



By Kelly Magyarics

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The Gist of a Great Cocktail List

Creating a Cocktail List can be a Tedious Process — Perfecting the Wording, Branding and Length — But Its Value Can't be Overlooked

Up until a few years ago, guests were hard pressed to find a bar that even had a printed cocktail menu, but these days, customers expect venues to highlight their beverage options. A well-thought-out drink menu brings attention to the beverage program and gives curious clientele some direction. But wording is key — too little information confuses guests, too much overwhelms them and esoteric language alienates them. We asked cocktail consultants, mixologists and authors what to consider including — and omitting — when drafting a cocktail menu.

Know your audience. “Some markets are much more educated about cocktails and ingredients than others,” notes Jeffrey Morgenthaler, bar manager for Clyde Common in Portland, Ore. “In those markets where consumer knowledge isn't high, a more descriptive menu makes sense.” Listing “St-Germain,” for example, may be ample for cocktail-savvy customers, but “St-Ger-

your location. “It's human nature to have the urge to know exactly what we are getting,” admits Jonathan Pogash, cocktail consultant for The Cocktail Guru, who goes on to say that this style of cocktail menu allows that urge to be fulfilled. Morgenthaler agrees, adding that a list with names and ingredients has a cleaner look and puts the focus front and center on what's in the glass.

Remember that order affects drink orders. Unless there is some eclectic or unique ingredient to be highlighted, the main spirit should be listed first, followed by other spirits or liqueurs. Components with smaller quantities (bitters, syrup, egg white) can be mentioned toward the end. Scott Baird and Josh Harris, cocktail consultants and partners in The Bon Vivants, point out order on the menu can also subtly express quantity: They listed Campari last in a drink that only contained a barspoon of the Italian red liqueur, so customers who don't typically gravitate toward bitter cocktails wouldn't necessarily avoid ordering it.

To brand or not to brand. Kathy Casey, celebrity chef and mixologist for Kathy Casey Food Studios, lists all except rail brands on the menu to highlight the mixologist's attention to detail and let the consumer know exactly what he or she is getting. On the other hand, it's undeniable that some brands work better in certain cocktails than others, deciding not to list a particular producer demonstrates trust in the bartender to select a spirit with the appropriate flavor profile.

Don't use over-the-top descriptions. While one or two sentences that articulately give a bit of information about the history or name origin of the cocktail can be evocative and draw peo-

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main Elderflower Liqueur” or “elderflower liqueur” with a description of the product may be required for others. And it's worth noting that certain ingredients may be too niche for some demographics or venue styles to embrace no matter how well they're explained.

Consider simplicity. A menu that succinctly lists cocktail names and ingredients may be the best choice for

ple in, cluttered, flowery descriptions can have the opposite effect and appear pretentious. "There is a fair amount of pressure to come up with something witty, yet descriptive and relevant," admits Pogash. He favors a description that guests can relate to, without what he calls "fancy schmancy language."

Win the name game. A newly created drink's name may be a historical reference (San Francisco's Absinthe Brasserie & Bar's High Cotton was based on a quote from Lyndon Baines Johnson), a literary one (New York's Bookmarks Lounge's literature-inspired menu has a cocktail called Tequila Mockingbird) or even a pun (Clyde Common offers up the Maker's Mark-based Bourbon Renewal), but it should never be an afterthought. Baird and Harris estimate the name accounts for more than half of the reason for selecting a

particular cocktail in the first place, and they strive for creating efficient names that attract the aesthetics of the drink. They avoid monikers that just list ingredients, though, as they tend to cheapen the bar menu. "Summer Solstice" sounds so much sexier than a "Pomegranate Ginger Mojito," they point out.

Use buzzwords to create excitement. Listing small-batch spirits in a drink's description, as well as trendy ingredients like blood orange, tangerine, Kaffir lime, Thai basil, lemongrass and passion fruit, generates enthusiasm and curiosity, explains Casey. She also likes to draw attention to any locally or regionally sourced components.

When in doubt, leave it out. Balancing agents like sugar or simple syrup don't need to be mentioned on the menu. If a cocktail contains a flavored syrup, the consensus instead is to list

the element that provides the flavor ("ginger" instead of "ginger syrup"). Since she recognizes that some consumers are still unnecessarily wary about raw eggs, Casey eschews "egg white" and instead uses "froth." And Morgenthaler deems adjectives like "flavorful" or "tasty" less than helpful. Shouldn't all cocktails on the menu be delicious?

But keep it fresh. Is it assumed these days that all ingredients are fresh, and putting the term in front of items like lemon or lime juice is redundant? Absolutely not, says Pogash. Baird and Harris agree. But do avoid the term "fresh sour," they say. Since fresh sour is simply sugar and lemon, they list lemon on the menu. (This also has the added benefit of guests not confusing it with low quality sour mix.)

Just remember: No matter what, a menu is a must. **NCB**