft cocktails. Its forefathers? Sangria and punch. Its distant cousin? Frozen margarita machines.

In recent years, batched cocktails have been showing up in increasing and varied forms, starting with the revival of pitcher and punchbowl cocktails, then to house-bottled cocktails, tapped aging barrels and cocktails on draft.

"Craft-cocktail bartenders can only make so many drinks in an hour, so batched cocktails provide obvious operational advantages," says beverage expert Jack Robertiello. "If made properly, they provide busier establishments a chance to offer cocktail specialties in volume without slowing general service."

QUANTITY WITH QUALITY

"Batching cocktails is the perfect method to offer deliciously consistent, high-quality beverages in a timely, efficient manner," says Hector Acevedo, banquet beverage

manager at Fontainebleau Miami Beach hotel, where select drinks are pitcher-batched, but with careful attention to quality. "Your guests want something unique, but don't necessarily want to wait for ingredients to be muddled and mixed." The hotel's list of batched cocktails is long and impressive; highlights include a Raspberry Collins (gin, fresh lemon, simple syrup, fresh raspberries and ginger beer) and a Blackberry Bramble (gin, fresh lemon, simple syrup and crème de mûre).

The trend of batched cocktails is propelled by operational necessity. But your customers will only respond well if it tastes good. Obvious, yes — but the point is worth underscoring. Make recipes that work well here. Vodka and cranberry juice can be left to à la minute prep, for

instance. Instead, consider choosing signature cocktails that can be made well in small or large batches.

"Guests are likely walking in doubtful [of pre-made cocktails], so do what you can to not reinforce the idea

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Pre-batching cocktails by also incorporating fresh, high-quality ingredients is an especially appealing way for high-volume operators to get in on the craft cocktail movement.

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KATHY CASEY

Maintaining quality and artisanship is critical when choosing to batch well-loved cocktails, like this Mai Tai on tap.



PERFECT PUREE OF NAPA VALLEY

Why Now There are several reasons for batching cocktails: speed of service for complex cocktails, and the opportunity for multiple flavors to meld together into one more complex flavor. Of course, batching is also great for highlighting a signature “you can only get it here” cocktail program. Depending on local laws, batching can be done in barrels, pitchers or store-n-pours. An operator should start with a signature recipe that warrants batching for volume, complexity or flavor reasons.

– DAVID COMMER



CAROLYN JAIME FOR HOOK & LADDER

The Devil If You Do — with Aviation gin, Cointreau Noir, Cinzano dry vermouth and angostura bitters — exemplifies the carefully balanced batching done at Hook & Ladder Manufacturing Co. in Sacramento.

that mass production equals lower quality,” says The Culinary Edge’s Steven Goldstein. “Avoid the Long-Island-iced-tea territory.” If you batch simple drinks that don’t require a deft hand or experienced bartender, then you’re conveying a lack of quality and attention to detail, perhaps signaling that preserving your margins is more important than hiring qualified staff.

“Guests already have expectations and standards of classic cocktails such as Manhattans or Sazeracs,” he adds. “Make sure you meet or exceed these expectations.”

“Batching cocktails provides an operational strategy to gain speed and efficiency in beverage service to your guests. It also can provide a control to both beverage (recipe) pricing and quality. Depending on the beverage, there may also be an opportunity to showcase the visual appeal of the batched cocktail — increasing impulse purchase through visual appeal. Look at what will make the biggest impact and also what your BOH operation can withstand, then craft your best beverage strategy.”

ROB CORLISS

And those expectations are higher than ever, at a time in which mojitos are muddled right in front of the customer, and where drinks see signature twists like blood orange instead of mint or perhaps Prosecco instead of soda water. However the cocktails are crafted, the expectation is that the libation intoxicates with its freshness and artisanship.

DRAFT DETAILS

Embracing innovation behind the bar was an important factor in the conceptual development of Sacramento's Hook & Ladder Manufacturing Co., a newly opened restaurant with an artisan, local vibe, serving housemade pastas, pizzas and small plates. Partners Kimio Bazett and Jon Modrow teamed up with Beverage Director Chris Tucker to install draft cocktails as an extension of both its mixology program and its commitment to customer service.

"This is not to say we don't do amazing cocktails to order, but a lot of people don't like to wait or think too hard about it," says co-owner Bazett. On tap, Hook & Ladder serves up a rye-based Jerry Thomas Manhattan, a Jameson Stinger (Jameson Irish Whiskey, Bols crème de menthe and orange bitters); a Devil If You Do, with Aviation gin, Cointreau Noir, Cinzano dry vermouth and

“ I love the mystique of a wooden cask behind the bar. Patrons enjoy the surprise, and it shows creativity. Why not create a house blend of your favorite mixture and become known for it? Sangrias are also a great visual — the colorful fresh ingredients pique curiosity. ”

TODD DOWNS

TAPPING Into Wine

One step ahead of tapped cocktails is the tapped-wine movement, which brings with it operational advantages like ease of use and reduced spoilage, while addressing increasing environmental and sustainability concerns. Bertucci's recently launched its 2Ovens casual concept in Shrewsbury, Mass., and proudly labels "tap wine" on its menu.

"It's a win-win for us," says Jeffrey Tenner, executive chef of 2Ovens and Bertucci's. "We increase freshness and reduce our environmental impact with no glass wine bottles." 2Ovens serves 15 wines by the glass, all housed in a temperature-controlled keg system. "It's no more expensive than setting up lines for tapped beer," he says. The one challenge is finding mid-priced wines. "We can get higher end and lower end, but the mid-range part of the market is still developing."

Wines on tap are making a showing in concepts across the industry, from fast-casuals to the new breed of wine bars. Boxed wine is even making its way into foodservice, especially with the growth in wine and beer in fast-casual settings. "There has been success with box wines in fast casual," says consultant Rob Corliss. "It simplifies service and storage, limits the risk of spoilage from bottle use, and mitigates staff training on bottle service. Advances in box wine quality and availability of brands have netted loyal followers who are more than ready to pay \$5-plus for a glass of box wine with their taco."



HOOK & LADDER

Wines on tap at concepts like Sacramento's Hook & Ladder means less spoilage and an eco-friendly halo.

angostura bitters, as well as a classic Negroni. “This Negroni is indistinguishable from a single serving — that’s how good the batching is,” says Bazett.

Hook & Ladder uses four 5-gallon “Corney” kegs with a nitrogen set-up, replumbed for quick-release soda-like taps. “There’s definitely trial and error with this process,” admits Bazett. “We anticipate having to change out the lines periodically, but haven’t gotten there yet.” When it comes to drink development, “we try to use ingredients that are as stable as possible, with not too much sugar in them, and stick to stronger, alcohol-heavy recipes,” he says. “All of these were made not only to pour quickly but to be well balanced.”

One goal in the planning of the draft-cocktail program was an attention to customer service that included speed and quality control. “Service was an enormous focus for us in developing the concept — almost more than the product itself,” says Bazett. Hook & Ladder’s draft drinks are being met with “overwhelmingly positive response.”

SPEEDIER SIPS

In St. Louis, Mo., mixologist Matt Seiter is also a big proponent of draft cocktails, tapping drinks like sangrias and punches at Sanctuaria, a tapas and cocktail concept. Seiter started the tap program more than a year ago, when he noticed patrons were “sitting with a glass of water for five to seven minutes” while perusing the vast cocktail menu. “We removed three of our draft beers and put cocktails on tap, solely with the purpose of getting something in our guests’ hands quickly,” he says.

Seiter started with a house sangria, and when he noticed the ingredients were stable and weren’t souring or oxidizing, he opened two more lines for seasonal

“Pre-batching has been around for years, but it’s definitely getting a makeover. I am always a fan of batching cocktails, whether on tap, in a punchbowl or bottled, as consistency is one of the most important factors in a bar.”

KATHY CASEY

Tips for BETTER BATCHING

“Write concise recipes and be sure to have the measuring tools and containers for the bar to pre-batch the cocktails. If using citrus for a tapped recipe, be sure to strain the juices.”

— Kathy Casey

“Be aware of sweetness levels. Know what touches should be administered à la minute, such as a finishing drop of bitters.”

— Steven Goldstein

“Finish the batched cocktail in front of the customer, adding herbs, fruits or vegetables. Perhaps let them customize the drink, offering a choice of syrup, for example, or maybe adding a tray of garnishes for them to choose from.”

— Suzy Badaracco



GREG POWERS AND AUDREY CREWE FOR JALEO

The beauty of cocktails like this Cava Sangria at Jaleo in Washington, D.C., can be showcased when batched in pitchers or punchbowl.

cocktails. The house sangria is a blend of Russian samogon, fresh grape juice, Crème de Violette and simple syrup. For service, he drops rosewater in the glass, pours from the tap and garnishes with a grapefruit twist. Seasonal batches include a Sanctuaria House Punch with chamomile-infused reposado tequila, Lambrusco, passion fruit and lemon juices; and a Oaxacan Sunrise — Vida mezcal, St. Germaine and lime and passion fruit juices.

Like Hook & Ladder, Sanctuaria uses a Cornelius keg system, adapted to run through existing beer lines, but uses carbon dioxide as opposed to nitrogen. “The end result is almost like a soda; the drinks have a nice effervescence,” says Seiter. “We tried to do all-spirit cocktails like Manhattans or Martinis, but because of the gas we use, they’re not ideal for us. So for now, we base our recipes on drinks that will respond well with effervescence.”

The program has been a winner for Sanctuaria — Seiter has seen check averages and overall revenues increase as a result. “We did this for financial reasons and for quickness of service,” he says, noting the advantages a



How to Work It If volume makes you wary about adding more complicated cocktails, road test a few of your most popular drinks in bottled form. Develop a workable system, with one person responsible for the overall development and execution of the program. Reward success, correct failure and don't be afraid to start over.

– JACK ROBERTIELLO

tap program offers to high-volume operations. Consistency is another benefit, as is the ease and ability to offer the guest a sample. “We’ll suggest a cocktail on tap to start off while they read the menu or wait for a table,” he adds. As for customer reaction, Seiter says tap cocktails are a great conversation piece; “guests are intrigued by it.”

The tapped cocktail trend is not without its critics. Some feel it’s not reflective of the handcrafted cocktail movement, but Seiter quickly negates those claims. “Some professionals look down on us as if we’re cheating,” he says, “but there’s as much skill required in batching up a cocktail as in making a single serving. You’ve still got to have that knowledge and palate,” Seiter adds. “You’re still putting the effort and craftsmanship in; you’re just making 150 drinks at once. If a recipe calls for a gallon of lime juice, we’re still hand-squeezing fresh limes. It’s mass production on an extremely small scale.”

BARRELS OF CRAFT

Pride in craftsmanship is the intent of batched cocktails at Asador in Dallas. “We have three barrels on the back bar as a focal point,” says John McAuliffe, general manager and director of food and beverage. “The reason we added batched cocktails was to show our care and attention to detail, how we infuse and age them.”

For this program, he uses 3-liter new American oak barrels. Housed at the back of the bar, they carry signature Asador cocktails: the Vesper is made with Lillet Blanc, gin and vodka; the Old Fashioned sports añejo tequila in place of bourbon; and the Manhattan boasts bourbon, vermouth and bitters. The batches mature for six weeks in the barrels, from which they are served. “We’re proud of how we craft these cocktails and want to share that process with our guests,” he says.

If done well and with a modern mixology mindset, volume drink development — whether punchbowl or pitcher poured, barrel-aged or bottled behind the bar, or tapped from converted draft systems — can indeed express the same pride of cocktail craftsmanship that goes into a glass. ☺

“Mixology is an incredible draw for restaurants. There is a lot of opportunity in batched cocktails for high-volume operators. It’s a great way to satisfy customers with a high-price/high-margin item.”

DARREN TRISTANO