

Cider house rules

Cider can be matched with food, much as a fine wine, but the problem is that diners don't know how to do it. *John Porter* looks at the more unusual ciders that should make up a core part of your offering

As we mark the 950th anniversary of the Norman Conquest, it's worth noting that one consequence of the arrival of William I and his cronies in 1066 was that Normandy-style cider became a staple accompaniment to food at the great houses of England.

And now, there is a growing movement among cider makers and operators to try and put cider back in its rightful place as a choice for diners in restaurants and gastropubs.

Figures from CGA Strategy show that cider continues to make inroads in the eating out market. In the year to the start of August 2016, cider grew by 2.4% in volume and 3.2% in value across the on-trade as whole. In hotels, there was a 5.1% increase in value, while restaurants saw a 2.2% value increase.

Both draught cider (up 5.9% by value) and premium cider (up 1.4% in value) are performing well across the on-trade, but just what proportion is linked to food is less clear.

Henry Chevallier Guild, a partner in the family-owned Aspoll business, regularly puts his 'cyders' up against sommeliers' wine choices at food-matching events. He says: "There is enough good cider out there, but whether it actually ends up being in the right place and served with the right food is a different question."

"The key is the education of restaurants, hotels and casual-dining outlets to under-

stand the difference between a high-juice cider that's been lovingly created versus the more mainstream or mass-produced ciders, that aren't always going to give you the same satisfaction when you match them with food."

The Hush Heath winery in Kent has added cider-making to its offer, launching the Jake's Orchard brand, which includes both nettle and strawberry and blackcurrant flavour sparkling ciders, served in a 75cl Champagne-style bottle. Hush Heath hosts regular cider and food matching evenings at its four gastropubs, which include St Bart Brewery in London's Smithfield Market.

Hush Heath operations director Laurence Bowes says: "With cider, you have to do an initial sell. We find consumers are hugely interested when we talk about Champagne-style ciders, but they don't go and seek them out.

When they order a drink with their meal, they will automatically go for a grape-based, rather than apple-based beverage.

"The cider and food matching dinners we organise in our pubs are popular, and when we engage with diners and work through our cider range with them, they're blown away."

Cider maker Westons operates the Scrumpy House restaurant in a con-

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Henry Chevallier Guild, Aspoll



verted stable on its cider mill site in Herefordshire. Chef Chris Murphy says: "Cider is clearly a big part of the experience, both as an ingredient in our recipes and as an accompaniment to the food. Our staff are specifically trained to advise customers which ciders will go with which foods and why."

"One of my favourites is our home-cooked ham, which we boil in water and then bake in the oven. We pour Westons Wyld Wood Organic Cider into the roasting tin, to about a third of the way up the ham, and then cover the meat in light brown sugar. We serve this with home-made chips and recommend customers pair it with Wyld Wood."

David Sheppy, managing director of Sheppy's Cider, points to the flavour versatility that cider offers. "Craft cider is perfect for pairing with all types of foods. Not only can it accompany a dish such as cheese or a salad, but also as an ingredient in cooking. Sheppy's Bull Finch cider, for example, pairs beautifully with mussels as an alternative to wine," he says.

The continued popularity of cider has also seen the traditional family brewers enter the market. London brewer Fuller's acquired the Cornish Orchard cider brand in 2013 and a stake in artisan pizza and cider restaurant the Stable the following year. This year the Stable has come to London, with branches in Whitechapel and Kew, as well as the opening of the biggest site to date in Exeter.

Shepherd Neame has formed a distribution partnership with US brand Angry Orchard Crisp Apple Cider, which is stocked by operators including TGI Fridays, Bodean's Smokehouse and Coast to Coast. National on-trade sales controller Deighton Ridge says: "Sweeter apple ciders and bigger flavours are winning right now and cider ranges look quite different to five years ago. Angry Orchard has exceeded our expectations with customers reporting very strong repeat purchase."

"US barbecue and pit-grilling is now accepted as mainstream and there is a demand for authentic US beverage accompaniments for this kind of food."

Bag, box or bottle?

The wide range of cider styles available, as well as formats including draught, bag-in-box, and packaged, leaves operators with no shortage of choice. Emma Sherwood-Smith, cider director at Heineken UK, advises that "bottled cider is easier to store than draught, so is a great way to introduce new brands and offer a wide range of choice to drinkers. In addition, bottled cider is an easy and quick serve for bar staff, so it can have an impact on profitability and help to reduce waiting times during busy periods."

Martin Thatcher of Thatchers Cider advises at least one draught cider alongside a packaged minimum of three fruit and two apple ciders in the fridge. "There's always a churn of brands in the on-trade, so operators need to stock a variety of cider styles to ensure a good spread for their customers."

"Customers want high-quality and interesting ciders all year round, as cider is no longer





◀ a summer-exclusive drink. It's the savvy operators who stock the best-selling ciders on the bar and top these up with seasonal and super-premium ciders in the fridge."

Martyn Jones, head of on-trade at Westons, says: "Caterers need to ensure they have a differentiated product range between the fridge and the bar. Licensees should look at their total draught offering and make sure it provides a broad spectrum across beer and cider. Likewise, a draught offering should complement the packaged products in the fridge and not just repeat them."

CGA's figures show that flavoured ciders are currently the driver of cider growth in the mainstream on-trade. At Diageo GB, which has both Smirnoff- and Pimm's-branded

flavoured ciders, Claire O'Neill, innovation commercialisation manager, says: "There have been a number of innovations in the fruit cider category over the years, and as the market continues to grow, we still see there is potential to grow the category even further."

An expanded range also requires a greater depth of staff knowledge. Martyn Jones of Westons says: "As consumers are becoming increasingly discerning, and therefore more engaged with their food and drink experiences, bar staff teams need to be more familiar with the provenance of the cider brands they serve. Being able to name the

ciders that contain fresh juice, where the brands are made, and their heritage, etc, are all useful points of interest to share with customers."

Deighton Ridge of Shepherd Neame suggests that operators "organise a cider-tasting session for staff and profile several different types of cider so they can discover the differences for themselves and better understand the category. Tasting notes for the ciders they stock will enable them to answer customer questions about different styles, while ideas on cider and food pairing will help them to match dishes with cider drinks."



New products



Stassen
Heineken UK has launched three varieties of its Stassen premium cider brand into the on-trade, all available in a 750ml corked bottle. Stassen Cidre Brut, Stassen Cidre Cuvée Rosé and Stassen Cidre Grand Cru are made with apples from the Aube Valley in Belgium.
www.heineken.co.uk



Pure Hopped Cider
Warwickshire-based Purity Brewing Company has teamed up with Westons to launch Pure Hopped, a craft cider made with 100% fresh apple juice from Herefordshire, with an added dash of Target hops from local Stocks Farm.
www.puritybrewing.com

Thatchers Family Reserve
Using a century-old family recipe, Thatchers Family Reserve is an 11% sparkling apple wine, using the first pressed juice of the Katy dessert apple. With light golden hues and a gentle effervescence, Family Reserve is a dry, subtle sparkling apple wine said to be like a fine Champagne.
www.thatcherscider.co.uk



Aspell John Barrington
This still cider is named after John Barrington Chevallier Guild, a previous generation of the Suffolk cyder-making family who played in no fewer than four FA Cup finals for the Old Etonians. It's suitable as an aperitif or can be matched with fish, white meat and vegetarian food.
www.aspell.co.uk

Hogan's Innovation range
The Innovation range from Warwickshire-based Hogan's Cider is specifically aimed at the on-trade and supplied in a keg format. It includes the Breton-style French Revelation, Wild Elder, made with foraged elderflower, and Lonely Partridge perry.
www.hogancider.co.uk

Bad Apple
Billing itself as "a cider from the uglier, darker end of the orchard", Bad Apple is a draught cider from Carlsberg UK made with the gnarly apples that are too sharp to eat. It's an intriguing cider with sweet notes, a sharp tang and a dry finish.
www.carlsberguk.co.uk

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Deighton Ridge, Shepherd Neame

Suppliers

- Aspell**
www.aspell.co.uk
- Carlsberg UK**
www.carlsberguk.co.uk
- Fuller's**
www.fullers.co.uk
- Heineken UK**
www.heineken.co.uk
- Hogan's Cider**
www.hogancider.co.uk
- Hush Heath**
www.hushheath.com
- Purity Brewing Co**
www.puritybrewing.com
- Sheppy's**
<http://sheppyscider.com>
- Shepherd Neame**
www.shepherdneame.co.uk
- Thatchers**
www.thatcherscider.co.uk
- Westons**
www.westons-cider.co.uk