

# ARTISAN SPIRIT

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THE MAGAZINE FOR CRAFT DISTILLERS AND THEIR FANS

BAR CONVENT  
BROOKLYN 2023:

## Bigger, Better, & No Bad Bugs

BARLEY OF  
THE FUTURE

SELF-DETERM  
through SELF-

*Professionals from bar and beverage  
gather to network and educate*

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Photos provided by **BAR CONVENT BROOKLYN**

The first thing I saw when I entered Bar Convent Brooklyn were big name and craft spirits brands lining the bustling greenbelt laid between Buildings 7 and 8 of Brooklyn's sprawling Industry City complex. This was expected and terrific.

The second thing I noticed, however, was the blast of cold air that hit me when I first stepped into Building 8 to check out more brands. This was hoped for, and its presence set a tone for the event that couldn't necessarily be achieved by the mere presence of exceptional booze.

Understanding why requires a look back at last year's event, affectionately known as BCB. The air conditioning in the same Industry City buildings failed on the first day, leading to sweltering conditions and periodic water station shortages. That initial sensation of artificial breeze erased any concerns about ungodly temperatures interfering with a good time. This naturally made it easier to focus on enjoying familiar brands and discovering new finds.

Good thing, too: BCB 2023 was massive. The need for more space to properly showcase participating brands turned the exhibition area into a two-story affair. The expanded floor plan turned out to be a blessing at one point: A brief but aggressive shock of rain on day two drove attendees exploring brands on the





outdoor greenbelt inside for roughly 20 minutes, and it still didn't feel all that constricted.

The larger display area allowed industry heavyweights to flex their creativity and budgeting muscles — Campari's recreation of JFK's TWA Hotel lounge and Brown-Forman's Brooklyn bodega replica were most noteworthy — but it also provided the craft, independent, and small-batch brands plenty of room to command attention with their bottles and stories. This was by design. Like last year, BCB featured an Emerging Brands rectangular kiosk specifically designed to give fledgling labels with smaller budget options a chance to be seen

in a concentrated setting. "This year, we saw a wide range of products from around the world, from a Scottish-based alcohol-free spirit to a premium gin made in Mexico City," explained Jackie Williams, Bar Convent Brooklyn's event director. "We recognize it can be challenging for smaller brands to participate in such large events, so offering this turnkey option makes it a worthwhile investment of their time and resources."

Artisan brands with a larger market presence shared the rest of the floor, with the big brands, and held their own rather impressively. According to Williams, this slice of the craft sector sees the two-day

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event as a prime opportunity to scale their market presence even higher. "We've seen this sector grow every year, and these brands see Bar Convent Brooklyn as a really important opportunity to get in-front of the right people," she said. "We've had a lot of brands come back and tell us how fruitful it was to attend and/or participate."

### BEYOND THE TASTINGS

Tasting spirits at a convention over two days is obviously fun, but taking deeper dives into the business of booze is important. BCB provided ample opportunity for the latter through its robust education program. The 55 sessions covered a host of angles that would be relevant to a distiller's interests, from business-driven discussions like developing effective marketing strategies to nerdy science stuff like exploring connections between distilling and perfume creation. "The education programming is an essential part of Bar Convent Brooklyn," Williams said. "Across the board, the event hosted 121 speakers, and all of the sessions were incredibly well attended."


There was also a substantial increase in events around Brooklyn and Manhattan compared to last year. Plenty of bars in the two boroughs seized the opportunity to promote special one-night bar takeovers and pop-ups, while large and craft labels alike held brand activations of various sizes. On one level, it was a signal that whatever remnant of worry about the pandemic was unequivocally



whisked away. On another level, it indicated Bar Convent Brooklyn's ability to draw different components of the overarching drinks industry is stronger than ever before.

The increase of activities outside BCB mirrored the main event's expansion within Industry City. Williams already sees the need to reserve more floor space as a distinct possibility for 2024. "This year marked the largest show floor that Bar Convent Brooklyn has ever had, and we look to continue that upward trajectory each year," she said. "Given this success, we do have an opportunity for growth next year, particularly in having more space so that we can continue showcasing more brands, while also allowing a little more room for attendees to spread out and explore."

This begs a question that was bounced around during the convention's second day: Will Bar Convent Brooklyn outgrow its current venue? It's not an immediate issue to address — Industry City will host the fete once more in 2024, and the venue's network of long, narrow multi-story buildings still has plenty of space to be utilized. For now, however, Williams is content with the support the event's received in its current digs. "Nothing is ever set in stone, so who knows what the event will look like five years down the line," she said. "But we are incredibly appreciative of the support and hospitality that Industry City has shown us these last two years."

It's quite clear the industry will show up, from the large brands to the small labels. Hopefully, the air conditioning will continue to be in full force, too. 

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