



## Q&A: Tippling Bros.

### The beverage consultants and alcohol wizards explain what they do, and what we should drink

By Edith Zimmerman

In a way, we're all beverage consultants. As in, "I'm having an IPA." ("Is it good?") "Yeah, it's OK." But what's an actual beverage consultant? Who actually makes a living in the mysterious realm of beverage consultancy, and what do they do there? We talked to Paul Tanguay and Tad Carducci, the two guys behind the **Tippling Bros.**, a popular beverage consultancy here in NYC (and nationwide), about what they are and what inspirations they find at Bed Bath & Beyond.

#### What is a beverage consultant?

**Tad:** A nebulous title, no? Bottom line is that beverage consultants strive to help the world drink better. Many people in the field specialize in dealing exclusively with brands, inventing cocktails, hosting events and leading tastings. Some prefer to help restaurants and bars develop their wine lists and cocktail menus, and train staff members. Paul and I try to stay as well-rounded as we can by encompassing all of this into what we do.

**Paul:** The term is misused a lot because it sounds better than being a bartender or mixologist. I think what we've seen over the past five years in America is a shift toward foodie culture, [spurred by things like] the Food Network and Top Chef, which was reflected in the restaurant industry. And the beverage industry followed.

#### And it's your full time job?

**Paul:** Yup. It's been a little over a year now. Before that I was the beverage director for SushiSamba restaurants and Tad ran and operated a pretty serious bar program at the Pluckemin Inn out in West Jersey. We met at this class called **B.A.R.**—Beverage Alcohol Resource—which is a high-end spirits and mixology class. There were about five of us, and we talked about forming a company, but only Tad and I acted on it.

#### So what's the Tippling Bros. role in this meshing of foodie culture with drinking?

**Tad:** Our goal is to give people new options and broaden their horizons. There's been a growing trend over the last couple years of incorporating culinary ingredients and techniques into cocktails, either to pair with certain foods or to be showcased on their own. We regularly use all manner of fresh and dried herbs, spices, vinegars, vegetables, chiles and sauces to add unique complexity to our cocktails. We do dabble a bit in what's become known as "molecular mixology," or the practice of altering flavors and textures in cocktails through chemical or physical means. Things like foams, airs and sous vide infusions are all just new, fresh ways to dress up what bartenders have been doing for centuries, but it's really cool to see how people react when you give them a cocktail with an unexpected element.

**Paul:** We're always thinking of how we can push the envelope. For instance, with **Mercadito Cantina** [whose beverage program the Tippling Bros. designed], since we didn't have a spirits list but wanted to make margaritas, we took a high-proof sake and flavored it to taste like tequila. We call it Tric-quila. As a beverage consultant, you have to think 'how can I make myself useful, what can I do that's different?' More than just coming up with drinks, it's coming up with concepts.



### **What were the best and worst drinking trends of 2008?**

**Paul:** I think the best was the return to the classics. The whole cocktail movement first started in the mid 1800s, with the introduction of [easily accessible] ice, and then Prohibition in 1919 killed that. And then after the repeal, America went through this phase of pre-packaged, pre-made foods—sliced bread and all that. And I think with bars you had that, too—pre-made sour mixes, artificial juices—and it's only been fairly recently that we've seen a return to using fresh ingredients. I also like those big, cold-draft ice cubes. The worst thing was that everyone started calling themselves beverage consultants. I also despise the term 'bar chef.'

**Tad :** Best was the rise/rebirth of the micro-distillery. Worst was—and has been for several years—the use of the suffix "tini."

### **Predictions for 2009's drinking trends?**

**Tad:** I believe the downturn in the economy will spark a return to simplicity in cocktail creation. With the rising cost of exotic ingredients and vendor surcharges, mixologists will be forced to focus on using fewer ingredients and really showcasing the quality of the spirits and liqueurs they're using. Also the use of **amari** and other potable bitters in cocktails will see a big increase this year.

**Paul:** I think herbs are on the rise. Sage. I'm a big sage lover. I think vegetables would be cool. Infusions with vegetables. In '09 I think there'll be a backlash against the word 'organic.' And 'local.' I can't stand that stuff anymore. Like, how much are you paying for it? What's the profitability? What are you sacrificing? I think one of the welcome backlashes of the economic downturn will be that bars can't charge as much for a cocktail—people just won't accept it. There are lots of cocktail bars in the city that aren't profitable because they're adhering too closely to how drinks were made in the 1800s, and there's only so much you can charge for a cocktail. \$17 to \$22? For a cocktail? That's insane.

### **When coming up with new cocktails, have you made any disastrous flavor combinations?**

**Paul:** I learned that most flavor combinations have already been done for you. Tad said this, and I think it's smart: If you want to know what those combinations are, you go to Bed Bath & Beyond, and you go to the candle section. All those ingredient combinations are what scientists have put together. Why? Because they work. So when you build a cocktail you use the same thing. Mint and strawberry? No-brainer.

### **Any ingredients you won't touch?**

**Tad:** Hell no, other than mass-produced sour mix. I've been known to try all kinds of things over the years. One success was a cocktail made with bourbon, prosciutto, Fig Newtons and old balsamic vinegar. I can tell you, however, from personal experience, that a Taylor ham, egg and American cheese sandwich does not a cocktail ingredient make.

### **Anything you won't drink?**

**Paul:** Ummm, no! Well, maybe Santa Margarita Pinot Grigio. I refuse to drink that. I'm also sick of overpaying. If you go to somewhere and you're paying \$8 for their beer—that's highway robbery.

### **Any special hangover cures?**

**Paul:** A light beer. Pilsner. Works wonders. A beer and two Aleves. Sounds like an alcoholic's answer, no?

**Tad:** AVERNA!! And grease, in the form of a burger or similar. Also Mexican posole. A little "gettin' down" time with the one you love does the trick as well. Gotta love endorphins!

*Photo by Michael Harlan Turkell*

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