Get the party STARTED

What should you be serving behind the bar this Christmas? We look at the top party drinks to consider for your menu to help your customers celebrate in style

EMMA EVERSHAM REPORTS

{ FENTIMANS *Sparkling* RASPBERRY }

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SCHWEPPES 1783 CUCUMBER TONIC WATER

Cucumber Pink

With Schweppes 1783 Cucumber Tonic Water

Glass: highball

Ingredients: 50ml pink grapefruit vodka, **200ml** Schweppes 1783 Cucumber Tonic Water

Garnish: pink grapefruit and fresh ginger

Method: Fill a highball glass to the top with ice. Add the vodka and top with Schweppes 1783 Cucumber Tonic Water.

To garnish: peel the skin of a pink grapefruit, taper and twist inside the drink, add a slice of fresh ginger.

For more, visit www.schweppesmixers.co.uk

1783
New range of unique natural flavours.
Inspired by the master.
J. Schweppe

GET IN CONTACT TO FIND OUT MORE AT CONNECT@CCEP.COM OR CALL 0808 1 000 000.

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With Halloween and Bonfire Night almost distant memories, it's full pelt towards Christmas when pubs fill with regulars – and some not-so-regulars – to celebrate the season of goodwill.

As Martyn Cozens, director of on-trade UK at Molson Coors, says: "Consumers are more experimental with drink choices at Christmas" and are more likely to consider those with a festive twist or that denote celebration, so operators should look for ways to add interest with new products or turn existing ones into a more seasonal serve.

"Our festive best-sellers are a combination of year-round favourites such as Carling and Coors Light, as well as seasonal products such as Rekorderlig Spiced Plum, a mulled cider winter warmer appealing to the hot drinks trend at Christmas," Cozens says.

Rekordelig's Spiced Plum is a blend of pear cider mixed with plums, cherries, cloves and cinnamon that can be served cold over ice or hot with a slice of orange making it a versatile choice for the festive season and beyond.

Other drinks that are championing festive flavours include Cranes Ciders – a range of cranberry-based fruit ciders that can be served straight, or as a base for mulled cider – and Cranes Cranberry & Blood Orange liqueur.

Cranes Drinks co-founder Ben Ritsema suggests simmering Cranes Cranberry & Lime cider with apple juice, fresh ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon and orange to create a winter warmer, or adding the liqueur to a glass of Prosecco to create some festive fizz.

The cranberry base makes these products ideal for Christmas, yet their versatility gives them year-round appeal, says Ritsema, meaning publicans who add them for the festive season will still be able to sell them in the summer, while those stocking them already can create something new for Christmas with a little creative thinking.

"That is something we are very proud about with our products," he says. "The ciders are very refreshing for the summer but can also be used in a winter mulled cider. Then the liqueur is hugely versatile, going into making traditional cocktails like the Cosmo, as well as Halloween (blood orange) red cocktails but then amazing winter cocktails too."

Whether you are considering adding new products to your core range, or sticking with your existing ones, what is important is that you 'refresh' your offer says Dan Bolton,

Offering seasonal cocktails helps stop 'festive fatigue' setting in

managing director of Hi-Spirits, because customers will be familiar with the 'usual suspects' and look for new flavours and 'enticing serves' during the party season.

"Offering a varied and interesting choice of seasonal cocktails and long drinks helps to engage customers and offers the range of choice needed to stop 'festive fatigue' setting in too soon," he says.

Seasonal serve ideas from Hi-Spirits' mixology team include the Southern Comfort Southern Berry Sour – a mix of 50ml Southern Comfort, 100ml cranberry juice, 50ml Fever-Tree Sicilian Lemonade served over ice and garnished with fresh cranberries and a sprig of rosemary; and Buffalo Trace & Ginger – 50ml of Buffalo Trace Bourbon poured over ice, topped with ginger ale and garnished with an orange wedge.

On the subject of spirits, sales of gin continues to outstrip other spirits, so consider ways to capitalise on its popularity while also working it into a Yuletide serve.

Alison Redding of Norfolk Gin says the artisan gin she co-founded in 2014 is juniper-led with floral and citrus notes, resulting in a smooth and well-balanced gin "that works well in your timeless G&T but also across your special Christmas cocktail menu".

"Our philosophy is that you only need one great gin all year round and, of course, we think that's Norfolk Gin," she adds.

The versatility of gin

"Gin works particularly well over Christmas and new year because it's a fantastic base and starting point for so many great drinks. Mix pitchers of gin cocktails for sharing with friends or, for an extra special seasonal drink, add great-quality mixers, vermouths and liqueurs, and elevate it with sparkle, seasonal garnishes such as orange and thyme and serve in beautiful glassware to create the perfect glass of festive cheer."

If you are looking for a product that can make your Christmas drinks menu literally sparkle, consider stocking Corky's Schnapps, which has three glitter infused flavours – blueberry, raspberry and mango – as well as two non-glittery sours: apple and cherry.

"Many more people now prefer uniqueness in drinks and opt »

SCHWEPPES 1783 SALTY LEMON TONIC WATER

Sbagliato

With Schweppes 1783 Salty Lemon Tonic Water

Glass: rocks

Ingredients: 25ml Campari, **25ml** sweet vermouth, **200ml** Schweppes 1783 Salty Lemon Tonic Water

Garnish: orange slice

Method: Take a rocks or tumbler glass and drop in a large piece of block ice. Pour in Campari and sweet vermouth before topping with Schweppes 1783 Salty Lemon Tonic Water.

To garnish: take a large slice of orange and place at the back of the glass.

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1783

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for more aesthetically pleasing serves," says Thomas Bennett, trade marketing controller at Global Brands.

"The glitter flavours are ideal to stock at Christmas time. They can add a sparkly, festive feel to a serve, or even be added into a glass of Prosecco for some extra Christmas spirit."

Christmas cocktails

Global Brands has also created some Christmas-themed cocktail recipes featuring Corky's Schnapps and its RTD brand VK designed as shared serves in branded bowls. They include Berry Christmas – two VK Strawberry & Lime, 50ml Corky's Raspberry glitter, lemonade and ice; and The Grinch, a blend of two VK Apple & Mango and Corky's Sour Apple topped with lemonade and ice.

"These sell particularly well in student and late-night venues, adding value to both consumers and customers," says Bennett.

Of course, simple serves, like those suggested by Global Brands, as well as speed of service are 'crucial' at Christmas when bars are busier than usual, says Matthew Sykes, director of international marketing, Patrón Spirits International.

Sykes suggests offering customers a P&T – Patrón Silver with Fever-Tree Citrus Tonic Water, created especially to complement the Tequila – to give a Mexican spin on the classic G&T.

"The P&T is a great twist on the popular drink and provides an original, premium drink that is easy to build quickly and is ideal for high-volume outlets," he says.

It is only natural for pubs to expand their soft drinks offering

While it's the last area to be mentioned, soft drinks shouldn't be an afterthought at Christmas, especially considering that 30% of customers are non-drinkers according to figures from the Office of National Statistics.

Harry Christie, head of all things wine at Bel & The Dragon country inns, believes it is important to show non-drinkers that you've paid as much attention to the non-alcoholic offerings as their alcoholic counterparts. He is a big advocate of non-alcoholic spirit Seedlip, which he says is a great base for alcohol-free cocktails, including their own Seedlip Sour (Seedlip Garden with apple juice, lemon juice, Aspall Cyder Vinegar, gomme and egg white).

"It's also fantastic as a replacement for gin in longer drinks, such as a Collins, which is ideal for drivers to match the pace of drinkers," he says.

Gabriel David, chairman and founder of Luscombe Drinks, says it is 'essential' that pubs stock a selection of 'sophisticated alternatives' to alcohol if they want to make all customers feel that they are being treated for Christmas.

"At Christmas, visits are celebratory, relaxed occasions and consumers seek something extra special, potentially even with a nod to the festive season.

"It is also worth noting the publican who offers great soft drinks will attract 'designated drivers', who may also bring a car load of customers with them (see p33-35)."

Examples of Luscombe's own Yuletide offerings include Damascene Rose Bubbly, a gently effervescent blend of damascene rose water, Muscat grape juice and Sicilian lemon; Cranberry Crush; Passionate Ginger Beer, ginger beer with passion fruit juice; and Sparkling Sour Cherry Water.

NEW PRODUCTS LAUNCHING THIS CHRISTMAS

- Didsbury Gin Christmas Pudding Liqueur – this limited-edition liqueur infuses the Manchester distilled Didsbury Gin with cinnamon, nutmeg, mixed spice and some seasonal secrets to create a sweet liqueur that can be served straight up over ice or included in a festive cocktail.
- Christmas Tide (ABV 4.9%), Salcombe Brewery's limited-edition yuletide ale, is a well-structured, malt driven beer that will be launched in October and available exclusively to be enjoyed throughout the festive season. The crystal, chocolate and wheat malts bring warmth and body to the beer, ideal for a winter's day. The plethora of hops build on the chocolatey malt base and add a bittersweet finish to this Christmas ale.
- Proper Cracker (4.3% ABV) St Austell Brewery's limited-edition ruby IPA is an addition to its Proper Job range. A hint of spice tiptoes across your taste buds before the full force of dark fruit hops. It has a unique bar call and blends the style of a traditional Christmas beer with a modern IPA twist.

WKD BRINGS FESTIVE CHEER TO PUBS

RTDs are pivotal for licensees looking to maximise party opportunities," explains Amanda Grabham, head of alcohol brand marketing at SHS Drinks, owner of RTD WKD.

"Celebratory occasions with friends are what RTDs are all about. Plus, consumers turn to big brands for the festive party season so, as a category-leader, WKD really drives sales for stockists. Multi-serve cocktails bring theatre to outlets and present a huge opportunity during peak trading periods," advises Grabham. "WKD sharing cocktails are easy for staff to mix, they've a real talk-about factor and help create fun nights out.

"Our new Cocktail Baubles will give a festive twist to proceedings. With four delicious recipes (Berry Christmas, Halo Cheeky, Mango Ho Ho and WKD Frostbite), the eye-catching seasonal serves are really coming into their own in the party season; the festive period is great for the category and the category is great for the festive period."

If you want to deliver sophisticated soft drinks while also meeting growing demand for healthier ones this Christmas, then the fermented tea drink kombucha ticks both boxes. The product is naturally effervescent due to its live cultures and purports to have a restorative effect on health.

Tim Lennox, CEO of No.1 Kombucha, believes the three editions in the range – Raspberry, Pomegranate & Hisbiscus; Passion Fruit & Goji; and Ginger & Turmeric – are ideal for those seeking a healthy alternative to fizzy drinks. He suggests using them as a long serve over ice with garnishes such as mint, basil or orange, or as the base to a mocktail.

"With one in five adults in the UK being teetotal, it is only natural for pubs to expand their soft drinks offering for this growing market, particularly during the busiest, most sociable time of year," he says.

"It's also important for consumers to have access to soft drinks that aren't loaded with sugar and artificial sweeteners. Every bottle of No.1 Kombucha contains fewer than 50 calories and it doesn't have the highs and lows of artificially carbonated drinks; it is infinitely refreshing but without disruptive effects to the body."

Organic kombucha brand Wild Fizz has four different flavours in its range – Jasmine Tea; Blood Orange; Lavender, Rosemary & Lemon; and Ginger, Turmeric & Black Pepper – which can be served as they are, or used as an alternative to traditional mixers or even as a cocktail base, making them a versatile, as well as healthy, choice.

"Great with gin, or in festive cocktails, drinks can be premiumised by the addition of kombucha and can transform a seasonal menu," says Wild Fizz Kombucha founder Gina Geoghegan. ■

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