

THE JÄGERMEISTER WAY

The iconic green liqueur has always been a rogue in the alcohol industry thanks to its distinctive taste, bold colour, and willingness to go it alone. Managing Director of Mast-Jägermeister UK Michael Cleary is adding fuel to the brand's pioneering spirit.

MICHAEL CLEARY

Director @ Mast-Jägermeister UK

MD of Mast
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Michael Cleary





A master distiller tests some liquid German perfection

When Curt Mast, the son of a German vinegar manufacturer from the town of Wolfenbüttel, started tinkering with herbs in the early 1930s while working for his father, there was no guessing that his recipe would become one of the world's most iconic liquors – Jägermeister.

Curt's original concoction, made from 56 botanical ingredients, was born out of a desire to diversify his father's vinegar business. The square-shouldered green bottle he created remains today and is instantly recognisable in drinks cabinets, bars, and pubs the world over.

Fast-forward almost 90 years and Irishman Michael Cleary, appointed MD of Mast-Jägermeister UK in 2019, is keeping the dream alive in the region after a successful five-year stint as the company's regional director of West-

ern Europe. With a CV boasting international management roles at Pernod Ricard and Irish Distillers as well as Unilever (domestically) he knows a thing or two about branding.

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“Jägermeister is the ninth biggest premium spirit brand and the only one in the top ten that's independently owned – we are still a family business,” Michael says. “The other big spirits are owned by large brand houses so we really benefit from the trust, focus and commitment that flourishes at Jägermeister.”

Rich history, secret recipe

Every drop of Jägermeister comes from the 445 oak barrels that reside in the company's specially built cellar in Wolfenbüttel. Deep underground, the macerates – made from the highest-grade herbs, blossoms, roots, and fruits – are left to blend and mature for up to a year until they become liquid German perfection. The full ingredient list is a closely guarded secret, Jägermeister's master distillers won't give it away for love nor money.

The striking logo on each and every green bottle takes inspiration from the tale of Saint Hubertus, a wild huntsman who once had a vision of a huge stag carrying a glowing cross between its antlers. This mystical sight transformed his outlook and from this point he championed a greater respect for nature, eventually becoming known as the patron saint of hunters. Curt thought this powerful story was a perfect match for his potent elixir and adopted the emblem of the stag in honour of Hubertus. He was an outdoors kind of guy so Curt needed a heavy-duty bottle that would stand up to serious wear and tear, so as an experiment he dropped different shapes of bottles onto his oak floor from height, and only one survived. From pragmatic to iconic: more than eight decades on, his square-shouldered bottle is still the first drink that catches the eye.

The best way to drink Jägermeister? Well, Michael likes his “a cool -18°C and in a nice green branded shot glass. We're all very proud of the fact you can drink it pure, it has an incredibly complex flavour thanks to the 56 herbs that go into it. Many Germans like to drink it with tonic water. I also like it with ginger beer, as a Mule, it's incredibly refreshing.”

Going rogue

Michael says that the German drinks company doesn't conform – instead it adds a little spice to everything it does, whether it be the launch of a new flavour or sponsoring a music festival. He calls it “the Jägermeister way.”

“As a brand we don't do things normally. For example, instead of creating a coffee liqueur we tapped into people's appetite for cold brew and we launched Jägermeister Cold Brew Coffee,” he says. “Supported by a £2 million market campaign called ‘New Mix New Beat,’ the release is inspired by the innovative, ever-changing drinks scene. We know how a drop of Jägermeister and a backbeat of cold brew coffee can transform any night.” Jägermeister Cold Brew is a blend of the classic herbal liqueur and a generous helping of strong roasted Arabica coffee with a hint of cacao – its distinctive aromatic spicy notes lead to a delicious, sweet, and rich finish, which is probably why it's selling so well.

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From a brand perspective, Jägermeister's mission is to “give young adults the best nights of their lives,” but this wouldn't be possible without the love, craftsmanship, and attention to detail that's poured into every bottle. “Our heritage is long and distinguished and we've always made sure that quality is never compromised,” Michael explains. “We carry out 383 quality checks before a bottle finds its way into your hands – we're talking about brilliant German quality. Everything is still produced in Wolfenbüttel, which is fantastic.”

People power

Jägermeister invests a great deal in its people all over the world: brand managers, the in-house marketing and sales teams, graphic designers, logistics, and everyone working in the distillery – they all benefit from regular training and education programmes. The company also gives back to local communities with employees volunteering at community centres and social enterprises. “Thanks to this tradition of giving, we've been gold-accredited by investors and organisations and hopefully we will get platinum in 2020,” Michael adds.

Sales are growing year-on-year despite current economic uncertainties – in 2019, nine-litre case sales grew by 13% to 8.5 million making the brand a clear overachiever in the global market. This equates to 109.5 million individual 0.7-litre bottle sales and sees Jägermeister break the 100 million bottle mark for the first time.

There is no market without its challenges. In the UK, the vision is to drive sales of ice-cold Jägermeister shots, the perfect serve being chilled to -18°C. In a market that was traditionally a strong Jägerbomb market, consumers are now experiencing the brand as it was intended. Delivering the ideal serve will be the continued focus of communication and investment over the coming years in the UK.

“I am in no doubt that we are creating unique and unforgettable experiences for people, especially in the UK,” Michael says. “We are focusing our investment around everything that Jägermeister stands for, which is quality, originality, and tradition.”