

SA's cocktail scene: Fresh and sophisticated for summer

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Stylish South Africans of all ages are moving towards refreshing, innovative cocktails as their drinks of choice, says award-winning bartender Nkuli Khanyile of Molecular Bars.



Nkuli Khanyile, South African BAR awards 2019 Newcomer of the Year winner and bartender at Molecular Bars.

Nkuli, who won the title of Newcomer of the Year at the 2019 South African BAR Awards, is also making an impact at international bartending competitions, and has her finger on the pulse of cocktail fashion among South Africans of all ages.

Nkuli sees an increase of South Africans opting for cocktails when they're out, and becoming more interested in mixing cocktails to serve their guests at home too. "Customers of all ages are enjoying long, refreshing cocktails, with the younger consumers – those under the age of 30 – keen to try experimental new cocktails incorporating vegetables, savoury notes and even novel ingredients like cheese."

Nkuli added, "Gin and whiskey-based cocktails are hugely popular in South Africa, particularly those highlighting lemon, orange, herbs and summery flavours."

Nkuli introduced South Africans to a range of US distilled spirits at a Summer in the City cocktail and spirits tasting in Sandton in September.

Discerning consumers are revisiting retro and classic cocktails like the [Sazerac](#), the [Sidecar](#), the [Boulevardier](#) and the [Tom Collins](#) – some of which were first introduced to stylish society over 100 years ago.

The finest ingredients and beautiful presentation are the secrets behind the stylish cocktails so in demand this season. The US, long renowned for its Bourbon, Tennessee Whiskey and American Rye Whiskey, is a major global supplier of a wide range of premier distilled spirits for the fast-growing global cocktail market.

According to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, 2018 marked the ninth straight year of record spirits sales and volumes, with spirits gaining market share versus beer and wine, growing to 37.4 percent of the total beverage alcohol market. "Adult consumers are continuing to favour spirits over beer and wine, particularly among millennials," said Distilled

Spirits Council President and CEO Chris Swonger. “The spirits sector is benefitting from millennials who demand diverse and authentic experiences, and desire innovative and higher-end products.”

This trend is playing out in South Africa too, where an increasingly sophisticated cocktail set is seeking new and exciting flavours and drinking experiences. Nkuli, who initially intended to become a chef, says the world of mixology has opened new doors for her, as she perfects the art of blending and balancing flavours and the skill involved in crafting ingredients such as complex clarified milk punch to offer a range of sensory experiences for customers.

“But cocktails don’t have to be complicated to prepare,” she says. “Many people are keen to experiment at home, wanting to offer their guests something special and unique when they entertain. My advice to them is to keep it simple – don’t add too many ingredients and rather make a simple built or stirred cocktail and garnish it with stylish but easy-to-find ingredients like rosemary, thyme, fruit or zested cucumber.”

The spirits sampled at the tasting event, and produced by distillers across the US, included:

- **Golden Moon Crème de Violette** – a classic cocktail ingredient distilled using the finest hand-selected botanicals available, including blue violet flowers and buds.
- **Vodquila** - a blend of vodka and tequila by Red Eye Louie’s.
- **Uncle Nearest 1856 Premium Whiskey** – featuring a bold and spicy upfront taste that mellows with sweet caramel and maple.
- **Golden Moon Amer dit Pitcon** – bitters produced using the finest hand-selected herbs, spices and botanicals, these bitters can be enjoyed alone or in cocktails.
- **Whistling Andy Spirit of Sperry Vodka** – a huckleberry-flavoured vodka.
- **Whistling Andy, Hibiscus & Coconut Rum** - distilled incorporating dried hibiscus flowers and coconut steeped directly into a rum born of blackstrap molasses and raw cane sugar, for a clean floral rum with hints of banana, ripe plum, licorice and apricot.
- **Koval Dry Gin** – featuring a unique blend of 13 secret ingredients including woodland spices, juniper and wildflowers to envelop the nose, while the taste is smooth, dry, yet vibrant.
- **Golden Moon Gunfighter 13 American Bourbon** – a double-cask Bourbon aged in new American oak barrels and finished in used French Port barrels to deliver a unique smoothness and complexity.
- **Sagamore Spirit Double Oak Rye** - an award-winning spirit aged for four years before being placed in a second oak barrel. The new toasted staves reenergize the aging process, creating flavors full of caramel and dark vanilla and colors that radiate amber and warm chestnut.
- **Dad’s Hat Rye** - a smooth spirit that delivers the upfront spice that rye is known for while finishing with a full, round mouthfeel, with hints of pepper and cinnamon spice, green apple, fig and cocoa powder.
- **Jack Daniel Old No 7** - mellowed drop by drop through 10 feet of sugar maple charcoal, then matured in handcrafted barrels.

For more information about American distilled spirits in SA, follow <https://www.facebook.com/USwhiskeyZA/> and @USwhiskeyZA.

The US distilled spirits industry is committed to social responsibility. Adults who choose to drink should do so in moderation and responsibly at all times. For more information: www.drinkinmoderation.org.

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