



Zero to Sixty

Pre-batching, taps, and bottles make Heathman drink service faster, more efficient, and more engaging.

By Tad Wilkes



Prepped in volume ahead of time, cocktails such as the Huckleberry Mule (top left) flow easily from a tap, giving staff more time to engage, excite, and please crowds of guests.

Portland's Heathman Hotel was serving handcrafted cocktails with many ingredients and couldn't keep pace with crowds—especially the incredibly fast and furious influx of show patrons from the adjacent Portland Center for the Performing Arts and the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

"We can go from zero to 60 in two seconds, where I can get 150 to 200 people in my doors all wanting service within a 15-minute increment," says Heathman GM Randy Noia. "Likewise, after a show lets out, I can be inundated."

Social interaction, service, and guest engagement were severely compromised. "You're having to jump, duck, and pull and grab things from different areas and produce these cocktails, with service tickets coming in at the same time," he says.

Extra Helping: Northwest Grapefruit Negroni

Kathy Casey of Liquid Kitchen, for The Heathman Restaurant & Bar, The Heathman Hotel, Portland,



Oregon

Ingredients:

3 cups Aviation Gin
2 cups Carpano Antica Formula Vermouth
1 cup Combier Pamplemousse
1 cup Campari
2 cups water

Directions:

Combine ingredients into a large container and whisk together. Measure out mixture into apothecary-style bottles and store refrigerated. Place tag with string on bottle of Northwest Grapefruit Negroni and serve in a chilled Steelite Nick & Nora glass. Squeeze orange disk and drop into glass. Makes 72 oz [16 cocktails, in bottles or glasses]

With the help of Liquid Kitchen's Kathy Casey, the Heathman Restaurant & Bar's new approach is a case study in how to make bar service speedier and more efficient in multiple relatively small ways. Three of the Heathman's drinks are now pre-batched, and each is served a different way. The Huckleberry Mule is kegged and poured from a tap for fast and easy service; the Northwest Grapefruit Negroni is house-bottled; and the Broadway Punch, explained later.

"With batched cocktails, they're done in our prep kitchen by prep people with exact measurements," Noia says. "They're done when you're not under pressure and feeling the guest presence. We're able to do exact recipes."

HUCKLEBERRY MULE

"We're able to just garnish and put out a great-tasting cocktail that's not taking a lot of time," Noia says of the kegged Huckleberry Mule, rolled out in September 2014 and comprising Absolut vodka, homemade huckleberry, ginger ale, tapped and carbonated, with fresh lime.

They use a tap previously used for wine, because wine lines are preferable to beer lines, explains Casey. She also had them make huckleberry preserves, enough for the whole fall/winter, and process it to be shelf-stable, so bartenders could do a small spoonful on top of the drink for a fresh finish. The plan is to change the tap out to a different, seasonal cocktail in the spring and again in the summer and so on, probably coming back to the Huckleberry Mule in September 2015.

"You're still able to interact with your guests and keep them engaged," Noia says. "It's a great talking point for the guest. They say, 'What's that? You've got a cocktail on tap? How does that work?' All of a sudden, two or three people down the line want to try it. Plus, they know they're going to get it really quickly."

Casey notes that when doing cocktails on tap, bar staff must consider a "pre-dilution" factor that obviates shaking or stirring. "You have to get the carbonation right," she says. "Some juices are heavier, with more water content. You have to agitate it a few times a day while it's starting to carbonate. There's a method and science to it, which is different depending on ingredients."

"We have to shake it a couple times a day just to keep it fresh and moving around," Noia says.

NORTHWEST NEGRONI

For the pre-batched and house-bottled Northwest Negroni, all the server has to do is pull the chilled bottle out of the fridge and put it on a tray with a glass with two large ice cubes and other appointments. It impresses the guest, Noia says.

BROADWAY PUNCH

The Broadway Punch is inspired by the Heathman's famous tea service. "Kathy came up with a recipe combining citrus juices, rum, Courvoisier, Cognac, and Earl Grey tea," Noia says. "We serve it in a little teapot with a snifter and a big dollop of Angostura foam. It's quite the production that comes out, but it's batched. We're pouring the batch into the teapot and putting the foam into a snifter. Boom, boom—two steps and we're ready to go. "By pre-mixing it, we're cutting out seven or eight steps. And I've got good quality control, my costs are good, and there's no waste. It's ideal."

SERVICE

The Heathman staff pre-batch those three cocktails every day, sometimes making more volume depending on what show is next door. "I've got my prep people getting those kegs ready, carbonated, and sealed," Noia says.

Having just really gotten rolling with the tap program and entering his peak season, Noia says he doesn't have at his fingertips figures on how many more drinks the Heathman has sold by tap than previously, but says guests are more engaged with staff, bartenders aren't frazzled, and guests get drinks in a timely fashion. "[Staff are] able to spend more time with the guest, and that's what's bringing them back."

The benefits carry over to the Heathman Restaurant dining room.

"Before, the dining room drinks might take a lot longer than what's coming across the bartop," Noia says. "Certainly my servers are great at selling wine, but before they were avoiding cocktails, and now they're coming back to them because they see they can get

them quickly.”

MINIMIZING MOVEMENTS

In the Heathman bar, the theatre rush was no more pressing than on the night they launched the Huckleberry Mule cocktail on tap. Jerry Seinfeld just happened to be performing two shows that night nearby. But, thanks to the tap, the team pulled it off.

“Ticket times were about seven to eight minutes, which is great,” says GM Randy Noia.

Kathy Casey of Liquid Kitchen led the Heathman Hotel’s efficiency movement. She offers insight in a simple way to speed things up at the bar.

“If there is a signature cocktail that is really popular with multiple ingredients, I suggest pre-batching the majority of the ingredients, in states where this is allowed,” she says. “Then shake and do a fresh finish like a splash of soda or bubbly or adding in a fresh herb, etc. It can cut down the amount of movements the bartender has to do, but keeps the quality and consistency of the drink. I also love to finish cocktails these days with a mist or spritz of something such as bitters or smoky Scotch, adding for a bit of flair and flavor. It’s quick, easy, and impressive to the guest.” –TW

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