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LIQUID CULTURE

Cork vs. Screw Cap

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6 DELICIOUS BEER TRENDS

**GREAT COFFEE IN
UNEXPECTED PLACES**

**AMAZING COCKTAIL
& FOOD PAIRINGS**



DINNER WITH A TWIST

*Bartenders
and chefs
join forces
to shake up
fine dining*

Story by LIZA WEISSTUCH
Photos by LARA ROSSIGNOL






Teriyaki pork belly and a rye whiskey sour (recipe p. 42) are a pair of aces at Atlanta's Restaurant Eugene.

At Restaurant Eugene, even bar garnishes are born in the kitchen.





Eventually there had to be a snag in the relationship. All these years, it's been like a storybook romance: just you, that tender filet mignon and the Bordeaux. It was always meant to be the three of you. But then something came along to distract you. All it took was that one night in the restaurant. The lighting was dim. You were spending some quality time with your beef and someone interrupted and offered you a Manhattan. You accepted, and since then, whenever the steak is in the room, you just can't look at that Bordeaux the same way.

Traditionalists may deem such a split sacrilege, but for open-minded diners and bartenders, pairing cocktails with food is the next logical step in gastronomy as the line between the bar and the kitchen blurs. Adam Seger, manager and bartender at Nacional 27, a Pan-Latin restaurant in Chicago, and beverage manager at sister restaurant Osteria Via Stato, is among those playing matchmaker. "The concept has opened up as more wine drinkers are ordering cocktails," Seger says. "People are more open to having food with cocktails, especially if a restaurant is using fresh ingredients at the bar—the very ingredients the chef is working with."

Seger and Nacional 27's chef, Randy Zweiban, hit seasonal farmers' markets every week like it's a religion. Zweiban buys produce for tasting menus while Seger picks out items for a market cocktail list that changes regularly. The ingredients also make appearances at the restaurant's weekly Latin Street Beat Thursdays, when cocktails are paired with small Latin-themed plates. At Osteria Via Stato, an Italian wine bar, Seger has christened his cocktail creations "gastrotails," savory infusions balanced with wine syrups. "About 99 percent of my cocktails are inspired by dishes I've had," he says. Take the derivation of the mango-ginger-habanero daiquiri, a Nacional 27 signature. "I had a salad that blew my mind—arugula with warm goat cheese and mango habanero dressing. The goat cheese is rich and

tangy and the arugula is peppery. You get three or four seconds of heat from the habanero and then the mango cools it off. Every inch of your mouth is jazzed with flavor." The drink, which he describes as a standard rum daiquiri with mango puree, serves as an encore to each bite. The ginger is peppery like the arugula and the habanero, its heat reigned in by the syrup it's steeped in, is an extension of the flavors in the dressing.

MERGING THE BAR & KITCHEN

Wine will always have a place at the table, but some say cocktails offer pairing opportunities that are more dynamic, even interactive. It's like the difference between shopping for a designer shirt in a boutique and having the designer on hand to customize your shirt exactly to your liking.

When Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg were working on their book *What To Drink With What You Eat*, they ended up including more information about cocktails than they initially expected. "Truth be told, when we started, we'd always planned to cover spirits, but it was only after running into some of the country's leading mixology enthusiasts that we realized the potential of cocktail and food pairing," the duo confesses. "It opens many new doors because of the ability to craft a cocktail to pick up flavor notes of food through juices, herbs and spices in the drink itself. We found the possibilities endlessly fascinating."



Greg Best repurposes Chef Linton Hopkins' fresh strawberries for a bold-flavored cocktail purée.



PAIRING TALES

Each July in New Orleans, forward-thinking bartenders from around the world pair up with the city's top chefs to host a series of cocktail dinners at local restaurants as part of the annual Tales of the Cocktail celebration. The duos spend months planning their menus and cocktail pairings, and the results can be dazzling. The best part? The hosts take the mic to explain what inspired each match, and to share other delicious details about the process. For information about this year's dinners, visit talesofthecocktail.com.

DIY COCKTAIL PAIRING

Restaurant Eugene mixologist Greg Best gets inspiration from the kitchen on a regular basis. He whips up tinctures of lavender, spearmint root, cardamom, saffron, fennel and anise, dresses up his sugar with oven-dried orange peel, and makes his own fruit bitters, tonic water, grenadine and spice-infused rum. But you don't have to be a wizard to pair cocktails with foods you cook at home (and you don't have to craft your own tonic water either). Get started with these pairing tips from Greg:

In the drink: Rye whiskey

On the plate: Beef

Why it works: Rye's lean, spicy character and cigar-box notes complement bold marbled cuts and grilled flavors.

In the drink: Tart citrus juices

On the plate: Fatty fish, salt

Why it works: The acid cuts through the fat and balances the salt.

In the drink: Bourbon

On the plate: Roasted veggies, creamy goat cheese

Why it works: Sweet, earthy bourbon showcases vegetal flavors and tart cheeses.

In the drink: Amaro and other bittersweet herbal liqueurs

On the plate: Caramel

Why it works: Herbs add interest to caramel's warm, sweet notes.



In Atlanta, the ... Fields Forever (recipe p. 42) with gin and fresh strawberry purée is just the thing to accompany goat cheese crostini.



Unlike wine, a cocktail is easily modulated and manipulated. “You can look at a cocktail like wine in terms of body, flavor and acidity and use all those aspects to determine how to pair it with something,” says cocktail consultant Ryan Magarian. “[Those aspects] can each be modified to turn a mixed drink into an extension of a dish.”

That’s the approach bar chef Lu Brow took when she and proprietor Ti Adelaide Martin reopened Café Adelaide & The Swizzle Stick Bar in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The contemporary Creole restaurant is part of the venerable Commander’s Palace restaurant group. After the storm, Brow says, they were starting from square one. She’d always been interested in pairing cocktails with food but had encountered resistance from bar staff in the past. But with a blank slate to build upon, it was a prime opportunity to pay tribute to legacy with contemporary style. “We missed how people respected food and cocktails,” Brow explains. “We wanted to honor the history of New Orleans and we really wanted a bar that’s a destination for cocktails.”

The result: a designated bar chef’s table. Parties make a dinner reservation and Brow plans cocktail pairings after consulting with chef Danny Trace, who creates a menu for the night’s guests. “It’s a looser environment compared with wine pairings, but it’s still a white tablecloth experience,” Brow says. “We love the creativity of the table. It gives us a chance to try new recipes.” While she regularly incorporates a standard cocktail or two into a dinner, she also creates custom drinks to pair with the evening’s menu, many of which have ended up on the restaurant’s drink list.

“Once I get the menu from Chef, we discuss it for up to 30 minutes,” she says. “He gives me the menu and components of each dish. If he’s got lime in one, I need to know how strong that taste is. I use lighter cocktails to contrast with heavier flavors. And the whole experience is important. I don’t want to take a guest’s palate from champagne to bourbon or scotch. I’ll go in a more graduating order to ease into the most flavorful entrée.”

At Restaurant Eugene in Atlanta, chef Linton Hopkins and bartender Greg Best also combine their efforts by offering a series of hors d’oeuvres paired with cocktails every week. This past summer they exhumed the stack of menus they’d developed over the preceding 18 months and admitted to being surprised by the momentum the program has maintained since it launched. “It started as something to play with,” Best says. “Now every week is a test to see if we can continue. [Linton] prepares a menu and my job is to augment it.”

They both enjoy blurring the boundaries between the food and drink experiences. When Hopkins serves teriyaki pork belly, Best’s rye whiskey sour adds another layer of flavor. If goat cheese crostini with a drizzle of balsamic vinaigrette is on the menu, he might make a cocktail with fresh strawberry purée (...Fields Forever,

recipe p.42), Dubonnet blond, gin, soda water and a sprig of mint. As Hopkins sees it, though, there’s a synergy that flows both ways. “I want to play off the cocktail, celebrate the cocktail,” he says. “Similar to wine or a good cognac, [a cocktail] should flow through the taste. The food should riff off that.”

PLAYING WITH MATCHES

More and more bartenders and chefs are rising to the challenge of making cocktails part of an overall dining experience. It was the heady intensity of Roquefort that sparked Magarian’s epiphany eight years ago, when he moved to Seattle to help develop the cocktail list at Restaurant Zoë, where, he notes, the bar wasn’t swarming with barflies, but was instead peppered with foodies ordering dinner. A grilled romaine salad with lightly charred lettuce, thinly sliced Red Delicious apples, smoked bacon, crumbled Roquefort and a red wine vinaigrette got him thinking. “It managed to be rich and decadent and crisp and refreshing,” he says, and he started wondering what its spirituous match would be. He found what he dubbed the Northwest Apple Sidecar.

He started with apple brandy, lengthened it with vodka, and mixed in a touch of Cointreau and a squeeze of tangerine. “The clean flavors play nicely with the salad,” he says. “There’s flavor correspondence between apple brandy and the apples, and the light char on the romaine complements the rich oakiness of brandy. Sweet notes of tangerine offset the saltiness of the dish.”

The boundless possibilities of pairing dinner courses with cocktails caught Darlene Mann-Clarke’s attention so completely while working in restaurants in New York and Los Angeles that when she moved back to her native Greenville, S.C., and opened American Grocery Restaurant last July, she made the collaboration between the bar and the kitchen a focus of the restaurant’s day-to-day offerings right out of the gate.

American Grocery, positioned to spearhead the emerging seasonal American cuisine movement in Greenville, extends its emphasis on seasonal ingredients from the kitchen to the bar in what Mann-Clarke calls “aguavits,” spirits elaborately infused in house. The restaurant regularly introduces new varieties to use in cocktails or serve straight as extensions of the dishes chefs Joe P. Clarke and David Sundeen prepare for their tasting menus. A recent menu included cucumber consommé with pickled heirloom tomato, red onion and fresh mint served with a glass of cucumber aguavit, later followed by a pouring of a fresh apple aguavit accompanied by house-cured pork belly with sauerkraut and blackberry applesauce. American Grocery’s signature cocktail, the Marie La Poire, a mixed drink brightened with rosemary-juniper simple syrup, finds its culinary soul mate in a venison chop dish with pommes Anna, roasted baby root vegetables and a rosemary demi-glace.

The Nihilist Sour

Pair this sweet and sour cocktail with Teriyaki pork belly.

1 1/2 oz. rye whiskey
 1/2 oz. peach liqueur
 2 dashes cardamom tincture
 1 1/2 oz. fresh sour mix (equal parts
 lemon juice, lime juice and simple syrup)
 1 egg white
 Ice cubes
 Tools: shaker, strainer
 Glass: old fashioned
 Garnish: orange wheel

Shake all ingredients and strain over ice into a glass. Garnish.

For Cardamom Tincture

Soak 2 Tbsp. of cardamom seeds in 2 cups of vodka for 2 weeks. Substitute 3–4 dashes of Angostura bitters and a pinch of crushed cardamom in place of the tincture if necessary.

... Fields Forever

Pair this refreshing gin cooler with creamy goat cheese crostini.

1 1/2 oz. gin
 1/2 oz. Dubbonet blonde
 1 Tbsp. fresh strawberry purée
 1 bar spoon simple syrup
 Soda water
 Ice cubes
 Tools: bar spoon
 Glass: Collins
 Garnish: 2 bruised sprigs of mint

Build ingredients over ice in a glass. Top with soda water and 2 mint sprigs (bruise gently with back of barspoon) and stir.

Don Juan Darlington

Pair this rich, earthy, sweet drink with roasted root veggies and chèvre.

1 1/2 oz. small-batch bourbon
 1/2 oz. cream sherry
 4 dashes peach bitters
 Ice cubes
 Tools: mixing glass, bar spoon, strainer
 Glass: port-wine
 Garnish: lemon twist

Combine ingredients in an ice-filled mixing glass and stir to chill. Strain into a glass and add one dense cube of ice. Garnish.

Recipes by Greg Best, Restaurant Eugene, Atlanta.
 For bonus recipes, visit imbibemagazine.com/recipes.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE RESTAURANT

As cocktails make their way onto dinner tables in top restaurants, bars are beginning to devote more attention to the food on offer at bars as well. Enhancing the cocktail experience is the approach chef Justin Large takes in developing menus for The Violet Hour, which opened last summer in Chicago's Wicker Park (Large is also sous-chef at Chicago's Avec restaurant and wine bar). Milk & Honey and Pegu Club vet Toby Maloney helms the bar, employing house bitters, syrups and juices. "My job as chef is to try to have a great marriage between the food on offer and cocktails on the menu—much like at a wine bar or restaurant," Large says. "Any of The Violet Hour's cocktails are easily as complex as a glass of wine. The way I thought about that menu is exactly the way I think about how to create a menu at Avec."

Playing on traditional bar food, which by Large's most basic definition is fried and salty, he came up with creations that are offered with a wink. Instead of basic nuts, for instance, there's a trio of curried Rice Krispies treats, mixed candied nuts and house cheddar-walnut icebox crackers. An indulgence he calls "The Elvis" comprises a deep-fried peanut butter and banana jam brioche sandwich sprinkled with crushed applewood-smoked bacon. "The bacon has a smokiness and high notes from the fruitwood. We put it all together and roll in a mixture of breadcrumbs and raw peanuts and pop [it] in the fryer. Add a little organic wildflower honey and it pairs really well with whiskey drinks," he says. "We've done it with a Sazerac, which is hot enough to cut through the savory, yummy fried-ness going on and sweet enough to pair with banana. It's much more interesting to have yin and yang going on in your mouth and create that balance."

The interest in cocktail and food pairing is permeating liquid culture so thoroughly that even Melissa Gugni, who runs Bay Area-based Drink cocktail catering with her husband Jay Esopenko, says that more clients are requesting customized cocktails to correspond with dinner courses. She and Esopenko both have strong wine backgrounds, and Gugni says it's easy to apply that knowledge to cocktails and food, considering, for instance, whether the acidity of a drink will overwhelm the dish. And as others have found, sometimes cocktails make a better match than wine. "We did a French-Vietnamese party with lemongrass margaritas and a Saigon cooler—rum, French marmalade and five-spice syrup," she says. "It paired better with the food than any of the wines they picked out."

The pair has been experimenting recently with bolder, more savory flavors in drinks. At an event where the host decided on a turkey dinner accompanied by prosciutto-wrapped green beans in a port reduction sauce, they served their Mission Fig Martini—house fig puree with ruby port and savory spice syrup infused with rosemary, thyme and peppercorns, lengthened with vodka and finished off with fresh lemon.

Whether in restaurants, bars or homes, cocktails are undoubtedly making steady strides as the next perfect match for food. And as bartenders and chefs around the country continue to collaborate, that synergy only becomes more natural. As Linton Hopkins says, "The American cocktail is jazz—not bound by rules other than truth. It's about fundamental relationships." ■



Housemade apple “aguavit” complements crispy pork belly with sauerkraut and blackberry-apple sauce at American Grocery in Greenville, S.C.

