

# In the land of stout and spirits, Ireland's first 'dry pub'

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The Virgin Mary has opened in Dublin, offering only non-alcoholic beverages as Ireland's first 'dry pub'

It's happy hour in Dublin and the drinks are flowing, but in Ireland's first "dry pub" patrons are forgoing Guinness and whiskey for non-boozy

beers and zero percent wine.

The Virgin Mary, which opened this month, bucks the trend in a city where nightlife is fuelled by stout and spirits, offering a menu of entirely non-alcoholic beverages.

Thronging with customers within minutes of opening one weekday afternoon, its popularity is viewed by its owners as a sign that hard-drinking Ireland may be changing its ways.

"Drinking is ingrained in society here," said co-founder Vaughan Yates, 51, a veteran of the drinks industry.

"However if you look at the Irish they are a very progressive nation, they are a very liberal nation, they're very open to change.

"I think there's a real cultural shift happening globally towards alcohol and we're really at the forefront of it."

Oisin Davis, the pub's other co-founder and with whom Yates works in a company making drinks mixers, said they had noticed non-alcoholic options increasingly appearing on menus and decided there could be a niche for a no-alcohol pub.

## **A sober night out**

Like many other countries, Ireland is currently in the midst of a wellness craze driven by visual social media platforms like Instagram.



Bar manager Anna Walsh said before The Virgin Mary no-alcohol pub opened, they did not know if it would be able to create the same atmosphere as a traditional pub. But once the pub had filled up, there was no difference

Festooned with florid garnishes and served in delicate glassware, many drinks at The Virgin Mary offer customers a "shareable" photogenic product, with bragging rights that they avoided a hangover after a night on the town.

"I do think that there is this movement towards wellness, and I think that our drinks probably reflect that," Yates said.

Dublin has just hosted a wellness festival attended by yoga teachers, mindfulness practitioners and nutritionists, among others.

Changes in diet are evident, with options for oat milk, coconut milk and a plethora of other alternatives to regular milk becoming the norm in cafes.

Health food business The Happy Pear that encourages people to eat more vegetables through courses, cafes, recipes and products, is hugely popular—twin brother owners Dave and Steve Flynn tout their early morning sea swims as part of their wellness routine on Instagram.



The drinks at The Virgin Mary have been designed to mimick alcoholic ones and the bar sells an array of "mocktails"



## Binge boozing

However, [alcohol consumption](#) in the country is actually on the rise, according to Alcohol Action Ireland.

The increase relates both to consumption per person, as well as in overall numbers of drinkers—84 percent of the population now, compared to about 82 percent in 2010, CEO Sheila Gilheany told AFP.

Given the rise, the "narrative in social media" about wellness and health, she said, was "a story that has really been put out, to kind of, give us a feeling that, 'Oh you know, everything's actually grand!'"

The country was ranked second for binge drinking out of 194 countries in a 2014 study by the World Health Organization that put Austria first.



Pub co-owners Oisín Davis (L) and Vaughan Yates, who work in the drinks industry, said they had noticed non-alcoholic options increasingly appearing on menus and decided there could be a niche for a no-alcohol pub

The Irish government already has the drinking public in its crosshairs.

In October, parliament passed a law mandating cancer warnings on alcohol labels in a bid to shift what Health Minister Simon Harris called a "corrosive culture" around drinking.

## **High spirits**

At The Virgin Mary, drinks have been designed with those served at the city's 750 traditional pubs in mind.

A dark and creamy "iced nitro coffee" is poured from a beer tap to mimic Guinness, without which no traditional Irish pub would be complete.



Despite a wellness trend in Ireland like elsewhere, figures show that alcohol consumption in the country has risen, according to Alcohol Action Ireland

Fridges are stocked with non-alcoholic beer bottles and "mocktail" ingredients such as cold coffee brew and sour cherry cordial are stacked like an array of apothecary potions.

And the pub's signature drink The Virgin Mary—a cheeky play on the classic Bloody Mary—is made of [tomato juice](#), muscat, pickle, lime and spice.

As well as mimicking the hard stuff, the bar matches pub opening hours and advertises to an older clientele in order to carve its own niche and avoid association with cafes and juice bars.

Before the opening, staff were anxious they would not be able to cultivate the most crucial aspect of an Irish pub—the atmosphere, or what is widely known in Ireland as the "craic".

"We didn't know what the vibe was going to be like," said 39 year-old bar manager Anna Walsh, perched on a bar stool before opening time.





Dublin has 750 traditional pubs, but owners of The Virgin Mary said reaction so far to their no-alcohol bar had been overwhelmingly positive

"But the first night, once the place filled up, if you walked in here you would not know that there was no alcohol."

### **'It's a novelty'**

Yates said that there had been "doubters", whom he described as mainly online "keyboard warriors", but that the reaction had been overwhelmingly positive.

Whether the dry bar can survive the competitive nightlife industry in Dublin—a city where the pub still reigns supreme—is yet to be seen.

Paula Gearty was one of the first through the doors on the opening night.



Ireland ranked second for binge drinking out of 194 countries in a 2014 study by the World Health Organization

"It's actually quite nice to just have something different," the 49-year-old said, after ordering a glass of alcohol-free white wine and posing for a photo with work friends at the bar.

"I think it sounds refreshing, it's a novelty."

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