



Zero Proof

A New Way of Drinking

By Stephanie Forté

In record numbers, people are reaching for non-alcoholic (NA) beverages. Yet they still demand sophistication in their libations and are unwilling to sacrifice social experiences. This has catalyzed a groundswell of bars, restaurants, and brands offering palate-pleasing alcohol-free beer, wine, and spirits, even in Las Vegas.

From the Strip to the 'burbs, local mixologists are creating zero-proof marvels that captivate and satisfy. Take, for instance, La Strega in Summerlin, where the Tilda cocktail—anchored by Lyre's London Dry, an alcohol-free spirit, and blended with elderflower tonic, cucumber, grapefruit, lemon, and vanilla, delivers a nuanced experience reminiscent of classic gin cocktails.

Similarly, PKWY Taverns, known for its mammoth beer selection, has embraced zero-proof. It offers a few NA beers, including a seasonal selection of Athletic Brewing, a trailblazing NA brewery. Athletic's extensive lineup of beers is so good that when it launched in 2017, the brand took off like a rocket. Athletic's award-winning brews like Run Wild IPA and Upside Dawn Golden are a testament to alcohol-free brews' burgeoning quality and diversity.

In the beverage business, Athletic's success came as an a-ha moment. "There was recognition that these consumers are by no means all total abstainers," says Gerry Khermouch, executive editor of Beverage Business Insights. That's because there's no longer a hard dividing line between drinkers and non-drinkers. In 2023, about 94 percent of non-alcoholic product purchasers also bought alcoholic beverages.

THE SOBER CURIOUS MOVEMENT

Sober curious was coined in 2018 by Ruby Warrington, author of *Sober Curious: The Blissful Sleep, Great Focus, Limitless Presence, and Deep Connection Awaiting Us All On The Other Side of Alcohol*. It's emerged as more than a fleeting trend—it's a seismic shift in how we view alcohol consumption. The term encapsulates a growing group exploring sobriety not as a mandate but as a mindful choice.

Social media, podcasts and blogs have amplified this ethos, transforming it into a lifestyle imbued with aspiration rather than deprivation. On TikTok, #sobercurious has over 822 million views. Locally, the Sober in Vegas blog is full of handy resources for residents and people visiting Las Vegas.

WHY GO DRY?

People abstain for many reasons, like months of intense triathlon training, pregnancy, or maintaining better mental health. Some opt-out for a night to have a clear head for a morning meeting or yoga class. It's also an easy way to cut calories and carbs. Others (me included) found things suddenly changed.

"I used to really like to drink a beer after skiing," says Jeff Ruby of Las Vegas. "But it got to where it made me tired, and I really felt [negative] effects," Ruby says. At about age 57, suddenly, after finishing a beer or cocktail, he felt the fallout of alcohol almost immediately, so he stopped drinking alcohol altogether.

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

Today's teenagers and young adults have a much different attitude about drinking than older generations. The 2018 Berenberg study found that for young people, drinking, especially excessive drinking, is *like major cringe*.

The study showed Gen Z's, born between 1997 and 2012, drank about 20% less than Millennials did at the same age. Also, 64% said they expect to drink alcohol less frequently as they get older. Fast-forward to a 2023 Gallup study that showed a 10% drop in the number of "drinkers" aged 35 years old and younger.

Older generations can rest easy, too, since social shaming over not drinking has gone the way of the pay phone. "The stigma has vanished rapidly, partly because the offerings are no longer inferior," says Khermouch.

CRAFTSMANSHIP NOT COMPROMISE

As NA production technology has evolved, taste has improved, most apparent in NA beer, which closely matches its alcoholic counterpart. Beverages like red wine and whiskey still have a way to go, according to Khermouch. But brands are making huge strides in finding creative solutions. "There are brands that feel the trick is to offer a complex sensory experience that doesn't try to replicate alcohol," he says.

The allure of zero-proof extends beyond consumption—it's also a vibe that resonates with contemporary sensibilities. Companies like Athletic Brewing have tied themselves to lifestyle sports and causes their customers care about, like running and trail cleanups. Brands like Ritual Zero Proof, makers of spirit alternatives, and others have created communities and tapped into something deeper: our desire to be a part of something important.

The economic viability of alcohol-free beverages is undeniable. The category is expected to grow to \$30 billion by 2025, according to Global Market. Its meteoric growth trajectory underscores a reorientation of consumer preferences and priorities. And it continues to evolve alongside its consumers.

In recent years, sober bars, pop-up events and even dry stores have opened in cities like New York and Los Angeles. These specialty retailers offer a plethora of non-alcoholic beer, wine, spirits, and bottled cocktails.

How about Las Vegas? Khermouch adds, "As a city that's all about hospitality, there's no question that Las Vegas will be in the vanguard of including NA cocktails on menus and deepening its NA beer offerings." Cheers to that.





Esther's Eight Days A Week



Al Solito Posto's Bohemian Spirit



Borracha's Pinky's Up, courtesy of Clique Hospitality

WHERE TO GO IN LAS VEGAS

The Strip

The Skyfall Rooftop Lounge at Delano, curated by Daniel Diaz

Lavender Haze: a frothy, lavender floral with bittersweet notes

Almond Blue: blackberry syrup, pineapple, lime & orgeat finished with chili lime salt rim

DTLV

ReBar (1225 Main Street)

Spicy Redhead: Lyre's Spiced Cane, cinnamon, apple & ginger syrups with ginger beer

Mad Hatter's Elixir: Lyre's American Malt, ginger, pumpkin, allspice and pineapple

Shag-a-licious: pineapple juice and mango puree with coconut milk

A Shrubbery: blueberry and ginger shrub, strawberry nectar mixed with ginger beer

Esther's Kitchen (1130 S. Casino Center Blvd.)

Eight Days a Week: Lyre's Dry London Spirit NA gin mixed with guava, coconut, lime and grapefruit

Nai Tai: Lyre's NA rums mixed with triple sec, orgeat and lime

Free Wave Hazy IPA by Athletic Brewing

Summerlin

La Strega (3555 S. Town Center Dr.)

Akasha: Verjus Blanc, passionfruit, spiced lychee, ginger ale

Lailee: Seedlip Spice 94, red verjus, chai dem, pineapple & lemon juice

Al Solito Posto at Tivoli Village

Bohemian Spirit: Lyre's Aperitivo Rosso mixed with Fever Tree pink sparkling grapefruit

Tropical Mule: ginger, lime, pineapple, Fever Tree elderflower tonic

Henderson

Borracha Mexican Cantina (located inside Green Valley Ranch)

Blood In The Sand: blood orange, agave and strawberry puree mixed with ginger beer

Pinky's Up: hibiscus, passion fruit, pineapple chili shrub and soda

Nice Mangos: mango, agave, lime, ginger beer, hibiscus float

Gaetano's (10271 S. Eastern Ave., #111)

Italian Spritz: Lyre's Italian Spritz mixed with Fever Tree soda and orange wedge

Amaretto Sour: Lyre's Amaretti, sweet and sour

No-groni: Lyre's Dry London Spirit and Aperitif Rosso mixed with Italian orange

Manhattan: Lyre's American Malt and Aperitif Rosso mixed with NA bitters

PKWY Tavern (locations in Henderson, Summerlin and Centennial Hills)

In addition to multiple NA beers, including Athletic Brewing's seasonal selection, PKWY offers zero proof cocktails like a mimosa made with NA Prosecco. ♦

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