Successful Brands Show
These Sweet Treats Are
Not Just for the Ladies
By Jeffery Lindenmuth

With all the talk about flavored spirits, from mango vodka to banana rum and vanilla Cognac, it’s easy to overlook the panoply of flavors that have inspired and delighted drinkers for years. Cordials and liqueurs, including standbys like Cointreau and maraschino, have graced our cocktails for more than a century. And savvy bartenders continue to look to this robust palette of ready-to-pour nuts, fruits, and herbs as they devise ever more inventive and flavor-packed drinks that appeal to men as well as women.
The terms liqueur and cordial are used interchangeably by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB); which determines that, in addition to being flavored, cordials must be sweet, not containing less than 2.5 percent sugar by weight. Adam Gam, national brand director with Kobrand Corporation, importers of the line of Alizé liqueurs says, “As far as demographics for the entire category, people who consume cordials are going to like sweet mixed drinks, mainly females of all ethnicities and urban men.” When many other spirits categories are desperately seeking female imbibers, cordials, then, are in the unique position of trying to attract male consumers.

The success of a cordial brand depends greatly on its inclusion in cocktails, either classic or cutting-edge, and its ability to transcend the typical after-dinner drinking occasion. While some cordials have a difficult time breaking out of their role as a blue-haired-lady nightcap, other cordials have danced their way effortlessly into club culture. Alizé, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary next year, is selling well over half a million cases annually, according to Gam. He concedes that the original Gold and Red are popular mostly with women, but with the launch of Alizé Bleu, the brand hopes to capture more male consumers. “Alizé Bleu is tending to skew toward men,” says Gam. “I think it is the color and the presence of vodka, which allows people to broaden the occasion. And there is a higher proof.” While Alizé was a frontrunner in the fruit juice and Cognac liqueur concept, they weren’t the first to use the color blue, with the success of Heaven Hill’s Hpnotiq, as well as other brands like Envy firmly in place.

Kobrand has also introduced Café Bohème, a blend of premium French vodka and coffee liqueur into test markets in New York, Boston and Pennsylvania. The brand contains the legal limit of caffeine for a flavored spirit and is targeted to white, urban females with its French pedigree and Old World coffee shop allure.

Kahlúa coffee liqueur, from Allied-Domecq Spirits, has managed to stay surprisingly hip and viable in the face of so much younger, more brightly-hued competition. And their new near-$10 million television campaign, “Kahlua: Everyday Exotic,” continues to target their slightly older, more established audience. “Soccer moms and dads; that’s our core consumer. The campaign is all about the brand being exotic, which is a word they use to describe the product. ‘Everyday Exotic’ adds a splash of escape,” says Adrienne Nagy, national Kahlúa brand manager. Kahlúa has enjoyed 4.4 percent growth for the 52-week period ending October 2004, according to AC Nielsen.

While Kahlúa with milk remains the core cocktail, Allied Domecq is also playing with the flavor craze, rather than battling it. For example, new vanilla and raspberry White Russian promotions utilize their Stoli Razberi and Stoli Vanil. These compound flavor drinks demonstrate that, far from being obsolete, cordials can actually be enhanced by the new flavored spirits. Beauty Bar in New York uses Kahlúa in a popular cocktail named after the cheeky ABC series Desperate Housewives. “It’s spot on. It’s focused on the thirty-something,” says Nagy.

In terms of gender appeal, segmentation studies show Kahlúa is split about fifty-fifty between men and women, but that women are almost always the instigators of the drink. Maybe men really do enjoy cordials; they just need someone to remind them. “We’ve talked to a lot of men in testing this new campaign, and found that we’ve doubled in relevance since our last campaign,” adds Nagy.

Often considered the girliest of the girly drinks, even the cream liqueur category is getting a bit of a testosterone injection with Bushmills Irish Cream introduced in February of 2004. “What’s interesting is that, in general, I agree that cordials skew female; however, one of the objectives in introducing Bushmills is leveraging the masculinity of the Bushmills name, which is almost exclusively a male brand. For
men that really love the whisky brand, there’s a natural connection,” says Suzanne Freedman, senior brand manager Irish whiskies, Pernod Ricard.

Even the bottle for Bushmills has shed the idyllic countryside imagery that defined the Irish cream category. Freedman feels that because women know the category, they need to win them over with superior taste. With men, the name is paramount. “Bushmills name suggests a stronger cordial brand that men can walk into a dinner party with. And the taste profile is one of the most whisky-centric of the liqueurs,” Freedman adds.

For the off-premise, Bushmills expects to expand cocktail occasions and build brand allegiance with a bottle-necker package of caramel and drink recipes using the products together.

Another cordial with potential to capitalize on its universal name appeal is a collaboration of Starbucks Coffee Company and Jim Beam Brands Co., who last April announced their intention to create a super-premium Starbucks-brand ed coffee liqueur. The product has since been test-marketed in Denver, Colorado and Austin, Texas in both on- and off-premise venues and is soon available nationally. Starbucks Coffee Liqueur features 100 percent Starbucks coffee, blended with spirit, and retailing for approximately $23. "While liqueurs traditionally have been considered after-dinner drinks, we developed Starbucks Coffee Liqueur to be mixable and versatile while delivering the authentic Starbucks coffee flavor people love,” says Kelly Doss, senior brand manager, Jim Beam Brands. “As the key ingredient in a new family of cocktails, Starbucks Coffee Liqueur is appropriate for most spirit occasions, including social gatherings with friends, entertaining at home and dining out. Because people will look at this distinctive liqueur in a new way, we think it will transform and expand the category.”

Allied Domecq also markets Carolans Irish Cream which maintains its position as the number two cream liqueur worldwide. With a recent package redesign last year, in a modern, burgundy and cream bottle embossed with a celtic-knot motif, Carolans’ overall brand image still echoes its traditional Irish character, but breaks away from the traditional Irish cream packaging in an attempt to distinguish itself.

Tuaca, an import of Brown-Forman Corporation, has found success among younger drinkers both male and female, proving it’s not just the cordial, but how you mix it. “It’s one of these brands that moves as a shooter and also mixes with Red Bull and with Coke,” says Sean Wachsman, public relations manager for developing brands. “I think being something that works as a shooter it will skew more male, because of the way it has found multiple uses. And men will drink anything with Red Bull.”

Tuaca is taking off with inquisitive, new drinkers, especially in beach towns and college towns, according to Wachsman, thanks in part, perhaps to its new upscale label redesign. “There’s a lot of interest on the west coast, but also in Wichita and Baltimore, where it’s really hot. It’s very much a pocket brand.”

Brown-Forman is also using both men and women in promotional materials and taking a cue from the success of Jägermeister by offering similar on-premise shot chiller machines.

With cordials it may have been “ladies first,” but the frenzy for flavors seems to have everyone taking a closer look at these eclectic spirits.

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**NEW CORDIAL COCKTAILS**

**White Knight**
1 1/2 oz Bushmills Irish Cream
1 1/2 oz coconut rum
1 1/2 oz half & half
Coconut wedge

Pour ingredients into a shaker with ice. Shake and pour into a rocks glass. Garnish with a coconut wedge.

**Hot Apple Pie**
1 1/2 oz Tuaca
5-6 oz hot apple cider

Combine ingredients in a glass mug and top with whipped cream and cinnamon.

**Dooley’s Caramel Apple**
2 parts Dooley’s Coffee & Vodka
1 Part Vodka
1 Part Apple Schnapps

Serve as shot.

**Silk Rose**
1 oz Tequila Rose
1/2 oz milk
1/2 oz butterscotch schnapps
1/2 oz banana schnapps
1/2 oz half and half

Mix on ice shaker and pour into Martini glass.

**The PB & J Shot**
Adapted from Ken Lusar’s recipe, By Gary Regan
3/4 oz Frangelico
1/4 oz Baileys Irish Cream
1/4 oz Stoli Razberi Vodka
1/4 oz Chambord

Shake over ice and strain into chilled glass.

**Bit-O-Honey**
1 oz of butterscotch schnapps
1 oz of Brogan’s Irish Cream Liqueur

Pour all ingredients into a shot glass and pour over the back of a spoon.