

Pre-mixed Drinks Challenge

The pre-mixed drinks category continues to diversify. Hamish Smith, chair of this year's challenge, sums up the mood of the expert panel

Whether it be on a train, plane, ferry, at a festival or even at home ahead of a night out, occasions for consuming pre-mixed drinks seem to be multiplying, and so do the offerings.

The 2012 Pre-mixed Drinks Challenge was *Drinks International's* fourth examination of the category and our most wide-ranging yet.

This year's blind tasting attracted pre-mixed products from countries including New Zealand, Mexico, France, Holland, Germany, the US and the UK.

Drinks International assembled a panel of six judges for the event: Dave Broido, senior trainer, Shaker UK; Chris Kelly, WSET marketing manager; Andy Dennett, brand ambassador at Hi Spirits; Ian McLaren, head of product training and mixology at Bacardi Brown-Forman; Neil Garner, Bar Wizards co-owner; and Hamish Smith, *Drinks International* news editor.

The tasting, followed by the Design & Packaging round, was divided into four categories: Classic Alcoholic Drink/Mixer Combo (orange text in the list of winners), Contemporary Alcoholic Drink/Mixer Combo (green), Ready-Made Classic Cocktails, ie Mojito, Cosmopolitan, Margarita, Mai Tai, Daiquiri, Piña Colada and Others (black), and Classic Cocktails –

consumer adds alcohol (red).

Judges agreed a degree of compromise by the consumer is intrinsic to the nature of convenience consumption, so a pre-mixed drink shouldn't be judged against a top-notch cocktail. More, it should be a representation of the cocktail it is sold as and should have relevance to the consumer it is positioned to attract. With this in mind, judges found both reasons to be positive and areas for improvement in what is, after all, still a youthful category.

Drinks that scored highly tended to contain fresh fruit – not synthetic flavourings – discernible spirits and stuck to the traditional ingredients of the cocktail. Judges observed that aromas were not as prominent as they might have been but reasoned that manufacturers probably intended the drinks to be consumed in-can or bottle – not in a glass.

The overriding feeling was that the category is diversifying and increasingly ambitious in what it will take on – and while mistakes are made along the way, this is part of its evolution.

Certainly, an encouraging number of the 2012 class were headed in the right direction – towards fresh, unprocessed ingredients, complementary alcohol and sophisticated, relevant packaging design.



GOLD WINNERS

Sierra Margarita – Borco International
Coppa Cocktails Strawberry Daiquiri – Toorank
Strawberry Daiquiri – Funkin
Piña Colada – Funkin

SILVER WINNERS

Vodka Mojito – VnC Cocktails
Viking Fjord Cosmo – Arcus
Light Margarita – Jose Cuervo
Coppa Margarita – Toorank
Piña Colada – Sainsbury's
Coppa Cocktails Sex on the Beach – Toorank
Bloody Mary – Sainsbury's
Raspberry Flirtini – Dirty Blonde Cocktails
Mojito – Funkin
VK Cheeky Mixed Fruit – Global Brands
Gin & Pick Grapefruit Juice – G&J Greenall
Gin Sin – G&J Greenall

BRONZE WINNERS

Gin & Tonic – Greenall's Gin & Tonic
Gin & Diet Tonic – Greenall's Gin & Diet Tonic
The Authentic Cocktail Company Mojito – Manchester Drinks Company
Coppa Cocktails Mojito – Toorank
Ginger Mojito – Sainsbury's
Viking Fjord Mojito – Arcus
Viking Fjord Raspberry Mojito – Arcus
Cosmopolitan – Manchester Drinks Company
Coppa Cocktails Cosmopolitan – Toorank
Pomegranate Cosmopolitan – VnC Cocktails
Mango Daiquiri – VnC Cocktails
Strawberry Daiquiri – VnC Cocktails
Coppa Cocktails Piña Colada – Toorank
The Authentic Cocktail Company On The Beach – Manchester Drinks Company
After Dark Martini – Sainsbury's
Blood Orange Mimosa – Dirty Blonde Cocktails
Passion Fruit Caprioska – VnC Cocktails
Vodka Apple – Cell Drinks
Vodka Caffeine & Taurine Reverb – Cell Drinks
Gin Fizz – G&J Greenall

DESIGN & PACKAGING

GOLD WINNERS

My Cocktail Mojito – Manchester Drinks

SILVER WINNERS

Dirty Blonde Cocktails Raspberry Flirtini – Kristen Raskopf

BRONZE WINNERS

The Authentic Cocktail Company On The Beach – Manchester Drinks
Coppa Cocktails Mojito – Toorank
Coppa Cocktails Margarita – Toorank
Pacific Mai Tai – VnC Cocktails