

Moderation is sexy: just ask Stryyk

If there were a time of year to talk about moderation, you might expect it to be January. The month when piousness abounds; when our feet look like they belong in a mortuary, at the end of our indulged and pallid bodies; when our bank accounts look like an evil toddler's been playing with a calculator ('minus one hundred gazillion pounds, Daddy!'); when we go to the doctors in the hope that something is tangibly wrong with us outside of general glibness, which you can't treat with an antibiotic, apparently. Oh, come on doctor, can we at least try it?

Well, we're in February now, so we're all off the hook. The health-conscious get their gyms back from the January joggers; the January joggers can take it or leave it, and the Dry January adopters can stick with it, or start paying for rounds again. And the rest of us are as we ever were, patiently looking forward to an eventual springtime. The jury's out on whether our bank balances or early-in-the-year moods are back on track.

Not just January

Nevermind our New Year personas, however, more generally young people are drinking less than before, and the older you are, the better you'll understand how you can't take it like you used to. You still have the taste for a Hendricks, but the fun has to end after one, maybe two. Oh, and we're *obviously* talking about singles. Double servings? Steady on.

If you're a Gen X Graver — bent on 'raving to the grave' — or just a Gen X-er that likes the ceremony of getting together with friends over a drink, this is a problem: mocktails are too sweet (and there's only so much cordial you can drink over an evening), and after only a couple of real drinks you know you'll be regretting it the next day.

... While the iron's hot...

Cue Alex Carlton. Alex's background includes a decade in the US entertainment industry before he made his name with Funkin smoothies, purees, cocktail mixers and syrups with a customer base largely in bars and restaurants in the UK before then breaking out into the States. In 2015 Alex sold the company to AG Barr, the Scottish drinks giant, whose brands include Irn-Bru, Strathmore and Bundaberg, amongst others.

Crucially, Alex's next move was a direct response to his drinking habits, which he wanted to moderate. It's one thing wishing you could drink less, and another thing if it's the millstone around which you and your friends converge. 'People will cancel plans because they're trying to stay off the drink,' he says, because there aren't adequate 'session' drinks available.

Stryyk has been putting itself on the map since bringing a product to market in 2018. Alex explains that 'in the year and a half we've had a product on the market, we've had four different iterations. We're always improving, pioneering for the best liquid of its kind in the market.' Working with experts including Thomas Soden, a well-known London mixologist, they develop their flavours to meet their market niche. Currently offering three 'spirits' (we'll do without the inverted commas herein, don't worry), each being calorie-free – Not Gin, Not Vodka and Not Rum – and each with a view to 'fit in with any ritual with friends'.

Sessionable, say what?

First, let's start with what these spirits are. Each contains distillates, additional botanicals and flavours, which have been designed to mimic the flavour of their alcoholic counterparts. For this article, the company sent over two Not Gin and Not Rum for sampling.

These ingredients combine to create a challenging taste for younger taste buds and could be described as 'grown-up', similar to what you'd find with any spirit. Not something you'd glug down but something you'd savour: that's what makes Stryyk-based drinks *sessionable*. There are only so many pints of blackcurrant and soda you can manage in the company of increasingly *hooned* friends, but with Stryyk you don't have to feel so parsimonious in your drink choice, somehow. Rather than feeling like you're drinking a mocktail, you feel like you're drinking a G&T without a twist of disapproval from your GP... and your body.

Flavour-wise, the gin tastes summery fresh, with overtones of mint and cucumber, and undertones of juniper and basil. And the rum is delicately spiced with an oakwood and vanilla base: a happy sub-in for the rum in your Dark & Story, Mojito, or Cuba Libre.

ABV as easy as 1,2,3

In the UK you're considered non-alcoholic if, like Stryyk, you're 0.05% ABV. Then, at 0.5% you're considered low alcohol. In the EU the numbers shift slightly, where a spirit that's low-alcohol in the UK can be considered non-alcoholic. Knowing this, it's a differentiator if, say, you're spending all day drinking when pregnant or planning to drive: better to plum for the 0.05% Stryyk, perhaps, than surprising yourself when breathalised. Know your limits, as the saying goes.

Healthy competition

Non-alcoholic spirits are certainly on the increase: Ceders, Borrigo, Seedlip, Three Spirits, Clean Liqueur, Amplify, to name but a few. Alex sees Stryyk as a different proposition: 'they are all playing in this unusual botanical distilled non-alcoholic spirit world. Stryyk is mainstream: we're aligned with the three mainstream spirits. You could get a Stryyk Not G&T because it's a reliable substitute for G&T, which is your favourite drink, but you want a clear head tomorrow. I think, too, that whilst we do buy into healthy minds, clarity and good mental health, we're about moderation, not abstinence.

‘If you go into Starbucks and everyone’s ordering a Cappuccino, it makes no difference if you’re ordering a decaf: that’s what Stryyk does for spirits. They’re for mindful hedonists.’

Future

Alex is understandably enthusiastic about how the landscape is continuing to change, with attitudes having already turned 180° towards the non-alcoholic movement. ‘Only two years ago, I would speak to Mixologists, who would ask why anyone needs a non-alcoholic spirit. Now, they really get it.’

For the Stryyk team, their next steps involve continued sell-in at bars and restaurants; export growth beyond the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Greece, Ireland and Israel; creating Not Whisky and Not Tequila; and they are looking to enter the world of ready-to-drink drinks. A promising diversification for the company in their category, not least as an excuse to involve Diane Abbott in their April Fool’s Day campaign (you can have that one for free, Stryyk).

Improbable ideas aside, fresh from his first Dry January, Alex affirms that for businesses to meet their ambitions they need to ‘listen to the market and be flexible. If you’re rigid, you’re going to die. For us, that’s realising that young Millennials don’t drink so much, so why would they want to drink something that tastes of alcohol? We now see our sweet spot as those between 30-70 years old.

‘People that work hard, love to travel, love experiences, love to let their hair down, but realise they have responsibilities.’

People like the author of this article, whose own libational approach is akin to Robert Burns’ assertion that ‘a now-and-then tribute to Bacchus is like the cold bath, bracing and invigorating.’ Aye, Rabbie, here’s to a slurp of the good stuff. And if it’s not gin, it’ll be Not Gin.

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