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THE FUTURE OF TASTE REPORT 2026

PREDICTING WHAT'S NEXT IN BEVERAGE CULTURE.
FLAVOURS, NUMBERS, TRENDS (AND GUESSES).

Editors' letter

BY TOBY WEEDON & ROWENA ROOS



There's a thrill in predicting the future. There's also a certain pressure when you have to do it again.

Last year, we asked the people closest to drinks culture — baristas, café owners, mixologists and drinks experts across the world — one simple question:

What's coming?

They made some pretty accurate predictions: decaf would have a moment, fibremaxxing would explode and that Matcha might just have the staying power of something more than a passing fad.

And now, we're back again. Hundreds of baristas, café owners, mixologists

and drinks experts from 21 countries told us what they're seeing and making now — and what they think they'll be pouring next.

From sensory exploration to a yearning for connection, this year's trends uncovered something deeper than we initially expected: cafés have become the defining cultural hub of our times. Far beyond a space to serve drinks, they are a reflection of our loves, hopes, fears and identities — where new ideas are cultivated and subcultures formed.

If you really want to know where global culture is headed, studying café menus is an excellent place to start.



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TREND ONE

The pharmafication of drinks

HOW THE PURSUIT OF WELLNESS GOT WHIMSICAL

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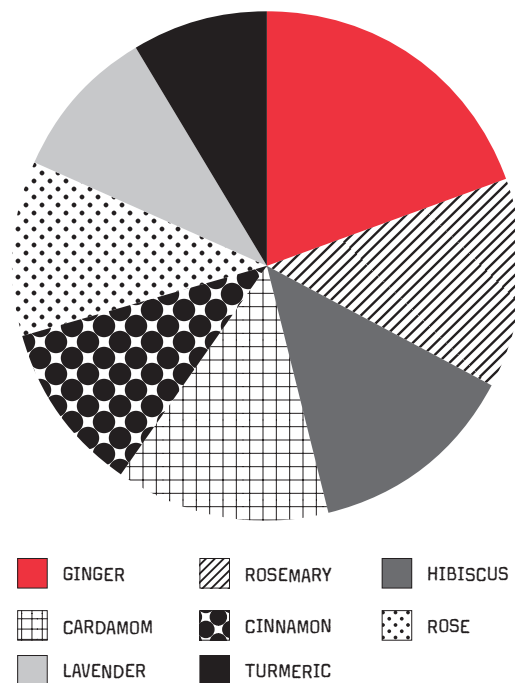
40% of drinks experts say
herbs and botanicals will
shape the future of flavour.

Cafés are starting to look like 18th-century pharmacies as more of us seek out drinks that feel medicinal, functional, preventative, therapeutic and bioactive. Think natural sodas infused with flowers, bioactive honeys, vinegar cocktails, adaptogenic herbs, fermentation and ingredients that sound as though they've been prescribed rather than poured.

The result is a new kind of wellness niche: part functional, part folk ritual, part fairytale.

"I think people are becoming much more curious, especially when there's a story behind the ingredient. Flowers, smoke, fermentation or unusual botanical ingredients are becoming more accepted. The most successful innovations often combine something unexpected with something comforting", said Lara Sosna of Forkk Studio, Germany. Natalie Schrauwen from Elder Lab in

MOST POPULAR HERBS AND BOTANICALS



Antwerp said customers are looking for "bioactive compounds in plants, the medicinal side, functionals, that are natural and also a bit more shamanic".

We're seeing similar signals online

"Plant-infused drinks, beverages made with herbs, botanicals and natural plants, are still relatively niche. I believe they have huge potential as consumers continue to prioritise wellness."

ALICE AND TIMOTHÉE, SAMBA COFFEE SHOP, PARIS

“I think we will see more ingredients connected to nature, fermentation and regionality: herbs, flowers, botanicals, tea, fermented fruits and local ingredients. People are becoming interested in flavours that tell a story.”

LARA SOSNA,
FORKK STUDIO, GERMANY.

too: articles mentioning botanicals saw a 239% YoY rise in impressions in the first half of 2026. And the focus on fibre and more fibre rich food and drinks is still on the up. Articles on the topic saw double the number of impressions in H1 2026 compared with the previous six months.

FROM KOMBUCHA TO KVASS

Is the future of flavour hiding in the past? Given the triple threats of a pandemic, climate change and AI, it's unsurprising to see folksy back-to-nature rituals like foraging and fermentation — one of the most discussed topics across all territories in the study — gaining cultural capital

in recent years. Kombucha still leads in this space according to our experts, but other traditional fermented drinks such as tepache from Mexico, kvass from Eastern Europe and Şalgam, a Turkish beverage made with fermented purple carrots, are also bubbling up. Views of articles online mentioning kvass rose 27% YoY in the first half of 2026.

“I think Eastern Europe, Poland and Romania, they've got stuff to say on the drinks front and traditions that we haven't really unearthed. People are interested in seeing heritage drinks and traditional drinks”, said Rebecca Morgan Lewis, from Origin Coffee Roasters in London.



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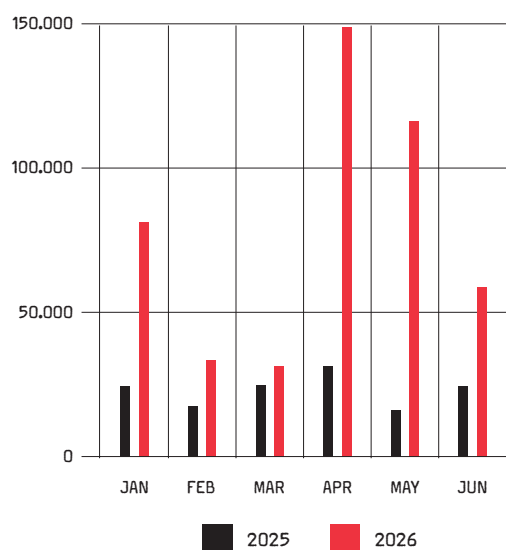
KEY STATISTICS

- 40% of drinks professionals from 21 countries called out herbs and botanicals as key to the future of flavour, making it the number one taste trend.
- Ginger, hibiscus and lavender were among the top ingredients named.
- 56% of respondents raised fermentation, unprompted, during interviews.

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

- LAVENDER AND BORAGE INFUSION
Sajéx Safiri, La Main Noire, Paris
- SALT-FERMENTED PLUM SODA
Hoa Tran Nhat, Antibarist, Berlin
- VINEGAR AND FIG LEAF SODA
Yuliia Stakhova, Beverage Professional, Belgium
- BLACKBERRY AND BASIL KOMBUCHA
Kato Avondst, Polly, Antwerp

BOTANICALS CULTURAL ATTENTION (UK+US)



**“The apothecary revival:
vinegar, shrubs,
bioactive honeys, floral,
fermentation, natural products.”**

**MIHAELA IORDACHE,
FOOD & BEVERAGE CONSULTANT, PARIS.**

TREND TWO

The great café reconnection

WHY HUMAN CONNECTION IS BECOMING HOSPITALITY'S MOST VALUABLE INGREDIENT

More than half of baristas say community and connection will be central to the future of the café.

In a world increasingly mediated by screens, algorithms and AI, one of the most powerful luxuries may be remarkably simple: someone knowing your name and asking how you are. The café is re-emerging as a vital third space for human connection.

KEY STATISTICS

- 51% of the drinks professionals and experts interviewed mentioned terms such as “belonging”, “community” and “connection” when discussing the future of café and beverages.
- 1 in 4 American adults (26%) now report eating all of their daily meals alone — an overall increase of more than 50% since 2003. (World Happiness Report, 2025)

When asked how AI will change the industry, baristas, café owners and experts around the world repeatedly returned to the same idea: automation may improve the consistency and quality of coffee, but it



should not replace the human interactions the industry is built upon.

“Sometimes people’s only interaction can be getting their coffee. It can set their day”, said Evan from Cloud Picker in Dublin. Sajëx Safiri from La Main Noire in Paris had a similar perspective: “For a good number of our regulars, the exchange at the counter is the only real conversation they will have that day”, and María Guerrero Patricio of Brewtalist in Valencia described the café counter as something more profound: “People want

“I don’t think that coffee can change the world, but the conversations that start with coffee can.”

NGUYEN HOANG LONG, TWOGATHER, BERLIN

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“The real value of a product isn’t just what it does but its ability to create relationships between people.”

MANUEL MONETTI, THE BLIND PIG, ROME

a place where there’s another human to say ‘hello’, and to look into their eyes and ask ‘how are you?’”

THE CAFÉ AS THE NEW SOCIAL CLUB

The sheer volume of cafés available today means we’re increasingly able to find community based on what, or where, we drink, in some respects filling the gaps in our social lives left by an increase in work from home and the decline of the traditional nightlife industry.

In the UK, for example, the late-night sector has contracted by over 26% overall since March 2020, and roughly 1 in 6 towns have lost all late-night venues entirely, according to the Night Time Industries Association. Cafés and bakeries, however, saw a nationwide average growth rate of nearly 13% between 2022 and 2025, with independent cafés now making up 85% of venues overall. More spaces means more opportunity for new communities to develop within them, each with its own rituals, icons and language.

Hello Matcha Girlies.

“There’s coffee shops for Heavy Metal fans”, added Chris from Lau Lau in Texas. Coffee professional David Rickenback in London said, “I love black coffee, and that is my personality. There’s tribalism in drinks, but it’s in a really cool way.” Dan Frommer, founder and editor of The New Consumer, noted, “It’s very much a generational thing...Younger people really identify in many ways through their beverage brands.”

The implication is significant: the product gets people through the door, but belonging may be what keeps them coming back.

Carmen Newton, owner of Masses Bagels in Melbourne, revealed, “People [are] spending money in your venue because of the community that you’ve built, the service that you’ve built.” Hannah Foy and Chris Praetzel from Lau Lau in Texas agreed: “In a world that’s hard, no-one has money, people are saying, ‘This is me putting stake in a business that I value, and has values that I believe in’, and I do think people are more intentional with that than they were even five years ago.”

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TREND THREE

The end of the flat white?

HOW GLOBAL FLAVOUR IS BLOWING UP THE CAFÉ MENU

82% of baristas and café owners mentioned drinks that were neither tea nor coffee.

The café menu had barely changed for decades: flat white, cappuccino, latte, Americano, espresso. You knew what you were getting.

Now walk into a café and things get a lot more interesting. Globally inspired flavours and wellness-adjacent drinks such as ube, refreshers, ferments and botanical sodas are all elbowing their way towards the mainstream. It's being called the "matcha effect". But can the success of one green drink alone be the catalyst for café menus changing forever?

In 2027, cafés won't be competing on coffee, it will be on their ability to surprise.

"This generation of people that go to a café don't want the usual stuff", said Jean Renzen of Papan, a micro-bakery and specialty café in the Netherlands. "They want something out of the ordinary, something they can tell their friends about."

KEY STATISTICS

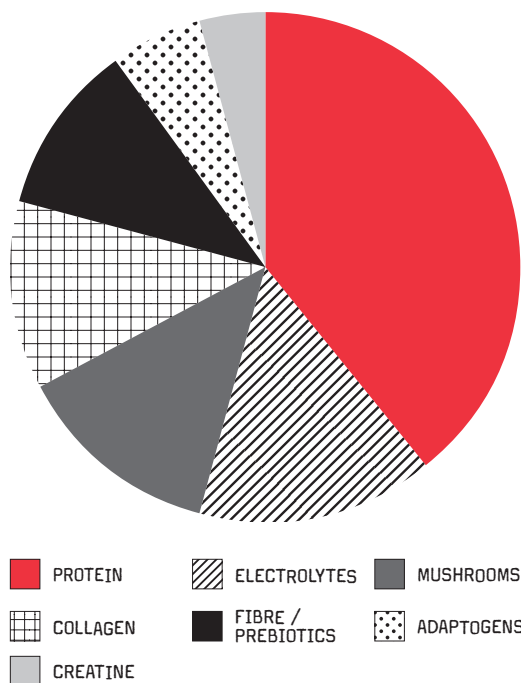
- 82% of baristas and café owners mentioned drinks that were neither tea nor coffee.
- Ube was mentioned twice as often as the flat white or cappuccino.
- 1 in 4 experts named wellness as the biggest influence on new flavour trends.

MENUS AS A MIRROR TO SOCIETY

Take the rise of refreshers. Light sparkling juices are hardly new, but the combination of increasingly warmer weather, demand for lower-caffeine options and a growing appetite for customisation is turning them into a category in their own right. "I made a rhubarb soda a couple of weeks ago, which was really fun", boasts Flo Thomas of London's Batch Baby. "It was the first thing we've had on the seasonal menu, which had nothing to do with coffee or matcha. It was rhubarb fermented with lactobacillus, so it tasted a bit like rhubarb yogurt."

MOST POPULAR FUNCTIONAL INGREDIENTS

BY NUMBER OF INTERVIEW MENTIONS



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“Customers will ask what the wildest thing we have on the menu is. We did a seaweed drink. People were really up for trying it. Not only for the health benefits, but also because it was something of a new flavour.”

**MARTIN LEE THOMSON,
PAPEGØYE, NORWAY.**

At Onyx Coffee Lab in Arkansas, Vanessa DeGraffenried sees refreshers differently: “[They feel] like something you’re drinking in addition to coffee and tea, not instead of. They’re so Customisable. It’s almost like a water alternative instead of a coffee or tea alternative.”

In a telling sign of a global cultural shift, the top five emerging ingredients mentioned by our interviewees were all from East or Southeast Asia, reflecting the cultural ascent of places such as Japan, Korea and the Philippines. Ube, an ingredient barely known in the West just a few years ago, was mentioned twice as often by baristas as was the flat white or cappuccino.

And then there’s aesthetics. How a beverage looks — its colour, even

what it’s served in (unprompted, 12% of experts mentioned the vessel being key to the experience) — is driving experimentation in ways that would’ve seemed eccentric only a decade ago. Social feeds drip with green, blue and purple drinks, while the wellness trend cycle spits out coconut water matchas and kombucha slushies.

WHERE IT’S HAPPENING

- VERBENA KOMBUCHA
Polly, Antwerp
- MANGO COCONUT SAGO
Layers, Amsterdam
- HIBISCUS ICED TEA WITH ELECTROLYTES,
FRESH LEMON AND LIME
Superfreak, Sydney
- MALTED HOJICHA
Matcha Mate, Melbourne
- FERMENTED RICE DRINK WITH FRESH GINGER
Tea Stories, Eindhoven

“We sell more hydration drinks than any other drink now.”

**FLO THOMAS,
BATCH BABY, LONDON.**

TREND FOUR

The squishy boom

YOUR NEXT DRINK IS ABOUT TO BECOME “CHEWY”

72% of experts believe mouthfeel is becoming as important as flavour.

We’re starting to care as much about how a drink “feels” as how it tastes. In fact, your next latte might not feel creamy at all. It could be fizzy, jellied, foamy, crunchy — or even all four at once!

KEY STATISTICS

- 72% of experts agree that mouthfeel is becoming as important to a drink as taste.
- Google searches for coffee jelly are up 90% YoY worldwide.
- More than a quarter of experts who discussed texture specifically called out foaminess.

Fizzy matcha, jellied coffee, chewy toppings and creamy foams. The continuing influence of East and Southeast Asia on Western tastes is sparking a wave of innovation in mouthfeel, turning drinks into a multisensory event.

THE FOAM REVOLUTION

“Social media has accelerated demand for visually and texturally distinctive beverages”, confirmed Cris Benavente, Blacksmith Coffee, UAE. “Creamy foams, fruit pieces, jelly inclusions, layered drinks, lightly carbonated textures and unique mouthfeels that create memorable experiences.” CultureLab data shows impressions going to such terms as “fizzy”, “foam” and “chewy” increased in food and drink culture by 9% in the first half of 2026 over H2 2025.



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“Texture is becoming a key part of the overall sensory experience. Creamy foams, fruit pieces, jelly inclusions, layered drinks, lightly carbonated textures and unique mouthfeels that create memorable experiences. Social media has accelerated demand for visually and texturally distinctive beverages.”

CRIS BENAVENTE, BLACKSMITH COFFEE, DUBAI

We heard café owners from Finland to Dubai talk about boba opening the floodgates to more jellied textures. As of August 2026, Google searches for coffee jelly had risen 90% YoY globally, while The New Consumer’s Dan Frommer agrees that the product is poised to crack the Western market.

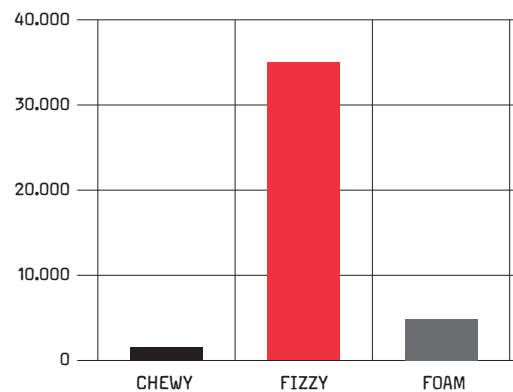
What we’re seeing here is the entire sensory experience that a drink offers increasing as a marker of value. Texture and flavour are two aspects, but visuals were also discussed widely for their social currency, with 37% of interviewees contending that how a drink looks is integral to its appeal.

Michael Jagger from Living Things in Manchester put it plainly: “People are buying an experience. They’re putting it out on their Instagram, on TikTok. They’re not just buying a product anymore. They’re buying a statement, saying, ‘I believe in this. This is who I am.’”

This will all become especially interesting if GLP-1 use continues to rise rapidly, with people seeking out interesting and diverse drinking experiences as they reduce food consumption.

GROWTH IN FOOD AND DRINKS CULTURE IN H1 VS H2 2025

GROWTH IN IMPRESSIONS



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PLANT-BASED BECOMES A TEXTURE PLAYGROUND

Dairy or non-dairy is redundant news as of 2026. Customers are increasingly interested in the option that creates the best texture for a particular drink. And that trend is inherently good news for plant-based drinks. As Dan Frommer put it, “Overall, we’ve reached a point where dairy is not the obvious answer for every kind of creaminess exploration in different beverages.”

“Nobody orders cold foam for the taste; they order it for the feeling. Texture has become its own language, separate from flavour.”

DIEGO MATA, NUWANDA, VALENCIA.

WHERE IT’S HAPPENING

- ESPRESSO PLUM FIZZ
Antibarist, Berlin
- GENMAICHA LATTE
WITH OSMANTHUS JELLY
Matcha Mate, Melbourne
- RASPBERRY DANISH ICED LATTE
W/ VEGAN CREAM CHEESE
The Artisan, Copenhagen
- BLUE SPIRULINA MATCHA LATTE
WITH DRIED COCONUT FLAKES
La Main Noire, Paris
- MILK TEA WITH RED BEAN
PASTE AND TAPIOCA BUBBLES
Tea Stories, Amsterdam



ADDITIONAL SOURCES

[<https://meaningfulvision.com/the-uks-coffee-bakery-boom-in-numbers/>]
[<https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/hospitality/uk-independent-coffee-shop-trends-revealed/>]
[<https://www.puregusto.co.uk/englands-coffee-shops-the-definitive-study-pure-gusto?srsId=AfmB0oqSAM6hBtFOWF3pFuqbM4mZNURukHLCFQ-VPVbU6s1WyZkJnC10>]

We would like to thank everyone who spoke with us as part of this year's report. Below is the full list of those who contributed. Roll the credits...

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