

# Soften up

BARS ARE TURNING TO NEW FLAVOURS AND PREMIUM BRANDS TO ADD INTEREST TO THEIR SOFT DRINKS SELECTIONS, REPORTS MARK LUDMON



Alcohol-free drinks at Redemption

**R**edemption looks like a perfectly normal bar: people knock back colourful cocktails served by bartenders in a cool setting with disco balls hanging from the ceiling. But this bar has one thing missing: alcohol. Running throughout January and every Sunday and Monday until at least March, the pop-up is a residency at Fairly Square in Holborn – a café-bar specialising in Fairtrade products. This is the third outing for Redemption which was created by Catherine Salway, a former brand director at Virgin Group, because she wanted to prove you could have a great night out on soft drinks.

Using fresh, organic ingredients, Redemption's mocktails all have coconut water as a base. Options include a Beet-o-tini, with fresh beetroot juice, freshly squeezed orange juice and lime, and an Elderflower & Lemon Fizz. Along with nutritious food, Catherine says Redemption is part of an "alcohol-free bar movement" offering "a night away from temptation

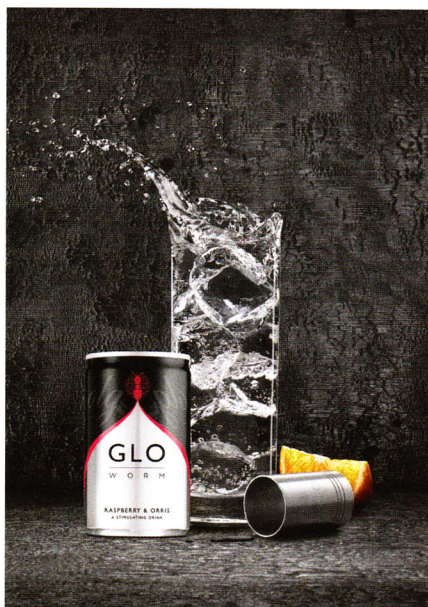
where you can spoil yourself without spoiling yourself". While no permanent bar is giving up the booze quite yet, mocktails and good-quality soft drinks are becoming all-year fixtures on menus. The volume of premium soft drinks sold in the on-trade in the year to September was up 16%, according to research group CGA Strategy, in contrast to a 3% decline across all soft drinks. "Consumers are expecting more choice of soft drinks when they are going out," says Amanda Grabham at SHS Drinks which looks after premium brands Bottlegreen and Shloer. "We expect to see continued growth as there is still huge distribution potential for the premium soft drinks category."

New brands continue to enter the UK on-trade, such as last month's launch of a Sparkling Pressé range by Kingsdown Water, the Kent producer of premium natural spring water. Using gently carbonated spring water, they come in five flavours made from hand-picked fruits:





Elderflower, Rhubarb, Lemon, Orange and Apple. William Bomer, managing director of Kingsdown Water, said: "With the 'adult' soft drinks category being the fastest-growing sector within the soft drinks market, we have decided to celebrate our



20th birthday with the launch of an exciting new range of hand-picked fruit sparkling pressés. We believe that there is a gap in the market for a grown-up sparkling soft drink that tastes pure, is 100% natural and doesn't taste too sweet."

Last year, Radnor Hills Mineral Water Company in Mid Wales introduced a range of sparkling pressés under the name of their home, Heartsease Farm. They have built up a six-strong range: Elderflower Pressé, Raspberry Lemonade, British Blackcurrant Crush, St Clements' Pressé, Traditional Lemonade and Fiery Ginger Beer, available in 330ml glass bottles. "Consumers are more conscious about the quality of products and are looking for premium drinks where the focus is on natural ingredients and great flavour,"



says managing director and farmer William Watkins. "Premium soft drinks are a huge opportunity for bars, pubs and restaurants to tap into. When people go out, they want soft drinks that taste as good as the food they are eating."

Traditional British flavours have driven growth for Fentiman's, from its ginger beers and Curiosity Cola to Dandelion & Burdock and Rose Lemonade. The latest addition to the botanically brewed range is the floral Wild English Elderflower enhanced by an infusion of pear. Luscombe Drinks continues to add to its range of ginger beers and juices, most recently introducing Damascene Rose Bubbly made with

## ALCOHOL-FREE BEER AND CIDER

Young adults in the UK are switching to alcohol-free beer more than any other age group, according to independent research commissioned by AB InBev UK. It found that 8% of people planned to replace alcoholic beer with alcohol-free beer in January while only 1% of the over-65s and 2% of those aged 55 to 65 were likely to do so. AB InBev UK's Beck's Blue has been joined by other brands such as Spain's Estrella Galicia 0.0 which was introduced in kegs in the UK last year. "Putting an alcohol-free beer on the bar raises the awareness of a product all too often placed on the bottom shelf of the fridge," says Lindsay Castling, brand manager at UK distributor Bibendum PLB Group.

Kopparberg is growing its range of alcohol-free ciders with the launch of Strawberry & Lime, joining the first two alcohol-free ciders, Pear and Mixed Fruit. "We've had an extremely positive response to our alcohol-free range since its launch in 2010," says Kopparberg's head of marketing Rob Calder. "They don't compromise on taste and offer a way to capitalise on the increasing demand for alcohol-free products and those occasions when people want to moderate their alcohol intake."







muscat grape juice, Damascene rose water, Sicilian lemon and spring water – positioned as a pink-tinted “alternative to a glass of champagne for the discerning non-drinker”.

Interest in new and different flavours led Halewood International to develop John Crabbie & Co, made up of three flavours: a cloudy ginger beer, Scottish raspberry with a twist of ginger, and cloudy lemonade with a twist of ginger. This is a strategic growth area for the business, with major opportunities for the category, says Richard Clark, director of marketing at Halewood. “We have conducted significant research within this market over the past 12 months, and this will pave the way for new product development in 2015 for John Crabbie & Co as well as further investment in above-the-live activity.”

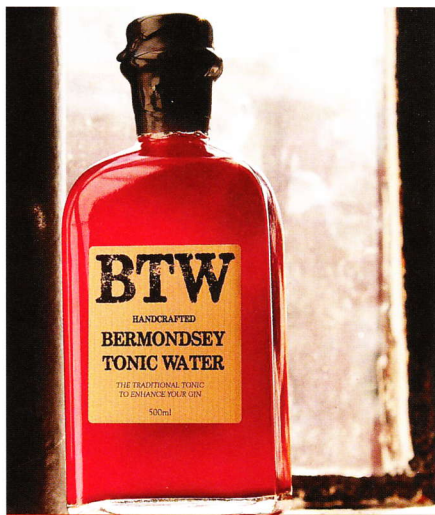
Michael Stringer of consultancy and bar company Blackleaf Events welcomes the increasing numbers of better-

quality soft drinks. “A high-quality soft drink, and that includes citrus juices, is just as important as high-quality spirits and liqueurs,” he says. He has noticed a trend for people to be more aware of mixer brands. “When we speak to clients for events, we are no longer being asked to provide ‘mixers’ but are specifically being asked for Fever-Tree or Frobishers by name rather than just a generic tonic or apple juice.”

Drinks consultant Dave Marsland says the quality of the mixers is important for any bar serving premium spirits. “The consumer is clearly after a good-quality beverage so, effectively, the venue should piece together the best combinations available. However, the mixer sector is a smaller category than you would expect which is surprising considering the rise of premium spirits.”

He welcomes the arrival of innovations such as

Gloworm, launched a year



## JUST THE TONIC

Innovation in mixers has come from gin bar 214 in Bermondsey Street, south London, where they have developed Bermondsey Tonic Water. Based on a Victorian recipe, it is made with natural quinine from the bark of the cinchona tree which is partly filtered for a smoother and more authentic taste. “It has none of the overpowering bitter sweetness of commercial tonics,” says Lawrence Mason, who founded it with Nick Crispini. Bottled as an undiluted syrup, it is growing distribution through suppliers such as World of Zing.



## NATURAL HYDRATION

As people continue to make healthier choices, natural mineral water and spring water are a great alternative to other soft drinks and alcoholic drinks, says Kinvara Carey, general manager of the Natural Hydration Council which represents the UK’s bottled water industry. “Encouraging customers to alternate between still or sparkling bottled water and an alcoholic drink can help limit the calories they are drinking and avoid a hangover.”

These health trends are widening the consumer base for bottled water, agrees Nick Taylor, general manager for Tÿ Nant, the natural mineral water from Mid Wales. “This awareness is driving and energising a growing bottled water market, and the trends point towards this, across both on-trade and retail alike. Year on year, the water market is seeing an increase in its bottled water sales as more consumers are becoming increasingly health conscious with external market forces now driving consumers towards drinking fewer sugars and fizz.”



ago, with four unique flavours: Raspberry & Orris, Cucumber & Apple, Ginger & Lemongrass, and Pear, Spice & Lime. "Consumers are spending more time considering what they want to drink, and the addition of Glowworm brings intrigue at a time that's relevant," Dave explains.

Consumers are more educated now and demand more of mixers when they go out, says Luke Benson, UK on-trade marketing manager for premium Fever-Tree mixers. "I think, in the past, bars didn't have much choice – the mixer was the afterthought and people just took what they were given. Mixers were poorly made and mass-produced as there wasn't a premium mixer industry at the time. People didn't know any better." Since launching in 2005, Fever-Tree has led the premiumisation of the mixer category, from its tonics to ginger beer, ginger ale and Sicilian lemonade. The brand team have been working with bars to help them design special menus showcasing different spirits and mixers, coming up with the right flavour matches. "It simply doesn't make sense to drink a well-made spirit with a poor quality, artificially flavoured mixer," Luke adds.

Britvic Soft Drinks responded to trends last year with the relaunch of its mixers with more premium packaging, targeting the "ever-growing adult soft drink occasion". Reflecting the brand's heritage, the new bottles and cans aim to reassure consumers they are choosing a good-quality product.

The success of Bottlegreen's Elderflower and pomegranate-flavoured Pink tonics has led it to introduce a Classic Indian Tonic Water to complement the innovative variants. "Because consumers are looking for more premium mixers, we believe there's room for another premium tonic in the market," says Amanda at SHS. "Consumers continue to look for innovative flavours from brands with natural and authentic credentials."

Funkin, the cocktail mixer and puree brand, works with bartenders to develop



new products. The latest innovation is the first branded 100% natural rhubarb syrup in the UK on-trade, created with bartender Dan Redman-Hubley who won Funkin's 2014 Innovation Champion competition. Its products are part of the spread of cocktails into the mainstream, both for non-alcoholic "softails" and as a way for any staff in a bar or pub to be able to make consistent cocktails quickly and easily by just adding alcohol.

Funkin chief executive Andrew King adds: "There are great pre-packaged adult soft drinks around but a lot of bars want to do something bespoke. These give them something more complex with added value that is made in front of the customer in the bar." Funkin provides the on-trade with plenty of ideas for more interesting soft drinks serves, such as adding the new rhubarb syrup to apple juice and topping it with soda. American Beverage Marketers also provides a range of mixers and purees through its Finest Call brand but it now complements these with its Re'al fruit-infused syrups, with flavours ranging from blueberry and peach to ginger and raspberry. "The new Re'al line opens up new opportunities for our customers to create unforgettable fruit cocktails," says William Hinkebein, vice-president of marketing. A variety of flavours from strawberry and banana to Margarita and Mojito is available in the Tropics range from Funnybones Foodservice. "With a little imagination, the possibilities are endless,"



Dan Redman-Hubley

says operations manager Marja Lawrence, "offering the ideal opportunity for bar owners to shake up their drinks menus and offer customers something new and exciting."

Concern about the sugar and calorie content of soft drinks will continue in 2015, says Amanda at SHS. "We are encouraging the trade to make reference to the calories of soft drinks on the menu so you can give consumers the choice." Consumers need to know that the low-calorie options they seek are available, agrees Dave Turner, trade communications manager at Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE). "These should be displayed prominently in order to capitalise on consumers who are focusing on health." CCE works with licensees to make sure soft drinks generally are being suitably promoted at point of sale, including in menus. Its Schweppes mixers range was relaunched last year with bolder packaging to help it stand out behind the bar.

Qcumber, a sparkling mixer made with cucumber, has benefited from people seeking out healthier flavours as well as new ones, says the brand's founder Graham Carr-Smith. However, he says 100% natural soft drinks like Qcumber, and its variant with added mint, need to be promoted at the bar, especially in menus. "Consumers are always keen to try something new and unusual when it comes to soft drinks but they need to be made aware of what is available."



## BUZZ GROWS FOR ENERGY

The revival in the energy drink market over the past few years owes much to its role in the on-trade as a mixer with vodka and in bombs. However, other factors are coming into play, says Simon Green, marketing director at Global Brands which owns leading brand Kick Start. "Energy drinks served on their own and not just as a mixer gained in popularity in pubs and bars throughout 2014, and this trend looks set to continue in 2015." He notes that flavoured and sugar-free variants are also doing well in the on-trade which is set to be reflected this year in new product development for Kick Start.