

TAPPING INTO TRENDS

Beverage trends are not just about the beverage itself, but also about how that drink gets into your glass.

As with any cultural practice, the Australian bar scene experiences trends – flowing from the popular fashions of the time. Throughout the years, it has witnessed an array of drink trends – some that fade into the past-fad abyss and others that stand the test of time. More recently, it is the beverage dispensers themselves that are forging new trends.

Cocktails have long been an after-dark indulgence, undeniably luxurious and notoriously lengthy in their concoction. Several bars around Australia have sought to maintain the cocktail's delicate flavour while cutting its preparation time. Enter the on-tap cocktail.

By kegging cocktail mixes, venues can serve the elaborate drinks quickly and efficiently while creating an air of novelty and intrigue. Tom Byrne, Venue Manager of Arbory Bar and Eatery, says, "We are always looking for new exciting ways to deliver drinks and food. We love variety and an element of discovery and surprise."

Retail Savvy Group's Commercial Director, Stewart Koziora, introduced the cocktail tap system into Asian Beer Café – where there are 12 different cocktails on

tap – as a way of revolutionising the delivery process and cutting down the service time. "This was the key motivating factor for the system's arrival at the venue," he says. "[It] keeps the product consistent and speeds the delivery."

At South Melbourne's Hats and Tatts, Venue Manager Merlin Jerebine cites bar space as the main reason for implementing on-tap cocktails. "It's quite small and hard to have a full cocktail set-up," he says. Putting cocktails on tap means drinks can be served quickly and to a high standard.

However, kegging cocktails does take some consideration and testing. Byrne advises, "Cocktail kegs take a lot of trial and error, and there is the potential for significant loss if you muck it up. Just a small tweak in gas pressure or product ratios can dramatically affect flavour."

Jerebine cautions about choosing raw ingredients, explaining, "You need to make sure you're not putting in something that is going to go off before the keg finishes." Over-carbonation and ingredients oxidising, he says, are the main struggles with kegging cocktails.

The future looks bright for on-tap cocktails, for both convenience and intrigue.



On-tap espresso martinis at Arbory Bar, Melbourne
Photography: Simon Shiff



The trend has taken root in Sydney, with favourite whisky bar, The Baxter Inn, serving Old Fashioneds from the keg and Darlinghurst haunt, Casoni, offering its Aperol Spritz on tap.

Australian Bartender of the Year (2016), Michael Chiem, creates four on-tap cocktails at his co-owned bar PS40. And The Rocks institution the Endeavour Tap Rooms, where tapped drinks are celebrated, proudly serves its all-Australian Negroni alongside a plethora of other kegged drinks.



In a similar vein, some bars are putting wine on tap and Port Melbourne's Harry & Frankie has found this effective. Co-owner Tom Hogan highlights its benefits, saying, "What we're trying to achieve is to produce something for everyday drinking that is still good quality and is faultless, and certainly to a price point as well." Another bonus is less wastage – kegging wine prevents half-drunk bottles being thrown out. Hogan says that while some customers are apprehensive about kegged wine, after tasting it they invariably go ahead and order a glass. "I feel that people genuinely love it and come back for it," he says.

As with kegging cocktails, there is a bit of know-how involved, in terms of product life and the gases to use. Hogan says on-tap wine has made quite a difference to Harry & Frankie's business. "We're making margin where we need to [and] we're able to both sell at a price that's attractive to customers and [offer] a product that's delicious."

The new trends facing beer dispensing lie not in kegging (obviously), but in systems that revolutionise the way beer is poured. The Bottom's Up and TRUfill taps dispense beer from the bottom of the glass and seal with a magnet. It allows multiple beers to be poured at the same time (44 pints per minute), which reduces customer wait time, and it improves keg yield to 98 percent by reducing the number of 'bad pours'.

In London, bars are pioneering a contactless beer pump. Designed by Barclaycard, Pay @ Pump is the world's first self-serve beer pump, which allows customers to pour their own pint and pay with a contactless card or device at its base. Designed to help reduce queuing times (it apparently takes only a minute!) during busy periods, the system works by allowing the beer supply to be initiated and regulated following a successful payment.

In the ever-competitive bar scene, these up-and-coming dispensing methods are gaining momentum, providing a thrill for customers and improving efficiency for the venues. ■