

PODCAST

## Mocktails, non-alcoholic drinks can elevate experiences for many hotel guests

Olympia Hospitality's director of food and beverage talks about the value of providing more menu choices



Even when choosing non-alcoholic options, guests still want an experience when ordering drinks, said Olympia Hospitality's Karl McElligott. (Getty Images)

By **Bryan Wroten**

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The point of having zero-proof drinks on the menu isn't to give guests a binary choice but to give guests multiple options while dining or having a night out, said Karl McElligott, food and beverage director for Olympia Hospitality.

A screenshot of a podcast player interface. On the left is a thumbnail for 'COSTAR NEWS HOTELS' featuring a building. The main area shows the episode title 'Mocktails and other non-alcoholic drinks give guests more choices when going out' and 'COSTAR NEWS HOTELS • EPISODE 123'. Below the title is a play button, volume controls, and a progress bar. At the bottom are 'SUBSCRIBE', 'SHARE', and 'MORE INFO' buttons, and a 'Transistor' logo.

In an interview on HNN's podcast, McElligott said there's a greater focus on wellness now, particularly in younger generations, and while there's not necessarily an adversity to alcohol consumption, they're looking for more of a balance. That comes more into focus during January — or Dry January when some may choose not to drink for the entire month — and most recently with the U.S. Surgeon General's new advisory on cancer risks associated with drinking alcohol.

In the hospitality business, hotel companies are in the alcohol market as well as the non-alcoholic market, he said. Whatever their reason for choosing a non-alcoholic drink, guests are looking for other choices beyond the super-sugary options out there.

“The guest is kind of demanding something that’s a little bit more complex, a little bit more dynamic, a little bit more flavor-forward,” he said. “They still want a food and beverage experience out of it, and they’re looking to balance both sides of the equation.”

The marketplace has filled that gap in the liquor segment over the last two to four years, McElligott said. Breweries have taken notice and increased the number of non-alcoholic beers available in multiple types, including pilsners, IPAs and darker beers, too. The wine market has been slower to catch up, but there are trends coming out of France and Italy indicating wineries there are keeping an eye on it.

“Obviously, wine is the most complex because the flavor profile is everything,” he said. “You don’t want to put your name on a bad product.”

Olympia’s zero-proof cocktail program has a goal of giving guests the full drink experience, McElligott said. There’s still depth and a flavor profile, there’s a garnish and glassware.

“There’s a balance to the drink — that is, in the same way it is to provide the guest in essence with a very similar flavor profile, flavor pattern that they should expect from an alcoholic cocktail,” he said.



The Hotel at Oberlin restaurant, 1833 - Raspberry Mint Tonic

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