

Raising the Bar

10 ideas for memorable cocktail and wine presentations

By Sara Perez Webber

As we head into the holidays, guests will be toasting the season at dinner parties, office events and social soirees. To help you add extra cheer to their “cheers,” we’ve rounded up 10 ways catering and event pros have made sure their drink presentations left a lasting impression.

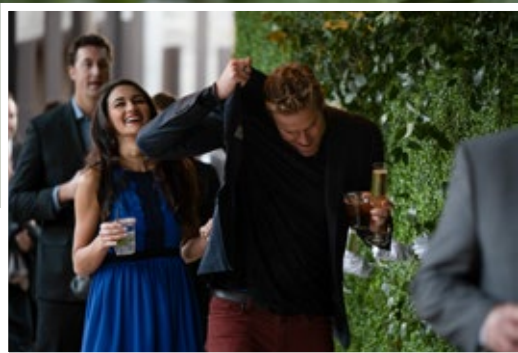
The Femme Rising cocktail, created by Bar Baby Co. for a summer solstice event, featured Hendrick’s limited-edition midsummer solstice gin, Lillet Blanc, strawberry and lemon juice, and lavender. Clipped to the drinks were notes with empowering messages.

Mobile Mixology

Heads turn when Bar Baby Co. rolls into an event with their traveling libations service. Co-owners and bartenders Abbie Crowther and Chase Daley transformed a Miley horse trailer into a stylish bar on wheels, which customers can book for their events in the Sacramento, Calif. area. Crowther and Daley work with clients to determine a bar menu for each event, then craft their cocktails utilizing such elements as bitters, herbs and shrubs made with local produce (such as the mango-based Golden Hour, pictured below right). Offerings could include such signature drinks as the Mandarin Mule, with vodka, tangerine, green tea, lemon, mint simple and ginger beer; a variety of tiki drinks; and cocktails featuring just beer or wine, for venues with alcohol restrictions. Clients supply the alcohol, and Bar Baby Co. rolls up with everything else. “Millennials especially want more of an experience when it comes to food and beverage,” says Crowther, noting that she and Daley also work events as mixologists without the trailer. “Craft cocktails at weddings are definitely a thing; people want more complexity.” ●●● barbabyco.com



OPPOSITE PHOTO BY NICOLETTE LOVELL;
ABOVE PHOTOS BY HAILEY AYSON



Bubbly Surprise

White-gloved hands emerged from a hedge wall holding flutes of champagne, greeting guests at a wedding at a private clubhouse in Henderson, Nev. "They really enjoyed the interaction and surprise of the plant wall coming to life," says Alex Barnett, partner with Las Vegas-based Cut & Taste, which catered the event. Flora Couture of Las Vegas created the champagne wall for the wedding, produced by Brit Bertino, with cocktails by Events With a Twist. ●●● cutandtastelv.com

Cocktails with a Message

Footers Catering & Events in Denver has served cocktails topped with images and logos made of a patented edible foam, a service called SIPMI offered by The Grand Bevy Corporation (thegrandbevy.com/products/sipmi-live). For the Booklovers Ball, supporting the Denver Public Library, Footers served such a cocktail as the reward for guests finding the "banned" prohibition-style bar hidden in the library stacks. Colbért Callan, Footers' director of sales and marketing, calls the logo cocktails "one of the best new inventions in the past year." SIPMI can even create cocktails on the spot using images taken in a photobooth at the event. ●●● footerscatering.com



TOP PHOTOS BY ROBYN RACHEL PHOTOGRAPHY; BOTTOM PHOTO BY FOOTERS CATERING



Hanging Florals

For its annual Summer Beats + Eats party in July—a showcase to loyal clients and industry peers of fresh event ideas—Toronto-based Eatertainment created an eye-catching purple wisteria installation to hang over the bar. A nod to the party's Mediterranean theme, the wisteria was artificial (as the out-of-season floral would have been cost-prohibitive), enhanced with real greenery and wisteria-scented spray. "Guests kept asking if it was real, and it definitely caught everyone's attention as it was the first thing they saw walking through the front door," says Suzanne Dunbar, Eatertainment's director of marketing and public relations. Underneath the florals, bartenders mixed fresh, Mediterranean-inspired cocktails featuring limoncello, Malfy gin, prosecco and ouzo. ●●● eatertainment.com



Cute Flutes

Guests looking for a tasty treat at Eatertainment's Summer Beats + Eats party could enter the Prosecco Room, where rows of flutes lined a grass wall above an assortment of sweets. Drink options included Berry Buzz (with prosecco and raspberry juice) and Citrus Sunshine (with prosecco, blood orange juice and garnished dehydrated blood orange), paired with desserts such as macarons, raspberry tarts, and passionfruit and chocolate mousse domes. While Eatertainment has featured the wall with pre-filled glasses of champagne, for this party it served as décor only. "Many photos were taken, and clients were asking to use it at their next event—even a daughter's wedding!" says Dunbar. ●●● eatertainment.com



Living It Up While Going Up

Making sure guests were entertained on the one-minute elevator ride to the 5th floor balcony at Pittsburgh's Senator John Heinz History Center, Common Plea Catering transformed a large freight elevator into a bar, with pipe and drape, up-lighting, bench seating and an area rug. "We wanted to make the elevator space feel a bit more inviting and fun," says Adam Gooch, Common Plea's corporate executive chef. Guests were served a Blood Orange Margarita—with fresh blood orange puree, peach nectar, Patron Silver Tequila, triple sec, and fresh-squeezed blood oranges, lemons and limes—in a clear plastic bag. "Each bag was filled and then chilled for about 30 minutes prior to guest arrival, which kept the drinks cold and also gave the bags a frosty look while on display at the bar," says Gooch. "They were a huge hit!" The cocktail was created by Angela Eremic, beverage manager (pictured behind the bar, above), while the space was designed by Maggie Gooch, director of events. ●●● commonplea-catering.com



PHOTOS BY CHANCELOR HUMPHREY
(INSTAGRAM.COM/KEEPPITTSBURGHDOPE)



Superhero Cocktails

Boston-based Alchemista—which recently opened a commissary to provide its corporate clients with cuisine from its own chef as well as restaurant and catering partners—now offers alcohol services, including superhero-themed cocktails. The company's creative presentations can be custom-tailored for the client and the desired superhero. Examples have included red, white and blue cocktails served tall on

ice, inspired by Captain America; and Swamp Thing-inspired Swamp Water, with green chartreuse, pineapple juice and lime juice. Designed to satisfy a specific client request, the Lantern Corps (pictured above) featured six vividly colored cocktails, such as Midori Sour (green) and Presidente (orange, with white rum and orange curaçao). ●●● alchemista.com



Bar in a Backpack

A conversation-starter and a way to keep guests' beverages refreshed, Alchemista's mobile drink delivery system features dual hydration tanks worn by the company's TIPS-certified bartenders and servers. The servers can move throughout large groups, topping off glasses on the spot. Alchemista utilizes the concept both for non-alcoholic drinks, such as water and Gatorade, as well as cocktails that are labor-intensive when served singly (pictured is a mojito).

PHOTOS BY PAT PIASEKI

The Write Stuff

Chalkboard bars from Paisley & Jade, a Richmond, Va.-based rental company, can be hand-lettered to accentuate the theme of an event. "In addition to being beautiful, it's also functional when used to display the bar menu!" says Morgan Montgomery, co-owner. For example, for a graduation-themed event, the faces of the bars displayed the beverage choices (like "The Bad Report Card" cocktail), and whimsical designs such as pencils and rulers. ●●● paisleyandjade.com



PHOTOS BY VIRGINIA ASHLEY PHOTOGRAPHY (VIRGINIAASHLEYPHOTOGRAPHY.COM)



Taste of Spain

The new AC Hotel by Marriott Downtown Houston says "salud" to guests on busy weeknights with a memorable ritual in its lobby bar. Inspired by the Spanish heritage of the AC brand's founder, Antonio Catalán, the ceremonious porrón experience serves as an ice-breaker among guests, who share wine or cava poured from the traditional Spanish pitcher. The porrón's lack of contact with the lips allows many people to share the same vessel. Corporate groups can book the experience as a way to kick off or end their meetings, while social guests can substitute it for a traditional champagne toast. ●●● ahotels.marriott.com/hotels/ac-hotel-houston-downtown



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