

Original URL: <http://www.rimag.com/article/CA6557611.html>

Story title: **Wine is just one option: Boost check averages and catch customers attention with fun beverage flights.**

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What's the best way to give customers an excuse to knock back cocktails well before 5 p.m. on a Sunday? Make it four—in a flight, of course.

That's what enticed Chicagoan Margaret Lyons to meet a friend one recent weekend afternoon at neighborhood restaurant Bin Wine Café, which offers multiflavored Bloody Mary and mimosa flights during brunch.

"I like Bloody Marys a lot, but the idea of trying four different ones was definitely the draw," says the 25-year-old writer, who'd sampled the restaurant's mimosa flight a couple weeks before and came back to try the brunch favorite. "It's sort of indulgent. You're getting a little bit of everything."

Flights have long been par for the course in wine service, but now restaurants are tapping their potential to build excitement around other beverages, from classic cocktails to freshly squeezed juices. Making more drinks requires extra time and labor, but the higher check averages they yield makes the effort well worthwhile for any operator.

At Maryville, Tenn.-based casual-dining chain Ruby Tuesday, some locations use flights to cash in on consumers' interest in craft beers, offering trios of their three most-popular varieties on tap. Bin Wine Café makes its program family friendly by serving flights of milk and juice as well as cocktails, while The Shores Restaurant in La Jolla, Calif., takes a similar tactic, offering \$2.50 milk tastings—strawberry, chocolate and regular—for kids at breakfast, lunch and dinner. In a more-exotic approach, Chef-owner Rick Tramonto's RT Lounge in Wheeling, Ill., is introducing a sake flight, with three 1-ounce pours arriving at tables in specially designed holders.

Brewing Up Interest

Hot beverages are an especially unusual choice for flights, but that's not stopping Jonathan Rubinstein from his plan to launch coffee flights at Joe: The Art of Coffee in New York City.

"We thought it would appeal to those who come in for coffee as a culinary treat, not just a caffeine injection," says Rubinstein, who will brew the flights using a new single-cup drip coffee bar he installed at the concept's Chelsea location.

Initially, tastings will showcase beans from three different growing regions—such as American, African and Indonesian—but future incarnations might explore three estates from the same country, varying roasting levels, or one type of coffee from different roasters. The idea, Rubinstein says, is to help customers learn what flavor profiles they prefer and better understand the multiple elements that shape a coffee's taste.

"The idea is to let people taste these things side by side, which they rarely do," Rubinstein says. "If you go to a place where you're paying between \$2.50 and \$7 for a cup of coffee, you'd have to shell out \$25 to try a few different things."

Flights at Joe: The Art of Coffee will run around \$12 for three 8 ounce pours. Preheated porcelain cups will help the coffee hold its heat. For customers who want to learn more, educational materials will come with the flights as well.

Tasting Trios

At Overland Park, Kan.-based Houlihan's, mini martini flights are huge sellers, always ranking in the top five among alcoholic-beverage sales.

"It's a great way for customers to explore different flavors without breaking the bank," says Vice President of Operations Support Dave Brown, who leads the casual-dining chain's beverage program.

Guests can create their own combinations, selecting among signature martinis such as the Key Lime Pie (vanilla vodka, key lime, sweet-and-sour mix, half-and-half) and the Guavatini (vodka, guava juice and fresh-squeezed lemonade).

Margarita, tequila and of course, wine flights, also are options. Each is poured into different sets of specialty glassware purchased to maximize visual impact.

"When one guest orders it, because the presentation is so cute and unique, others see it and it prompts additional orders," says Vice President of Marketing Jen Gulvik.

At Bin Wine Café, mimosas are the most-popular flight choice, says Partner Joanne Chessie. The \$12 selection of four includes pineapple, pomegranate, peach and Madras (orange juice and cranberry) flavors.

Bloody Marys, served in stemless wine glasses, take on ethnic accents. The Asian Mary is spiked with pickled ginger, wasabi and soy sauce; the Consuela Mary includes puréed chipotle chiles and lime juice; and the Italian Mary features balsamic syrup, grated Parmesan cheese and fresh basil.

"People just dig it," Chessie says. "If we could do everything as a flight, we would."