

## ON BEVERAGE



Gary  
Regan

## Bartending's best offer valuable advice and insight in the latest volume of 'Mixologist'

The second volume of "Mixologist: The Journal of the American Cocktail" has just been published, and I should state up front that there's a piece by yours truly in there. But that's not why I'm choosing to highlight the book in this column. Honest.

My piece concerns the origins of the Cosmopolitan cocktail, a mystery that I think is solved now, but the meat of "Mixologist" lies in the advice for bartenders and bar owners provided by such experts as Ryan

Magarian, a Beverage Associate at the Kathy Casey Food Studios in Seattle; Darcy O'Neal, a very passionate Canadian bartender; and many other luminaries of the cocktail world.

Magarian's piece deals with his quest to develop a detailed cocktail program for the Holland America line of 13 cruise ships. Anyone who has ever worked at a chain of any size will understand how daunting that sort of task can be.

"I work to ensure that my clients' cocktail menus hit the mark with their guests, achieve a high level of innovation, attain fiscal success, and, importantly, that they remain consistent long after I'm gone," Magarian writes.

Magarian first worked with the chefs at Kathy Casey Food Studios to create a list of 60 cocktails, divided into five focused areas including "Tropical Specialties," such as mojitos and margaritas; "Oceanside Retro Favorites," or variations on such classics as the Aviation and the Negroni, and "Extraordinary

Mocktails," a collection of four nonalcoholic drinks.

"I find the inclusion of well thought out nonalcoholic cocktails to be ... a fantastic test of the mixologist's ability to play with and meld flavors," he writes.

There's fun stuff in "Mixologist," too. LeNell Smothers, owner of LeNell's liquor store in Red Hook, N.Y., holds forth on the mint julep, for instance, and Christine Sismondo, a woman who describes herself as a "slackademic," delves into the origin of the word "cocktail." That is a subject that's much debated among cocktail geeks, and there doesn't seem to be a story about the birth of the word that proves to be satisfactory for many people at all.

Sismondo came up with a theory I had never heard of, and although I'll leave to details to her, I will tell you that she thinks that the word was used for political purposes.

Gwydion Stone, a man who heads up the Wormwood Society, examines absinthe in this edition of "Mixology," and he provides titillating information about this spirit, which is still illegal in the United States but widely available in many European countries. You can learn how to drink it, how it's made, the origins of absinthe and the reasons it was banned in several countries in the early 20th century. Would you believe that this event might have been tied to politics, too?

And if you thought that "sweet and sour" was a simple mix of sugar and lemon or lime juices, you might be somewhat astounded when you read Darcy O'Neal's treatise on the subject. He delves into citric, malic, tartaric and ascorbic acids, all of which are found in various fruits, and then he teaches us how best to balance those acids in cocktails. O'Neal presents

some simple options, such as sugar and lemon juice, and then details a sour mix that contains sugar, corn syrup, maltodextrin, lemon and lime juices, lime zest, dehydrated egg white, citric acid and water.

"The [second recipe] isn't as sweet as the first," O'Neal writes. "This is because we are using two sugars that are not as sweet as pure sucrose." Who knew?

I laughed when I first heard the term "bar chef," but people like O'Neal are proving to me that the craft of mixology has been taken to a whole new level by these 21st-century cocktailian masters. And I've been asked by several people if this is just a passing trend, but I doubt very much that's the case.

I believe we're now seeing the tip of the ice cube, as it were, and that bar chefs are finally coming into their own, and they're

being taken very seriously indeed. ▀

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Beverage specialist Ryan Magarian is a contributor to "Mixologist: The Journal of the American Cocktail."