

FREE *Spirits*

*Lyre's Alcohol
Alternatives
Take a Seat at
the Bar*



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Imitation is called the

sincerest form of flattery; in the case of Sydney, Australia-based company Lyre's, which makes a range of alcohol-alternative products that mimic classic spirits, it's an artful homage.

After three years of obsessive research and development by founder and CEO Mark Livings, Lyre's will make its debut in California, where—under the guidance of Global Brand Ambassador Jeremy Shipley—it's bound to find a receptive audience. Shipley and Christian Butler, Lyre's VP of North America, brought the portfolio to San Francisco for a tasting and to shed some light on the ingredients behind these doppelgänger spirits.

"The team at Lyre's collaborated with Australian sommelier David Murphy to craft and refine the 12 flavor profiles that make up the portfolio," said Butler, who describes Murphy as their "flavor architect." Livings and Murphy's recipes are based on all-natural, botanical essences, extracts, and distillates sourced from all corners of the globe, particularly Germany.



Shipley recommends layering multiple Lyre's expressions for a cocktail that suggests the presence of alcohol without actually containing any.



Lyre's Global Brand Ambassador Jeremy Shipley with VP of North America Christian Butler.

“The essence of Lyre's is freedom, giving consumers non- or low-alcoholic options for occasions that once offered few inspiring alternatives. We have crafted the world's finest range of non-alcoholic spirits with the tastes you know and love. Now you are free to drink your drink, your way!”

—Christian Butler, Lyre's VP of North America



The Lyre's portfolio currently includes 12 alcohol-free spirit alternatives, four of which—Dry London Spirit, Coffee Liqueur, American Malt, and Italian Orange—will be the first to enter the U.S. market.

“For example, we tasted 350 different kinds of vanilla to find the six right ones,” said Butler, whose beverage-industry savvy has been honed from all sides: He’s owned a wine bar in Shanghai and developed both a vodka brand and a négociant wine brand that’s sold in the U.S. All in all, he counts more than 1,200 ingredients derived from fruits, herbs, spices, nuts, seeds, and such, which were carefully analyzed and combined to create the range of 12 alcohol-free spirit alternatives: Absinthe, American Malt, Amaretto, Coffee Liqueur, Dark Cane Spirit, Dry London Spirit, Dry Vermouth, Italian Orange, Spiced Cane Spirit, Triple Sec, Vermouth Rosso, and White Cane Spirit.

The Art of Imitation

As if nailing the aroma and flavor profiles of classic spirits weren’t challenging enough, the team at Lyre’s also attempted to mimic the sensation alcohol imparts on the palate. They’ve achieved that by using tongue-numbing botanicals like grains of

paradise, an aromatic species of pepper that’s related to ginger and cardamom; possessing a pungent black-pepper quality along with hints of citrus, it’s often found in the cuisines of West and North Africa.

Capsicum and ginger play a similar role, but the absence of higher alcohols like isoamyl and isobutyl is nevertheless unmistakable. “The first spirit we took on was gin,” said Butler. “We relied on a focus group [that] comprised highly experienced bartenders who work at some of Sydney’s top bars—One Penny Red, Barangaroo House, Opera Bar, and Vernon’s Bar—and went back to the drawing board several times to get it right.” Persistence clearly paid off, as the expressions are compelling, with pure, natural aromas and lively, balanced, complex palates; the lack of synthetic flavors is one of the brand’s most appealing features.

Layering the products is another way to simulate the presence of alcohol, according to Shipley, a native of Christchurch, New Zealand, whose tenure as a Bacardi ambassador and working knowledge of large hospitality



groups means he has industry best practices in his back pocket. In acting as an advocate for the adoption of Lyre’s products, he observed, “We’re seeing bars serving only non-alcoholic cocktails popping up in major cities

around the U.S. There's no question that booze-free drinks have found a spot on bar menus." He has come up with a short list of the flavors to be introduced to the U.S. market first, each for an SRP of \$36: Dry London Spirit, Coffee Liqueur, Amaretto, and Italian Orange, a riff on Campari with a distinct amaro-like quality.

Social Camouflage

Although he has yet to taste through the Lyre's portfolio, bartender Eric Castro—the talent who reshaped San Diego's bar scene with Polite Provisions and Raised by Wolves—agreed that virgin concoctions are a rising trend: "We're selling a ton of alcohol-free cocktails, as the real estate we devote to them on our cocktail menu at Raised by Wolves attests." He's enthusiastic about alternatives like Lyre's largely because they're shelf-stable: "They address the real need for nonperishable, botanical ingredients [and] allow us to be very creative while keeping costs down," he adds.

According to Castro, "A good half of our customers are moderating." By that, he means they're enjoying one alcohol-based beverage before moving to an alternative. What's more, he's seeing no resistance to alcohol-free cocktails that are priced on par with traditional drinks.

Butler believes there's less stigma around moderation than outright abstinence, calling alcohol alternatives "a form of 'social camouflage' for those who choose to abstain." From his perspective, "Lyre's gives consumers an out when the pressure is on to consume. The trend toward healthier consumption habits doesn't just extend to those who are alcohol-free; there's a lot of appeal for consumers who want to consume less alcohol in an environment where, until recently, there were few alternatives."

As to exactly how bartenders will use complex, finely crafted alcohol alternatives like Lyre's beyond emulating standard cocktails is anyone's guess. But knowing the creative impetus that drives mixology, they're bound to come up with solutions that run the gamut. "From a sensory standpoint, there's not a lot of diversity in alcohol alternatives," said

Castro. "So Lyre's is clearly an early mover in the segment."

Spirit Animals

The team at Lyre's hasn't overlooked the importance of compelling branding, rallying both colorful package design and whimsical critters to their cause. The range is named after the lyrebird, a native of southern Australia and one of Mother Nature's most talented impressionists, with a vast repertoire of songs and the ability to mimic everything

from a camera shutter to a chainsaw. Each bottle in the lineup, meanwhile, has a designated animal that reflects the faux-spirit inside.

With patents pending on the flavor architecture of its botanical recipes, the company aims to maintain its early advantage in a segment that, based largely on consumer demand, is quickly evolving. Beyond finding a home on backbars or in wells, Lyre's also has plans for ready-to-drink non-alcoholic cocktails in 200-milliliter packaging in the works. ■■



Lyre's Negroni

- ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Dry London Spirit
 - ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Vermouth Rosso
 - ▶ 1 oz. Lyre's Italian Orange
- Stir all ingredients briefly in an Old Fashioned glass with fresh ice. Garnish with an orange slice.

Lyre's Gin & Tonic

- ▶ 1½ oz. Lyre's Dry London Spirit
 - ▶ 3 oz. premium bottled tonic
 - ▶ 1 slice pink grapefruit
- Build all ingredients in a Highball glass and fill with fresh cubed ice. Garnish with a rosemary sprig.