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HIGH SPIRITS

**SOUTH FLORIDA BARTENDERS
SERVE UP CLASSIC COCKTAILS
WITH A TWIST**

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High Spirits

What do the Barbary Coast, Mary Pickford and bloodhounds have in common? Each is the namesake of a classic cocktail – and South Florida bartenders will be serving some of them on drink menus very soon.



By CELIA LAVILLA • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BENJAMIN PARSONS



“Right now we have caraway-infused cachaça and a jasmine-infused pisco, and we have a bacon-infused bourbon. There are coffee tequilas on the market, but we make our own by infusing it with espresso.”

– Will Rivas, bar manager at Sra. Martinez

suit, inspiring consumers to indulge their oenophile desires. Now, Carducci says, “people have access to all things culinary that they didn’t used to. They have the food and wine and craft beer. Cocktails were the next logical step.”

Cocktail revivals in other parts of the country focus on traditional preparations of classic recipes. In South Florida, many bartenders add a modern flair to the drinks of yesteryear. Take Mercadito’s tequila-heavy cocktail menu, for example – they offer a gourmet version of a margarita, plus a handful of other tequila concoctions.

“I’m an agave-head,” Carducci says. “I love tequila. There are so many out there, and so much range of flavor that, for lack of a better word, it’s like a palette for an artist.” But working primarily in tequila, rather than more popular spirits, has its challenges. “We have to make sure our flavors really pop,” he says.

Tequila is on the rise, both in Miami and around the country, Carducci says. But the next big thing, from his standpoint, will be mescal, a similar spirit to tequila with a stronger, often smokier flavor. “Mescal is steeped in tradition and history and artisanship,” he says. “It’s kind of tequila’s grandfather.”

SHAKEN AND STIRRED

Of course, there’s more to a great drink than liquor and mixers. Correct

preparation makes a cocktail more than the sum of its parts. With the increased demand for cocktails in South Florida, more bartenders are taking extra care in carefully measuring their ingredients, rather than “free-pouring,” to achieve that perfect mix. “I like to compare it to the difference between being a line cook and being a pastry chef,” says Will Rivas, bar manager at Sra. Martinez, Michelle Bernstein’s tapas restaurant in Miami’s Design District. “As a line cook, you’re always adding different types of things to manipulate the dish. When you’re a pastry chef, you follow the recipe.”

Rivas and the rest of the bar staff at Sra. Martinez have plenty of unique ingredients at their fingertips, mixing drinks with a wide range of juices, syrups and liquors infused with the flavors of South Florida. Simple syrups

THESE AREN’T YOUR GRANDFATHER’S DRINKS. BARTENDERS have taken the nation’s growing obsession with finely crafted cocktails and given it South Florida finesse with unique takes on classic recipes using local ingredients. The result: a bar scene unlike anyplace else in the country.

MIXING IT UP

It was only a matter of time before Miami’s love of fine food and drink caught up to the cocktail scene, according to Tad Carducci, beverage director at Mercadito, the contemporary Mexican hotspot at Midtown Miami. “Americans are in love with gastronomy – eating and drinking and everything that surrounds it – the social dynamic, the camaraderie.” First came food, with diners demanding higher quality and innovative dishes. Then wine followed

PREVIOUS PAGES: Classic martini from Martini Bar at The Raleigh; the secret to a flaming cocktail is a volatile spray.

ABOVE: El Pirata, a cocktail made from tequila, pineapple, spices, chiles and beer, served at Mercadito.

RIGHT: Will Rivas of Sra. Martinez makes a Buena Vista. First, he adds cucumber, mint and lime juice to the glass. Next, he pours in St-Germain liqueur. Then, he firmly muddles the mixture before adding gin and vodka.

NEXT PAGE, TOP: A lineup of Will’s infusions.

