

'Everybody Is Drinking Guinness.' We Know Why.

Guinness, the beer of Irish pubs and Irish men, has endeared itself to chug-happy Americans eager to "split the 'G.'"

By LUKE FORTNEY

When Maxwell Quinn stepped out of the November chill into Clandestino, a bar in Manhattan's Chinatown favored by a young, fashionable crowd, he quickly passed over the sparkling wines, dirty martinis and Lagunitas IPA.

"Can I get a Guinness?" he said.

He wasted no time. Before the foam could settle, he raised the glass to his lips and tilted his head back. He began to chug.

Quinn, 36, was "splitting the 'G,'" an online trend in which drinkers gulp Guinness with the hopes that the horizon between the stout and the foam falls in the middle of the "G" on a branded pint glass. In some corners of the internet, it seems like everyone — the Jonas Brothers, John Cena, your cousin — is splitting the "G."

Guinness, once synonymous with old Irish pubs and old Irish men, is increasingly winning over younger, beer-bent Americans like Quinn. "It's having a moment," he said.

You can spot Guinness in some unexpected places across New York City, including Mexican restaurants, diners and natural wine bars. It is the fastest-growing imported beer in the country based on bar, restaurant and brewery sales over the last year, according to Nielsen. The Dublin-based brewer has been making up for ground lost in the United States since the pandemic.

But it's more than post-pandemic revenge spending. A motley of factors — an Irish pop cultural renaissance, viral drinking challenges and of course, marketing dollars — has helped endear one of the beer industry's most misunderstood products to skeptics.

"The numbers are completely bananas right now," said Oran McGonagle, an owner of the Dubliner, a 2-year-old pub in Boston. In 2023, his bar sold more Guinness



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Guinness, once synonymous with Irish pubs and older men, is winning over younger, beer-bent Americans at bars like Clandestino in New York City.

than any other bar or restaurant in the city. And this year, the Dubliner's purchasing volume of the stout is up 63% to meet rocketing demand.

Guinness' stateside boom is a byproduct of a larger cultural moment, said McGonagle, who is from County Donegal, Ireland. In recent years, Irish cultural figures like actor Paul Mescal and author Sally Rooney have introduced Americans to a cooler version of Ireland. Guinness, which was hardly trendy when he lived there, is benefiting. "Irish culture is having a big resurgence," he said. "We're at the peak of where we've ever been."

Sales have been strongest in cities with large populations of Irish Americans, said

Joyce He, the U.S. brand director for Guinness. The company's top-performing markets are New York City; Chicago, where Guinness opened a brewery last year; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Boston; and South Florida.

"During the pandemic, Guinness was disproportionately affected," she said, as most of its sales occur at restaurants and bars because so much of the quality relies on the tedious pour from the keg's tap. The recent uptick is partly the result of people missing a drinking experience they could only have in person, she said.

Pub owners said Guinness is shedding its reputation as a "meal in a glass," thanks in part to marketing campaigns aimed at dis-

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elling the notion that the beer is heavy. The stout is 4.2% alcohol by volume — about the strength of Bud Light — and 125 calories per 12 ounces, lighter than Modelo Especial.

That appeals to Americans wearied by craft beer's dominance, said Mike O'Sullivan, an owner of New York pubs Hartley's and Grace's.

"Everyone is drinking Guinness," he said. That was not the case in 2015, when he opened Hartley's in the Clinton Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn.

Guinness sales were strong from the start — the stout outsold the rest of the menu 3-to-1 — but it was mostly ordered by Irish men. "Americans preferred craft beers," he said. That changed during the pandemic. "You would look up and down the bar and everyone was drinking Guinness," he said. "Men, women, young and old."

Around two years ago, he noticed non-Irish Americans posting videos of themselves "splitting the 'G.'" He had first seen the trend around 2017 and watched it spread from London to Ireland and, eventually, to the chug-happy United States.

O'Sullivan was quick to act. In 2022, he replaced his unbranded beer glasses with custom pints featuring Hartley's logo so customers could "split the 'H.'" The payoff was immediate. Guinness now outsells the rest of the menu by a 6-to-1 margin, he said.

For anyone with an internet connection, splitting the "G" has become inescapable across platforms, with searches for the trend peaking in the United States on Google Trends in mid-November. Singers Ed Sheeran and Niall Horan recently attempted the trend together. Actor Jason Momoa is a fan, too, and there's even a split the "G" app.

(The challenge is not without debate. Some argue the target isn't the middle of the "G" — it's the narrow gap separating the Guinness name and the company's harp logo.)

Guinness has not publicly endorsed the trend, although He, the brand director, said splitting the "G" has been a positive driver of sales in the United States. "I love seeing people get creative about making Guinness their own and creating their new rituals with the brand," she said. "As long as it's done responsibly."

While the Guinness sold in the United States is still brewed in and imported from Ireland, the quality of pints poured at state-side bars has improved with demand.



LINDA CAMPOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

(Above) "Splitting the 'G'" — a viral challenge in which drinkers gulp Guinness to land the line between the stout and the foam in the middle of the "G" on a branded pint glass — has found eager participants stateside; (left) At the Dubliner in Boston, sales of Guinness are "are completely bananas right now," said Oran McGonagle, an owner of the bar.



"Guinness is our signature dish," said Fergus Carey, an owner of Fergie's Pub in Philadelphia. He pours his pints into 20-ounce imperial pint glasses, as is customary in Ireland, and takes several minutes to do so. "We take it very seriously," he said.

Thirty years ago, when Carey first opened the pub, he poured Guinness into 16-ounce American pint glasses, which any Irishman will tell you is a mistake. Most of his customers didn't care.

"A lot of Irish people, when they moved to the States, they would not drink Guinness because at most places, it was crap," he said.

New York State of Pint, an Instagram account managed by three Irishmen, is dedicated to finding the best pints of Guinness in New York City. They consider a variety of factors, such as temperature, glassware and appearance. Even the time it takes for the nitrogen to settle in a pour can affect a Guinness' rating.

"You would be amazed by the differences between pints," said one reviewer, who requested anonymity to ensure their review process is not swayed by special treatment. Despite Guinness' reach, their favorite is still at an Irish pub: Hartley's, which they awarded an 8.5.

O'Sullivan, the New York pub owner, is looking for new ways to capitalize on his customers' urge to split the "G." He plans to lower the logo on his branded glasses at Grace's in Manhattan by a few centimeters, to match the ones at Hartley's.

"It's for consistency," he said. "But of course, it's also for business."