



# MARKET WATCH

## Getting Punchy

BARTENDERS ARE SWEET ON FRUITY VODKA DRINKS FOR SUMMER

In recent years, the flavored vodka category has morphed from a trendy newcomer to a staple item on bartenders' shelves, as American drinkers continue to exhibit an unceasing passion for fruity cocktails. Used in everything from exotic concoctions made with yuzu juice (a Japanese fruit) to more classic citrus blends, flavors are extending the category's phenomenal ride. • Citrusy-orange flavors are the most popular, says Sambonn "Sam" Lek, the creator of the "101 Martini" list at the historic Renaissance Mayflower Hotel's 65-seat Town & Country bar and lounge in Washington D.C. "People will come in and ask for a

Cosmopolitan made with Absolut Citron, which is No. 1 at our bar," Lek says. In response to the love of all things orange, Lek created a "Tropical Breeze" (\$10.95) using Smirnoff Orange Twist as the base, mixed with Midori, Captain Morgan's Parrot Bay Rum and pineapple juice. "It tastes very fruity with a heavy orange flavor."

#### UNISEX FLAVORS

The Cosmopolitan, once labeled the "Chick Martini," and fruity drink flavors are becoming much more gender-neutral. "Men really go for our Ruby Rickshaw," says Mike Fleury, head bartender at Ponzu, a contemporary Asian, 128-seat restaurant and bar in San Francisco's Serrano Hotel. Made with Absolut Vanilla, Cointreau and grapefruit, cranberry and lime juices, the cocktail tastes like a candy Sweet Tart, says Fleury. The drink was featured as a \$3 Happy Hour special but became so popular it is now on the regular menu for \$8.25, according to Ponzu general manager Lisa Redwine.

"About 40 percent of my male customers are trying the flavors," says Stefan Trummer, head bartender at the seafood restaurant Citarella's 40-seat bar and lounge in the Landmark Building at New York City's Rockefeller Center. Trummer and a mix of bartenders around the country created the 12 summer vodka-based drinks that follow, many of which show tropical and Asian influences.

#### EXCITEMENT IN A GLASS

Flavored vodka drinks and fruity cocktails made with regular vodkas, such as Vox and Ciroc, are not only helping drive vodka's growth, but they're also giving bartenders a boost against the competition. "Flavored vodka gives you an entirely new direction," says Citarella's Trummer. Vox is even slated to introduce a raspberry flavor this month. One of his most popular drinks is the Titanic, in which bits of Champagne sorbet float in a Martini glass filled with Ciroc, elderflower syrup and verjus. It is priced at \$14.

In upscale venues such as Ponzu, customers expect drinks that are a cut above the norm. Fleury's The Yuzu, priced at \$7.50, blends Absolut Citron, yuzu juice, simple syrup and ginger juice. "It's very popular because it's different," he says.

#### NO SLOWDOWN IN SIGHT

Vodka flavors have found a home even in the most traditional of U.S. venues—the steakhouse—further ensuring the category's growth. At Chicago's Tavern on Rush, a 296-seat bar and eatery, 50 percent of the drinks ordered are vodka based, and of those, 35 percent are flavored, reports head bartender Michael Shannon. His newest drink is the "Aqua Dream," priced at \$7.25, a mixture of Vox, Blue Curaçao, sweet and sour mix and pineapple juice.

—Jean Deitz Sexton is a freelance writer based in Santa Rosa, California.



To bring these vodka recipes to life, Stefan Trummer, head bartender at Citarella, served as drink stylist.