**The Six Hottest Trends In Tequila**

As one of the world’s fastest-growing spirits, tequila is shaking off its reputation as a party animal and re-establishing itself as a luxury product. In the past decade, we’ve seen a similar rebirth from both Bourbon and vodka, as brands within those categories experimented with new ways to appeal to the palette and lifestyle of younger, image-conscious consumers.

So, how is tequila changing?

For many consumers, their initial experience with tequila left a lasting impression. Oftentimes, that first drink was too sweet, too sour or mixed with an inferior product, resulting in headaches and heart-crossed promises to leave the gold-colored spirit on the shelf. Once the hangover wore off, they associated all tequilas as being the same and gravitated toward other spirits.

Now tequila brands are out to revise that mindset. And the most significant growth is taking place in the super premium segment, with higher quality budget brands not far behind. As consumers taste these refined tequilas, they’re turning away from low-cost options that use artificial sugars and neutral grain spirits.

Several new trends are emerging as brands aim to appeal to potential consumers in radically different ways.

To better understand what the future holds for tequila, we asked an expert.

Steve Brooks is the Director of Beverage Development at Tumbleweed Tex Mex Grill & Margarita Bar, a regional restaurant that is famous for authentic Tex Mex, including tequila-based drinks.

Here’s what Steve is seeing today, and what he expects to happen in the near future.

**1. More celebrity endorsements and ownership**

Obviously, the idea of a famous people endorsing a product is nothing new. But in many cases, a celebrity can be used to improve the appeal of a lesser quality product. This is not the case with tequila.

From Sean Combs’ DeLeon to George Clooney’s Casamigo to Sammy Hagar’s Cabo Wabo and many others, these individuals only want their names associated with premium products. In the case of Justin Timberlake’s 901, the tequila’s name represents the area code of his hometown of Memphis. That’s a great example of how much pride they take in their tequila.

And Steve thinks this is just the beginning. As tequila continues to grow in popularity, he predicts we’ll see more celebrity names involved.

**2. Flavored tequilas**

Consumers are also looking for different ways to experience their tequila. And, for tequila manufacturers, producing sweeter or spicier options is encouraging new people to try their products.

Brands have been adding familiar flavors, like lime or hot peppers, to tequila for some time. But the range of new choices that will be coming to market is astounding. Popular options currently include coconut, cinnamon, citrus, chocolate and even strawberry.

It’s only a matter of time before tequila follows the vodka path, creating a vanilla cake or whipped cream flavored product that is completely different from anything out there right now.

**3. All-natural, authentic ingredients**

Some audiences – including Millenials, who are relatively new to the spirits market – are becoming more health-conscious and seeking out authentic experiences. Steve says this is great news for tequila, as the product has a storied history in Jalisco, Mexico, and is created using only natural ingredients.

Margaritas – the most popular tequila-based mixed drink – can feature a wide variety of fresh ingredients to accentuate the natural flavors of the tequila and still appeal to healthy lifestyles. “Skinny” margaritas, which consist solely of 100% blue agave tequila, fresh lime juice and agave nectar, can even be made with fewer than 200 calories per 16 oz. drink.

This is actually the recipe Steve uses when making a margarita for someone who is trying one for the first time.

**4. Unique margaritas**

While margaritas made with just the essential ingredients are growing in popularity, another large group is seeking out interesting twists and unexpected flavors.

That’s why Steve is seeing imaginative mixologists taking traditional recipes in completely new directions, as consumers can now enjoy margaritas poured over cotton candy, topped with pineapple upside down cake or served in a red solo cup with a gummi worm.

Other creative ingredients include Pop Rocks® candy, birthday cake and banana pudding. The possibilities are truly endless as new recipes continue to push boundaries.

**5. More elaborate bottles**

Another trend that Steve is seeing has nothing to do with the actual product. Everyone wants to have the best-looking bottle, whether it’s on the liquor store shelf or sitting behind the bar.

From the KAH bottles, which are little skulls, to the Texas-shaped Republic bottle to bottles that look like armadillos, he expects to see more ornamental packaging that captures the artistry and culture of Mexico as time goes on.

**6. Mixed tequilas**

Steve also points out that the things people mix with tequila are starting to broaden out, too. Flavored vodka, for example, can be used to build a margarita with fewer calories than using sour mix.

There’s also a new citrus liqueur on the market that’s similar to sake and can be used as a more natural replacement to triple sec. Another prediction is that consumers will see more pre-mixed cocktails featuring tequila on their store shelves.

Steve wouldn’t be surprised to see some brands come out with a wide variety of pre-made margaritas, Palomas and other mixed drink options that are ready to drink, right out of the bottle.

Of course, one person who wasn’t surprised by tequila’s rapid growth is Matt Higgins, the President of Tumbleweed Tex Mex Grill & Margarita Bar.

“We have always been fans of authentic Tex Mex experiences,” Matt said. “That’s why we wanted our restaurants to be a place where guests can enjoy the finest tequilas available. With Steve’s guidance, we’ve also created more than 300 different margarita combinations that really accentuate the different flavors of our tequilas.”

“At Tumbleweed, we love tequila,” he continued. “And we’re exciting about what the future holds for this great spirit.”

For beverage specialists like Steve and Matt, tequila’s newfound sophistication and subsequent resurgence in popularity is a great reason to celebrate.