

# Cocktails and Wine on the Horizon

Restaurateurs are crafting beverage menus that match their concept or provide an insightful contrast.

By Deborah Grossman

Celebrity chefs, move over! The next stars may be the bartender, mixologist and wine director. Whether shaken or stirred, artisanal or packaged, domestic or imported, line items on the beverage menu are garnering attention in the dining room and bar. A scan of the cocktail and wine scene in America displays barrels of creativity, casks of innovation and bubbling profits.

Nationally known bartenders, such as Tony Abou-Ganim of Las Vegas, point to the resurgence of cocktails. Abou-Ganim, consultant and Fine Living Network host, says, "For the first time, the 2006 Aspen Food and Wine Classic offered seminars on cocktails. Making a cocktail is like cooking—it's all about ingredients, flavors and balance."

This "Vya Con Dios" cocktail—Myers's dark rum, Vya sweet vermouth, raspberry purée, fresh lime, pineapple juice and fresh orange juice—showcases the skills of bartender Joseph Wrye at Lark Creek Steak.

John Benson



### Mixing it up

These days, every city and town seems to harbor a crew of star bartenders. "Manny Hinojosa is our bar chef, and a key factor in our success," says Ellen McCarty, co-owner of Walnut Creek Yacht Club in Walnut Creek, Calif. Hinojosa's "Latini" cocktail is a perennial favorite of Corzo Reposado tequila and simple syrup with Latin spices and lime.

Hinojosa applies his fame to broadening his patrons' knowledge of beverages, as well as keeping up with chef/co-owner Kevin Weinberg's inventive seafood-oriented menu. "Americans prefer everything sweet, like Cosmos and pomegranate-flavored drinks," he says. "I'm introducing drier and more aromatic cocktails, such as the 'Moulin Rouge'—Grey Goose vodka, Dubonnet, Cointreau and fresh lemon, rimmed in a powdered, dried citrus zest"

Complementing the star status of Chef Douglas Keane at Cyrus in Healdsburg, Calif., the popular bar manager, Scott Beattie, crafts seasonal drinks such as the spring cocktail, "Zebra Envy with Hangar One Straight Vodka"—green-zebra tomato juice, aged balsamico, toasted black peppercorn and fleur de sel with a garnish of mozzarella. Using only freshly squeezed juices, Beattie maximizes his wine-country location, incorporating produce from local purveyors.

A focus on regional ingredients and local culture propels marketing in several ways. At the new Lark Creek Steak, Bradley Ogden's latest venture in San Francisco, manager/partner Michael Kapash credits much of the restaurant's early success to the skills and outgoing personality of bartender Joseph Wrye. To honor a 19th-century citizen who supported local firemen and bequeathed Coit Tower to the city, Wrye serves the "Lillie Coit," a blend of Junipero gin, Lillet Blond

and fresh orange juice.

On the main menu at Canlis in Seattle, owner Mark Canlis honors his grandfather, Peter, who founded the restaurant in 1950. He pairs spicy Peter Canlis prawns with a "Pepper Delicious" cocktail of gin, muddled red peppers, lime juice, simple syrup and mint.

David Lusby is the high-profile bar manager at the five-star Broadmoor resort in Colorado Springs, Colo. At the Summit brasserie, he showcases neighborhood firms, such as Bristol Brewing, and names cocktails after regular customers, such as the "Churchill Manhattan," featuring vanilla-infused Old Overholt rye whiskey. Lusby also prepares up-and-coming drinks, such as the *caipirinha*, the national drink of Brazil, made with Cachaça, a rum-like liquor, muddled with lime and brown sugar.

### Pairing cocktails with concept and food

Restaurants increasingly match their food concept to the bar with inventive twists.

At Walnut Creek Yacht Club, co-owner Weinberg menus rum-based cocktails such as the "America's Cup." At Lark Creek Steak, the farm-fresh American fare

In the bar at the Summit brasserie, one of the Broadmoor resort's restaurants, patrons rely on the expertise of bar manager David Lusby, who believes that the beverage offering can add value to the kitchen, and vice versa.

concept is reflected in cocktails such as the "Southern Drawl" with Southern Comfort, while honoring international favorites.

Dio Dekka, a new Greek-Mediterranean restaurant in Los Gatos, Calif., features a large selection of ouzo, Greece's famed spirit. But manager/partner Julian Abbott cautions against overzealous bar concepts. "We may offer Greek-inspired cocktails with ouzo or



*tsipouro*, a triple-distilled spirit, but this is a work-in-progress as we train staff and gradually introduce diners to ouzo drinks.”

Located in the coffee capital of America, Canlis showcases coffee drinks. He menus flaming Coffee Diablo, his grandfather Peter's favorite drink, with orange curaço, brandy, coriander, cinnamon, cloves, sugar, lemon zest and Seattle-based Starbucks Coffee Company's high-end foodservice-brand coffee, *Casi Cielo*<sup>®</sup>. In winter he presents Mocha Martinis: *Casi Cielo* espresso, white and dark Starbucks chocolate liqueur and *Stoli* vanilla vodka.

Not to be left behind, tea purveyors tout tea-inspired cocktails. *Numi Organic Tea* of such as dirty-martini olive juice and clarified key lime; *Rimmer*<sup>®</sup> cocktail garnishes, ranging from mango to Bloody Caesar; and essences such as hillside-lavender martini.

At *Vox Populi* in Boston, bar manager Josh Norris uses *Stirrings* for cutting-edge seasonal creations. “In the fall, when everyone else did pomegranate martinis, we served spiced-apple Mojitos with *Stirrings* spiced-apple mixer, *Bacardi* Big Apple rum and muddled mint, and garnished with fresh apple slices,” he says.

### Winning wine strategies

Wine sales are climbing in the retail and restaurant worlds. Matching the wine list to the restaurant concept pays off, says Tim Matthews, wine director for the *Broadmoor* restaurants. The wine list at *Charles Court* restaurant, styled to American food and Colorado lamb and game, is a tribute to American producers from Colorado, California and other states. The Adam Tihany-designed *Summit* brasserie offers an elite 200 bottles from a glass-encased

wine room. At the high-end continental *Penrose Room*, the list favors Europe, with emphasis on a mix of classical regions, and up-and-comers such as *Priorato* and approachable *Rioja* brands from younger, innovative winemakers.

In New York, the newly-opened *Varietal* showcases global wine flights. Since his customers want to know the provenance of their wine as well as their food, owner Gregory Hockenberry shares stories about smaller producers, such as *Margan Family Estates*, an Australian boutique producer of *Simillion* in the *Hunter Valley*, but also includes Australia's venerable *Penfolds Grange*.

Keeping the wine list fresh and interesting is a key to boosting wine sales, says Charlie Kimbrough, beverage manager at *Terra Bistro* at *Vail Mountain Lodge* in *Vail, Colo.* Known for discovering new producers, Kimbrough recently sampled 4 Bears wines of *Sacramento*. “4 Bears Cabernet Sauvignon is the bestseller on our by-the-glass list, but no one had heard of it,” says Kimbrough. “With the lowest price and excellent flavor, it's a hit.”

Greece is an up-and-coming wine region. At *Dio Deko*, *Abbott* hand-sells the Greek wine selections. He keeps the cost low—only twice the wholesale price—and diners are enthusiastic about the white varietals *Moschofilero* and *Asiritiko*, partly because the origin, the isle of *Santorini*, is familiar to diners.

With all the changes in restaurant beverages, winemaker dinners are still in vogue. At *Bridges Restaurant and Bar* in *Danville, Calif.*, the location where the famous dining scene from “Mrs. Doubtfire” was filmed, general manager *Lisa Waldman* sells out for most winemaker dinners, from the ultra-premium *Napa Valley*



estate Rombauer to lesser-known D'Arenberg from Australia. "It's an opportunity to showcase Chef Kevin Gin's cooking," she says.

In the end, the relationship and significance of the bar to the kitchen is a classic chicken-or-egg dilemma. The beverage offering can add value to the kitchen, and vice versa. At The Broadmoor's Summit, Lusby works closely with the kitchen, where he discovered leftover ginger simple syrup that led to his "Lychee on the Level" cocktail with Level vodka, ginger syrup and puréed lychee fruit garnished with a candied ginger crisp.

"I work closely with Summit chef Bertrand Bouquin," says Lusby. "He tastes all my signature cocktails—and he'll tell me if it's too sour or sweet. We take a culinary approach, and stay in touch with flavor trends."

When people arrive at the door, no matter what the size or style of the restaurant, they look forward to exciting flavor in both food and drink.

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