

Emerging Beverage Trends

By Evonne Lin





Beer, beer and more beer. For decades, the golden suds and the standard rye and coke dominated the Albertan beverage scene. But in the past few years, an evolution of varied beverage options has unfolded.

Why are we now seeing more sophisticated beverage selections offered? Alberta is quickly maturing. A booming economy and a young, affluent population has made a sharp impact on the food and beverage industry. The rave of wine is hitting our restaurants, whether upscale or not, promoting an eclectic selection of new elixirs.

For years, Alberta was known as a province of oilfields, cowboys, and flat prairies. With its rapidly expanding economy, Alberta has made its mark not only in Canada, but in North America as well. Oil revenues have not only bolstered Albertan cities, but also have encouraged international business and tourism. The proliferation of private liquor stores and the phenomenal success of Mountain Crest and Big Rock Breweries attest to the many exciting opportunities that have emerged for the food and beverage industry.

So what are the latest beverage trends in this up-and-coming province? Martinis have become increasingly popular in upscale dine-in establishments as well as energy drink beverages such as Red Bull. But without a doubt, wine has made the boldest entrance into our restaurant market. From moderately priced domestics to high priced vintage exports, more wine options are emerging all over the province. Alberta's privatization of the Liquor Act in 1993 created an open market for retailers and consumers to enjoy a wider selection of premium products. This has generated more competition, which has given consumers a higher quality of wine for a better price.



Wine is the perfect drink of the future, providing a feeling of luxury and class. Experienced in the optimum setting, wine can enhance the hidden flavours of a dish, or accentuate spices or herbs. Fine dining restaurants pair wines with menu selections and acknowledge customer preferences. Restaurant managers have a vast choice of wine representatives who

will host wine information seminars for the service staff. Since many customers are unfamiliar and possibly intimidated with the wine scene, it is imperative that service staff are knowledgeable about wine selections and service. A simple mistake of pairing the wrong wine with a dish can ruin an entire meal, or possibly even push customers away from wine all together. Many wine merchants offer tasting sessions to better educate their customers.

Although Alberta has yet to develop a decent vineyard, our neighbours in BC's Okanagan Valley and Ontario's Niagara Escarpment have produced world-class vintages. These wines are often chosen as house specialties, providing an opportunity to profile our excellent Canadian wineries. Also rising in popularity are world-class Canadian ice wines, crafted in our ideal climate. The cold temperatures allow for the grapes to freeze for the duration of the winter months, and later thaw, intensifying the flavours and sweetness of the wine.

The market for wine in Alberta looks increasingly healthy. As our economy continues to grow, our palates have become educated. Alberta has embraced a new age of acceptance for wine consumption, and is better educating service staff, marketing to consumers, and promoting our domestic products. Wine is an exciting beverage trend, not only because it can be greatly appreciated, but also because it brings out the best in food. While Albertans still enjoy premium rye whiskeys and the world-famous Caesar (originally created in Calgary), we now welcome the joy and pleasure of a comforting glass of good wine. Cheers!

Evonne Lin is an aspiring writer and culinary student at NAIT's School of Hospitality.

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