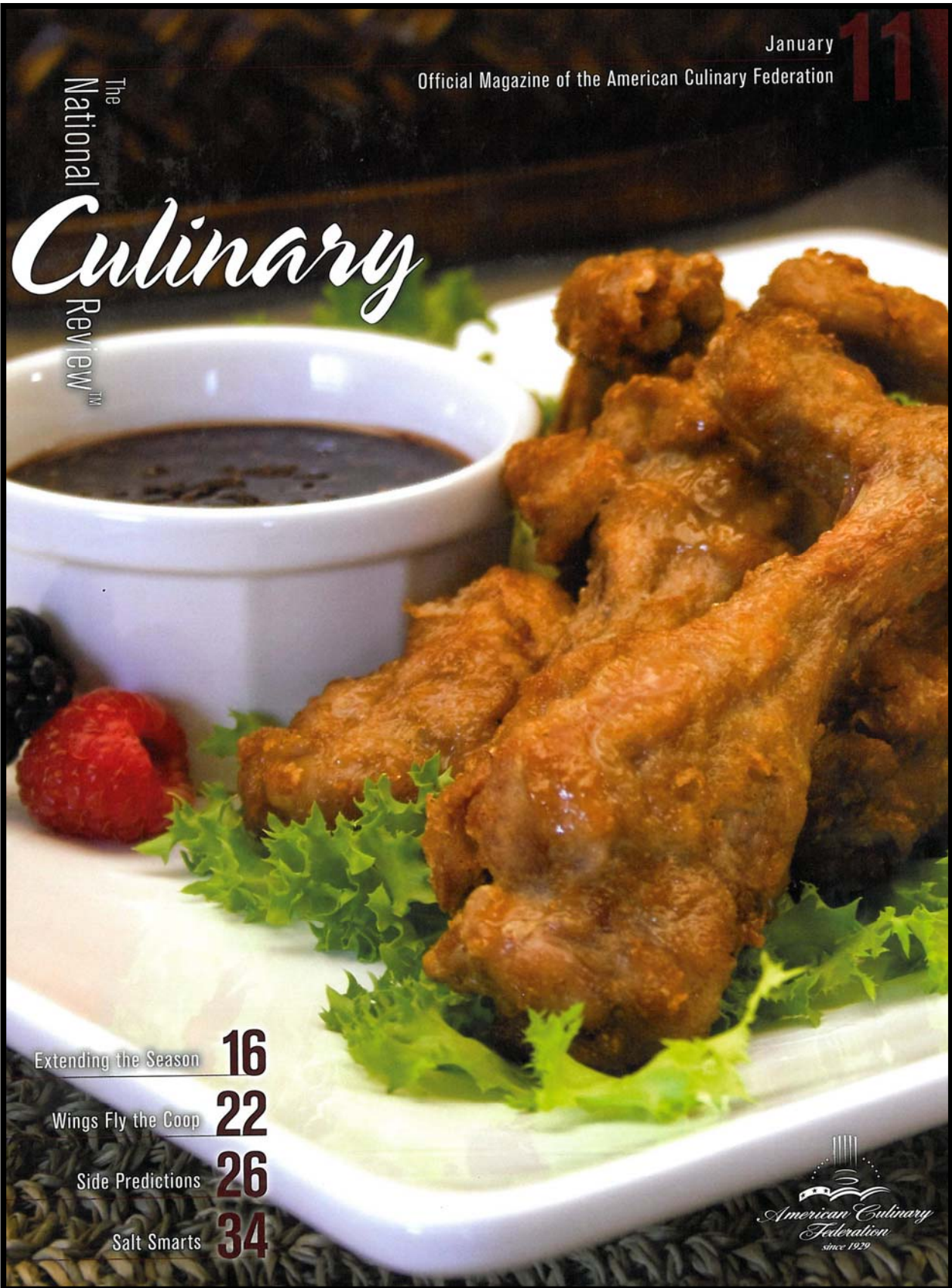


mercadito ^{midtown}

ThePattonGroup
Public Relations, Events, Marketing & Social Networking



January **11**

Official Magazine of the American Culinary Federation

The
National
Culinary
Review™

Extending the Season	16
Wings Fly the Coop	22
Side Predictions	26
Salt Smarts	34


American Culinary
Federation
since 1929

FLAVORS

DRINKS *That Go* POP

Restaurants are putting the sizzle back into soda.
By Lauren Kramer

Starbilly offers this refreshing Darjeeling tea cocktail with lemon juice, basil and egg white.

SODA has a long history in the restaurant industry, but much of its pop has fizzled in the last few decades. Historically, it was a beverage mixed at a soda fountain to which bubbly water was added.

"It was fresh back then, and you could have it your way," says Clark Wolf, a restaurant consultant in New York and Sonoma, Calif.

When soda fountains met their demise in the 1970s, soft drinks stepped in to fill the void. People became accustomed to choosing from a dozen or so of the most popular soft drinks, led by Coca-Cola and Pepsi products, that persist to this day.

But change is in the air, and there's a certain nostalgia for the flavor, variety and novelty of the soda fountain. Some restaurants are choosing to introduce housemade sodas with innovative taste profiles and healthier sweeteners than high-fructose corn syrup.

"The three-martini lunch is over," Wolf says. "We're all working harder, and we're more aware of the health ramifications of what we eat and drink. As a result, a lot of people are opting for nonalcoholic drinks all the time, even at three-course meals."

HOUSEMADE GOODNESS

Saul's Restaurant & Delicatessen in Berkeley, Calif., was selling bottles of

Dr. Brown's soda—from Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, College Point, N.Y.—to complement its soft-drink selection until a year ago. "We had a to-go refrigerator with lots of different sodas that we'd change over time to keep the program exciting," says Karen Adelman, co-owner.

When Dr. Brown's increased in price, Adelman and her partner, Peter Levitt, decided to make all their offerings, including beverages, fresher, seasonal and local. "Dr. Brown's was far away, expensive and had a big carbon footprint," Adelman says. "So we chose to make our own sodas, instead."

Henrik Kam

www.ac/chefs.org

FLAVORS

They contracted with a stainless-steel manufacturer, a plumber and a beer company to maintain the tubing and refrigeration for their carbonated beverage maker. They purchased a multichiller refrigeration machine that makes carbonated water. And they started experimenting until they found winning syrup flavors, such as pomegranate, lime, strawberry, cardamom, cream, ginger and celery—all using cane sugar or the sweetness of the natural fruit.

"It's been wildly successful," says Adelman. "Sure, we get some people saying, 'Where's the real soda?' And to satisfy them, we buy some syrup from Boylan's [Boylan Bottling Co., Moonachie, N.J.]. But most people are really thrilled with our homemade sodas, and find that they go well with the smoked meats."

For restaurants accustomed to using a standard Coca-Cola machine, creating their own infrastructure for homemade sodas is unlikely to save money, says Levitt. "But our customer base was expecting Dr. Brown's soda, and by the time we took into account shipping and the cost of recycling the bottles, the sodas weren't cheap," he says.

Saul's was paying almost \$2 per bottle for Dr. Brown's soda coming into the restaurant, so there wasn't much room for a margin. "Our margin doubled or tripled when we started making soda ourselves," Levitt says. The homemade soda is \$2.95 for a 16-oz. glass.

But there was more to it than just the margin. By making sodas, Saul's saves 20,000 cans and bottles a year, and by substituting paper straws, it saves on using 360,000 plastic straws. Adelman and Levitt use only cane sugar, firm in the belief that high-fructose corn syrup should have no place in the business.

The homemade sodas have been extremely popular among diners, but there is a labor cost when it comes to their creation. "You don't just push a button," Levitt says. "You might have to pump a syrup or squeeze a fresh fruit juice and then add syrup and ice. There's judgment and measuring involved, and for a dedicated soda program, you really need a soda jerk who cares about each drink."

NO ALCOHOL? NO PROBLEM

The beverage menu at San Francisco's Starbely includes a strawberry cooler, a ginger/lime rickey, lavender lemonade and a grape cooler, which owner Deborah Blum has made on-site since the restaurant opened a year ago.

"We wanted to offer more interesting nonalcoholic beverages, using some of the herbs we grow out back in our garden," she says. "We're sweetening our sodas with natural cane sugar, and when we choose bottled sodas, we make sure to avoid those containing high-fructose corn syrup, which is toxic for the body."

Blum installed a carbonated-water machine in the restaurant, which filters the water, chills it and carbonates it. In addition to homemade sodas, she's also able to offer

HOUSEMADE SODA TIPS

"Stick to things that are seasonal, like fruit. The quality and flavor is so much better with seasonal fruit. It makes a big difference when you use seasonal fruit and items that are grown organically."

—Deborah Blum, owner, Starbely, San Francisco

"Try to come up with something new and original without it being too foreign or unconventional. People don't want to try something they don't understand, and are unlikely to drink something to which they cannot relate. So avoid crazy ideas that don't work."

—Tad Carducci, beverage director, Tippling Bros.

"Use club soda or soda guns, or make your own soda. Flavoring can be as simple as fresh ginger, and you can purchase lots of syrups, though it's fun to make your own and the choices are many. Squeeze fruit and vegetables, make your own teas, have fun with it!"

—Clark Wolf, restaurant consultant, New York and Sonoma, Calif.

diners a greater variety of water options on the house. They can choose filtered still water, at room temperature or chilled, or filtered carbonated water.

The syrups for the sodas are prepared by kitchen staff. "They prepare the purées, measuring the exact ounces of everything that goes into a drink to ensure that the proportions are always the same and the drink is high quality," Blum says. "That's helped ensure the consistency of the final product."

Blum believes there is high demand for more variety when it comes to nonalcoholic



Popular sodas at Saul's Restaurant & Delicatessen include, left to right, celery, blueberry, cream, strawberry and ginger.

beverages in restaurants. "When we first opened Starbilly, I thought it was strange that at the grocery store you could get a wide variety of nonalcoholic beverages, but not in a restaurant," she says. "This is a huge area of opportunity for restaurateurs, because people want an alternative to water or tea, and the market for homemade sodas is currently under-tapped."

LATIN VIBE IN A GLASS

At Mercadito, a chain of cantinas in Chicago, Miami and New York, diners can choose from Mexican-style sodas in flavors such as tamarind, grapefruit, mandarin, pineapple and mango, which range in price from \$4 to \$5 per glass. They can also choose imported Latin versions of big-name cola brands.

The program was developed for Mercadito six years ago by Tad Carducci and Paul Tanguay, beverage directors at Tippling Bros. (www.tipplingbros.com), and has been popular, particularly at lunch, according to Patricio Sandoval, culinary director/owner.

"In Mexico, it is popular to find fruit waters (*aguas frescas*) made at home, so at Mercadito, we tried to reproduce the

Mexican *aguas frescas*, making them with soda to give them a little twist. They provide interesting alternatives for people who don't want water, alcoholic beverages or regular sodas," Sandoval says. "They're more popular than the regular sodas, and though they're not a big moneymaker, our housemade sodas do help bring people in."

That's because people like to try different things, says Carducci. "Innovative sodas bring attention to a restaurant in the form of press and marketing, which brings people through the door. The key is to create flavors that are new and original without being too foreign or unconventional."

It's good to add variety, but restaurateurs who are paving the way with innovative sodas still believe some of the staples have to stay put.

"We will never be able to compete with Coke," says Sandoval. "But it's our job in the hospitality industry to offer guests a choice."

Wolf agrees. "I think Coke should stay. It's like ketchup. Occasionally, you'll go to a restaurant that makes its own ketchup. That's great, but unless it's brilliant, it can be annoying to have a variation.

"When it comes to sodas, I always recommend that people stick with Coke

and Diet Coke—they're sticking around. But don't be afraid to get innovative with everything else."

There's a fine line, however, between innovative and challenging, Wolf cautions and it's something restaurateurs need to be wary of. "We don't go to a restaurant to be challenged. We go to be fed and to feel better.

"We're all interested in mixology and fresh ingredients. If we're going to so much trouble for the food we put on our plates, why not go all the way to soda?"

Lauren Kramer, an award-winning writer based in Vancouver, Canada, is passionate about gourmet food and delights in tasting it and writing about it.

Darjeeling Black Tea Cocktail

Starbilly
San Francisco

Yield: 1 cocktail

2 oz. Darjeeling tea
1 oz. lemon juice
¾ oz. agave syrup
¼ oz. egg white
3 basil leaves (crush between fingers)
Bitters, for garnish

Method: Combine tea, lemon juice, agave syrup, egg white and crushed basil leaves. Dry shake 6 seconds; ice shake 6 seconds. Garnish with a few drops of bitters.