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**Taking Cocktail
Flights to New
Heights**

**Growing a
Family
Business**

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'CARMENCITA'
COCINA AL FONDO
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

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Desserts that
DELIGHT

Taking Cocktail Flights TO NEW HEIGHTS



| **BY ELYSE GLICKMAN** | Like tequila and mezcal flights, which took off a little more than a decade ago, cocktail flights can broaden the scope of customers' dining adventures. They also let members of your bartending crew flex their creative muscles and spark conversations between servers and customers about what your bar has to offer.

Whether using flights to educate customers on different brands or expressions of the same spirit, or to showcase seasonal fruits and flavor trends, the ultimate destination is a bottom line boosted by new and returning cocktail customers.

"Offering cocktail flights is a combination of a popular trend and a clever marketing strategy," says Miguel Hernandez, president of Rreal Tacos restaurants in Atlanta, Georgia. "They appeal to customers who enjoy trying different drinks and showcase the bartenders' skills while highlighting the variety of spirits available. They can create higher perceived value, they can enhance profitability, and they can also work with food pairings, creating a better overall experience."

PLANNING THE FLIGHT PATH

"Everyone wants to be creative, and the margarita, piña colada, and mojito flights we offer allow bartenders to shine and customers to have a unique experience," says Alex Hult, CEO of the aptly named Flights Restaurant Group, whose aviation-themed restaurants in the Bay Area and Las Vegas also feature taco and empanada flights on the food menu. "Our bars and kitchens work closely, as the interaction allows the bartenders

to experiment and use up products the kitchen does not want to go to waste."

For Flights restaurant in Las Vegas, that path includes a daily happy hour menu featuring different flights throughout the day: Mimosa and Bloody Mary flights from 9 am to noon; beer and wine flights from noon to 3 pm; cocktail flights from 3 pm to 6 pm; and beer and wine flights from 6 pm to close.

Katerina Coumbaros, co-founder of Meraki Food Group, which owns Kavas Tacos + Tequila in Orlando, Florida, says the restaurant is rolling out a Cocktail Tree that features multiple tequila-based spritzes — "the perfect refreshment for the Florida weather," Coumbaros says. "It can also help our staff upsell and increase check averages. It can also be a great way to create multiple uses of the ingredients we are making in-house or sourcing."

Coumbaros says Kavas' flights also keep bartenders sharp





Flights' Bloody Mary Flight



Real Tacos' Margarita Flight

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"While people understand the three main categories of tequila, they may not know how each one complements specific ingredients or how they taste in comparison," she says. "There's never any 'wrong' way to go; a permanent flight offering doesn't necessarily mean the flavors have to be permanent. Changing up the flight components seasonally is a great way to utilize the freshest ingredients, allow bartenders to weigh in and be creative on new options, and provide new options to market to your customers on social media."

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"When we batch, we do about four to five gallons a day, with each gallon yielding 25 cocktails...and we sell an average of 50 to 60 flight boards daily," Garcia reports. He stresses that flights are particularly helpful when dealing with

customers who can't decide which cocktail they want.

Customers unsure of which margarita to order, for example, can sample multiple options with the restaurants' Flight of 4 Tasting Size Margaritas that includes Pineapple Passion, Spicy Cucumber, Watermelon Tamarindo, and Jamaica versions of the cocktail. The flights are offered at both Tac/Quila and Clandestino. As the menu says, "Who says you have to pick one? Try these four."

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Sean Stewart, beverage director at Gracias Madre in Newport Beach, California, agrees that cocktail flights showcase a "bartender's ability to tell a story through flavor." The restaurant's distinctive twist on flights is offering small, cocktail versions of traditional Mexican raspados — shaved ice treats made with fresh fruit, flavorful syrups and sweet toppings. Examples include the guava, Herradura Blanco, seasonal fruit and cranberry-apricot chamoy raspado; one made with watermelon, mint, La Tierra De Acre Cenizo Mezcal, Cointreau and pink peppercorn, served with a pineapple popsicle; and the El Tequileño Reposado featuring cacao, clove, California dates and vanilla oat milk ice cream.



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"We price our flights at Tac/Quila and Clandestino at around \$23, which is the equivalent of a cocktail and a half, but presents our customers four different varieties," says Garcia. "The value lies in the selection for the customers, the presentation with the wood board and snifter glasses, and the drinks' versatility as they pair well with our food."

Coumbaros emphasizes that customers pay a bit less for cocktail flights at Kavas Tacos + Tequila than they would if ordering the same number of drinks individually. Even so, a big part of the value is the aesthetics, so extra effort is put into garnishes that add to the drink rather than just decorate it.

"We make sure we use fresh herbs grown in-house, organic edible flowers, and beautifully cut fruit when putting the final touches on a drink," she says.

"A great deal of thought goes into pricing our drink flights," says Hult when discussing how Flights determines the value-to-price ratio. "We use artisanal spirits and fresh produce that cost more, but there is also more preparation time as the mixologist is making three different drinks. Once the bartenders get used to making the drink, however, it's very successful. This is important as liquor sales are 75 percent of our total alcohol sales, whereas elsewhere, it's more like 60 percent wine, 20 percent beer, and 20 percent liquor."

Garcia and his teams at Tac/Quila and Clandestino go through a trial-and-error process when developing individual cocktails as well as a new stand-out flight every season. While

management has the final say, customer feedback is important. Garcia also includes the kitchen manager in the process, discussing what fruits will make the best ingredients for the various margaritas, as well as juices and syrups. Each season the menu includes a sweet selection, one that's tart and refreshing, and a couple of flights in between that reflect what's in season.

"I'll do a cocktail-of-the-week during the off-season (summer) that is potentially something for the next cocktail menu that will also be considered for the upcoming flight," he says. "After I get our customers' input along with the managers' input, (the team) will work on whatever is not working in that week's cocktail. From there, I will do my cocktail presentations for our managers' approval. This assures we will be completely ready for the start of our high/busy season in September."

HOW AND WHEN TO STAY GROUNDED

While Gracias Madre's Stewart acknowledges that flights can be great for the bottom line, they may add to an already busy night and slow down service.

"I think cocktail flights are best used sparingly," he says. "Bartenders already have so much to do, (and) this is why we program our flights a bit differently at Gracias Madre, offering it as a shared experience a group of friends can enjoy."

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Ultimately, when it comes to flights from the bar, the pre-flight prep is as important as the destination. As these chefs and mixologists know, success is a matter of packing the right

elements, working within a budget, and having a firm idea of where your customers want to travel on their cocktail journey.

See recipes for the flight-appropriate Mexican Aperol Spritz from Kavas Tacos + Tequila and Raspados from Gracias Madre on page 63.

Los Angeles-based writer Elyse Glickman is the At the Bar columnist for *el Restaurante*.



Kavas Tacos + Tequila's Aperol Spritz Tree

Llevar las catas de cócteles A NUEVOS TERRENOS



POR ELYSE GLICKMAN | Al igual que las catas de tequila y mezcal, que despuntaron hace poco más de una década, las catas de cócteles pueden ampliar el alcance de las aventuras gastronómicas de los clientes. También permiten a los bartenders dar rienda suelta a su creatividad y suscitar conversaciones entre bartenders y clientes sobre lo que ofrece el bar.

Tanto si se utilizan las catas para educar a los clientes sobre diferentes marcas o expresiones de una misma bebida alcohólica, como para mostrar las frutas de temporada y las tendencias de sabor, el objetivo final es un balance final impulsado por los clientes de cócteles nuevos y los que regresan.

“Ofrecer catas de cócteles es una combinación de una tendencia popular y una inteligente estrategia de marketing”, afirma Miguel Hernández, presidente de los restaurantes Rreal Tacos de Atlanta (Georgia). “Atraen a los clientes que disfrutan de probar bebidas diferentes y muestran las habilidades de los bartenders al tiempo que ponen de relieve la variedad de bebidas alcohólicas disponibles. Pueden crear un mayor valor percibido, pueden mejorar la rentabilidad y también pueden funcionar con maridajes de comida, creando una mejor experiencia global.”

PLANEAR LA TRAYECTORIA DE ESTRATEGIA

“Todo el mundo quiere ser creativo, y las catas de margarita, piña colada y mojito que ofrecemos permiten a los bartenders brillar y a los clientes vivir una experiencia única”, dice Alex Hult, director ejecutivo del acertadamente llamado Flights Restaurant Group, cuyos restaurantes de temática aeronáutica en San Francisco y Las Vegas también ofrecen catas de tacos y

empanadas en el menú de comida. “Nuestros bares y cocinas trabajan en estrecha colaboración, ya que la interacción permite a los bartenders experimentar y utilizar productos que la cocina no quiere que se desperdicien”.

Para el restaurante Flights de Las Vegas, ese camino incluye un menú diario de happy hour con diferentes catas a lo largo del día: Catas de mimosa y Bloody Mary de 9:00 a 12:00; catas de cerveza y vino de 12:00 a 15:00; catas de cóctel de 15:00 a 18:00; y catas de cerveza y vino de 18:00 a cierre.

Katerina Coumbaros, cofundadora de Meraki Food Group, propietaria de Kavas Tacos + Tequila en Orlando (Florida), dice que el restaurante está poniendo en marcha un Árbol de Cócteles con varios spritzes a base de tequila, “la bebida refrescante perfecta para el clima de Florida”, dice Coumbaros. “También puede ayudar a nuestro personal a vender más y aumentar el promedio del total de la cuenta. También puede ser una buena forma de dar múltiples usos a los ingredientes que preparamos o adquirimos”.





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Arepa de coco: Coconut Arepa

Recipe from *Arepas* by Irena Stein
Makes 6 Arepas

1½ c. water, at room temperature
½ c. sugar cane syrup
(1-to-1 sugar to water ratio)
1 t. salt
2 c. Harina P.A.N. pre-cooked
white maize flour (cornmeal)
¾ c. grated (shredded) fresh
coconut
Corn or vegetable oil, for deep
frying

Combine water, sugar cane
syrup and salt. Slowly add the
maize flour and coconut with
one hand while kneading the
mixture with the other.

Once mixed, dough should be
smooth. Leave to rest for 10 min-
utes before shaping the dough
into 6 arepas.

To cook arepas: Pour enough
vegetable oil to cover the arepas
into a large heavy-based pan,
making sure it is no more than
⅔ full. Heat oil to 320°F. Do not
exceed this temperature as the
arepas may burn.

Working in batches, carefully
lower arepas into oil, avoiding
splashes. Deep fry 4 to 5 minutes
or until golden and crispy.

Remove from pan with slotted
spoon. Place on baking tray lined
with paper towels to absorb
excess oil. Serve while hot.

Mexican Aperol Spritz

Recipe courtesy of Kavas Tacos +
Tequila, Orlando, FL

1½ oz. Milagro blanco
1 oz. Aperol
3 oz. cava
1 oz. triple sec

Build in a wine glass and top
with ice. Garnish with a clothes-
pin, dehydrated orange and
baby's breath, or any edible
flower.

Bartender's Tip: Think about
the colors of your final products
when creating a flight. We hap-
pen to love a variety of colors, so
this was one of the main focuses
of our cocktail tree.

Raspado Cocktail Flight

All recipes courtesy of Gracias Madre,
Los Angeles

Build each Raspado in a rocks
glass, or in a biodegradable
12-oz. plastic cup for the extra
Mexican street food vibes.

Raspado Guava

Seasonal fruit (we normally use
strawberries and blueberries)

Shaved ice

1½ oz. Pajarote Guava Ponche

1½ oz. Herradura Blanco Tequila

1 oz. lime cordial (recipe below)

Chamoy (recipe top right)

Put fruit on the bottom of the
glass. Top with shaved ice,
packed lightly to make a base
for the ice scoop ball.

Combine the ponche, tequila
and lime cordial and pour into
the glass. Stir the contents of the
glass to help combine the ice
into the liquid. Using a 4-oz. ice
cream scoop, create an ice ball
with the shaved ice.

Release the ice ball and place on
top of packed ice in the glass.
Pipe about 2 ounces of chamoy
on top or until ice ball is satu-
rated. Garnish with a plush of
mint, a straw and a spoon.

The Lime Cordial:

Makes approximately 1 liter

500 ml lime juice

440 g agave nectar

20 g lime peels

10 g orange peel

18 g lime acid

2 g salt

Combine Ingredients. Sous Vide
at 145°F for 2 hours. Fine strain.
Store in refrigerator. Shelf life is
about one month.

The Chamoy:

Makes about 1 liter

500 g frozen cranberries

140 g apricot jam

140 g agave nectar

500 ml water

500 ml lime juice

4 g salt

8 g chipotle powder

Blend all ingredients on high
for 4 minutes. Fine strain to
remove cranberry skins. Store
in refrigerator. Shelf life is about
one month.

Raspado Watermelon

1½ oz. La Tierra De Acre Cenizo
Mezcal

1 oz. watermelon/mint syrup
(recipe below)

½ oz. Cointreau

¼ oz. lemon juice

2 full droppers Pink Peppercorn
Tincture (recipe below)

Shaved ice

Pineapple popsicle (recipe below)

Spicy salt (house-made or Tajin)

Mint for garnish

Combine first five ingredients
in a rocks glass. Fill with shaved
ice. Stir the contents of the glass
to help combine the ice into the
liquid. Add more shaved ice if
needed. Remove a pineapple
popsicle from the mold and
sprinkle with spicy salt on one
side. Place popsicle on top. Gar-
nish with a plush of mint, a straw
and a spoon.

The Watermelon/Mint Syrup:

Makes 500 ml

250 ml watermelon juice

250 g sugar

7 g mint

Blend watermelon and sugar
only to combine. Add mint to
liquid. Store in the fridge for 24
hours. Strain out mint before
use. Store in refrigerator. Shelf
life is about one month.

The Pink Peppercorn Tincture:

10 g pink peppercorn

240 ml high proof spirit (*Everclear*)

Combine in a dropper bottle.
Infuse for at least 48 hours
before using.

The Pineapple Popsicle:

Add pineapple juice to mold
¾ full. Freeze 12 hours. Fill the
remaining ¼ of the mold
with chamoy. Freeze 12 hours.

Raspado Cacao

1½ oz. El Tequileno Reposado

½ oz. 1:1 date syrup (recipe below)

¼ oz. Tempus Fugit Creme De
Cacao

¼ oz. Mr. Black Coffee Liqueur

1 barspoon Pajarote Clove
(or Allspice dram)

Shaved ice

1 scoop vanilla ice cream

Dark chocolate, shaved, for
garnish

Mint, for garnish

Combine first five ingredients in
a rocks glass with 3 to 4 cubes
of ice to make a foundation for
the shaved ice and ice cream.

Top with shaved ice, then with
a scoop of vanilla ice cream.
Garnish with shaved dark choco-
late, a plush of mint, a spoon
and a straw.

The Date Syrup:

500 g date syrup

500 ml hot water

Combine in a heat safe con-
tainer. Stir to combine. Store in
refrigerator. Shelf life is about
one month.

SEE MORE GREAT RECIPES
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