

Prescription Glasses

Apothecary's diagnosis: We need more high-concept cocktails. *by Drew Lazor*

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Ask industry types what our dining culture lacks and you'll hear one answer over all others: artisan cocktails. You know, "cheffy" drinks. Libations crafted with \$32-entrée-worthy ingredients, intriguing flavors and, most vitally, innovation. Numbered, they say, are the days of soda guns and sour mix. Clear out those sticky bottles of Old Grand-Dad to make room for housemade bitters and rare Eastern European liqueurs.

The trend has yet to dig its hooks into Philly's gastro zeitgeist like it has in New York and San Francisco. But it'll come, they assure us. Any minute now.

It's the Philly drinking scene's *Chinese Democracy*.

But wait. Axl just turned in Guns N' Roses' long-awaited album to the record label. And the much-hyped Apothecary Bar + Lounge — a collaboration between restaurateur Bruno Pouget and real estate design firm URBANSPECEDEVELOPMENT, with a beverage program built by NYC consultants the Tippling Bros. — is days away from opening at 13th and Drury.

Cheffy cocktails are almost here. All we need is just a little patience.

The concept, developed by Pouget and URBAN brothers Sam and Tim Shaaban, is a "bespoke cocktail lab" — a sleek, bilevel drinker's playland, designed like a modern medicine shop, where bartenders wait tables, detailing drinks to guests like servers rhapsodizing about the evening's specials. Steven Cameron of LBI's Blue (also Pouget's) will offer a small-plates menu — but food will complement drink, not the other way around.

The Tippling Bros. are the guys making sure this happens. The pair, who hooked up with Apothecary through a mutual friend, aren't blood-related; Tad Carducci and Paul Tanguay, who hail from Jersey and Quebec, respectively, combined decades of experience when they partnered last year. Carducci's a certified sommelier and holds numerous industry certificates; Tanguay's one of the country's leading sake experts and the former corporate beverage director of SushiSamba. Past projects have included developing cocktails for spirits labels and lecturing at industry seminars, but with Apothecary, they were presented with an opportunity to sculpt an identity from the bottles up. "Bespoke" means custom, and the Tipplings approach filling a glass with the same care as a Savile Row tailor. "The lab aspect means we'll be doing things that are pretty avant-garde," says Carducci. "The other half of that is absolutely, to-the-letter, very classic bespoke cocktails."

On its face, "apothecary" is a reference to the pre-Prohibition "golden era" of booze, when cocktails were actually used medicinally. There will always be about 10 classic cocktails available. The Aviation — created in New York in a nod to the era of commercial flight — features dry gin, maraschino liqueur, fresh lemon juice, burnt orange peel and crème de violette. The Corpse Reviver, a re-invention of a recipe by cocktail godfather Harry Craddock, mixes apple jack, Spanish brandy, sweet vermouth, Fee Brothers bitters and Granny Smith apple.

But it won't be all Cole Porter swank — the Tipplings are also creating nouveau drinks with health-boosting natural ingredients. Dermis Fantasticus is an organic vodka concoction flavored with muddled cucumber, aloe vera and a secret tincture (or medicinal extract) of herbs and botanicals — great for the skin. The RustOleo features Brazilian cachaça, baronjager (German honey liqueur), a spirit made with bilberry extract and antioxidant-loaded acai.

All this requires top-notch technology. Management's sprung for Philly's first Kold-Draft ice machine, which freezes 40 percent colder than normal; place a single cube in a rocks glass and you'll be able to pour two to three helpings of liquor over it before it begins to melt.

But how will Philly, which won't ever fall out of love with the \$3 Beam'n' PBR special, react to pimento dram and herbal hydrosol sprays in their cups? "There's a danger to take it too far and make it too cerebral," says Tanguay. "We're just trying to have fun with it."

"What we're trying to do is make it accessible," adds URBAN's Sam Shaaban. "As it is with anything, the more you know about something, the greater your appreciation can be."

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