



ILLUSTRATION BY MARK STIVERS

# White Claw's grip

BY BRADLEY GEISER

What began as a fringe drink from the parent company that launched Mike's Hard Lemonade in the late '90s has landed at the crossroads of ironic fandom and a genuine viral boom.

Tapping into a similar market as La Croix, White Claw is marketed as a hard seltzer—a low-calorie, 5% alcohol-by-volume beverage that may give drinkers the buzz they want, but it won't replace a classic vodka soda.

Gabriell Garcia, who co-owns Cafe Colonial on Stockton Boulevard, said White Claw appeals to customers who want something a little bit different.

"It's just a new twist on drinking," Garcia said. "I think they just keep reinventing alternatives to beer. It is cool for us at Cafe Colonial as we are only beer [and] wine, and this helps satiate that cocktail drinker."

Bottle & Barlow co-owner Kimio Bazett said he's also seen the White Claw craze. "I think it speaks to the power of good marketing and branding," Bazett said. "And if you take that out, there's nothing special about it as a product, but it's going to hit people in the hearts and minds—and it works."

The commercials used to propel White Claw's mystique are reminiscent of a certain infamous island music festival, but its grasp has reached far beyond yachts and white sandy beaches. White

Claw is favored by 20- and 30-somethings going to punk rock venues and pizza parlors. This eclectic mix of potential consumers is, perhaps, hard seltzer's biggest draw.

"It seems like a lot of millennial restaurant industry folks are into it—bartenders and the like," Bazett said. "I went on a rafting trip with some guys last week and they were buying a couple of cases."

This diverse customer base is key. Not constrained to the ice bins of yachts featured in White Claw's commercials, the hard seltzer has drifted from the ocean to the shores of the Sacramento River. Bars, restaurants, liquor stores, soccer stadiums and grocery stores alike have dipped their toes into White Claw's waters.

Pabst Blue Ribbon, Natural Ice and even Four Loko have thrown their hats into the hard seltzer ring, and while White Claw reigns supreme, other brands such as Truly are also having fair amounts of success.

But will the hard seltzer trend continue to grow? Or will it fizz out?

"Things like this pop up overnight," Garcia said. "I'm sure [White Claw] will be reinvented much like the Tequila, Zima [and] Bartles & James of yesteryear."

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