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mixology and flair

# Recipe for success

An interest in fresh and organic food is inspiring mixologists to create new cocktails and contemporary twists on the classics

**M**olecular gastronomy has been changing the way food is made since the 1990s, propelled into the mainstream by Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck with famous dishes such as snail porridge and sardine on toast sorbet. The trend for looking at the science behind the physical and chemical processes in cooking has been seized on by many top bartenders in the UK. A course in molecular mixology now features in the portfolio offered by Shaker UK's BarSchool, while it has opened the gates for "bar chefs" to create some unusual and exciting concoctions on cocktail menus.

This fits in with the growing trend for new cocktails to be inspired by what is going on in the kitchen, developing a kind of "gastro cocktail". So the bar at a pan-Asian restaurant may well draw on some of the Asian ingredients that are being sourced for food, not only creating exciting new recipes but also creating a consistency between the dining and drinks offers.

Bartenders have also been inspired by the growth in organic ingredients, with Mintel revealing this year that sales of organic food have grown by 70 per cent since 2002, with further phenomenal rises predicted. **Joe McCanta** of Saf restaurant and bar in Shoreditch is described as "London's first organic mixologist and sommelier" and has been applying the venue's vegan ethos to its drinks offer. After working on the development of the lists at Saf restaurants in Istanbul and Munich, he says that the list in London is bigger because organic products are easier to obtain in the UK.

"People see organic as being better quality, fresher and locally sourced," he explains. "People may not go to bars for healthy drinks but they do go for well-made great-tasting drinks." Saf's list of "botanical cocktails" include the Pear & Thyme Collins which uses

gin infused with organic thyme on the premises and locally sourced pear juice as well as raw cane syrup, lemon juice and soda.

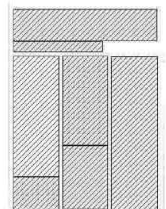
McCanta believes the use of organic ingredients fits in with another trend in the UK – the rediscovery of forgotten classics. "Going back to the 1930s, quite a lot of the classic cocktails did not have non-organic ingredients because everything was organic."

While there is a continuing trend for mixologists to take the well-known, enduring classics and give them a contemporary twist, other lesser-known names are appearing on menus. This owes much to the growing library of books devoted to the history of cocktail making as well as its inclusion in bartender training courses by the likes of Shaker UK and IPBartenders.

The cocktail menu in the main bar at the new Kingly Club in Upper St Martin's Lane, London, is notable for being inspired by the Japanese food in the downstairs restaurant, using ingredients such as shiso leaves, lychee, jasmine tea, saffron and cardamom. In its upstairs mezzanine bar, bartender Thomas Gillgren has put together an additional list that highlights how the taste of a cocktail varies depending on which brand is used.

It features only classic cocktails along with a range of suggestions within each spirit category, providing information on each brand in the same way as a good wine list. So for a Martini, Aviation, Negroni or White Lady, you can choose which gin should be used, based on its ABV or the number of botanicals. "It brings out the different flavours within each category of spirit," Gillgren explains. "I'm trying to teach people and give them a chance to try something new."

While bartender training puts great emphasis on the importance of flavours, consistency, knowledge and quality of service, Tom Cruise continues to haunt bars across the country with the persistent popularity of flair. It has

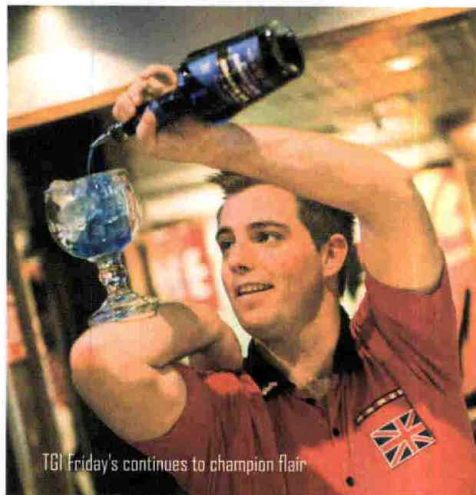


been fuelled by the success of the Bar Wizards on Britain's Got Talent, which led to its two mixologists, Neil Lowrey and Neil Garner, launching the Bar Wizards Academy for professional training. In fact, flair remains a key part of many courses, and bartenders from across the UK will this month be competing in the national heat of the World Flair Championship, sponsored by Skyy vodka.

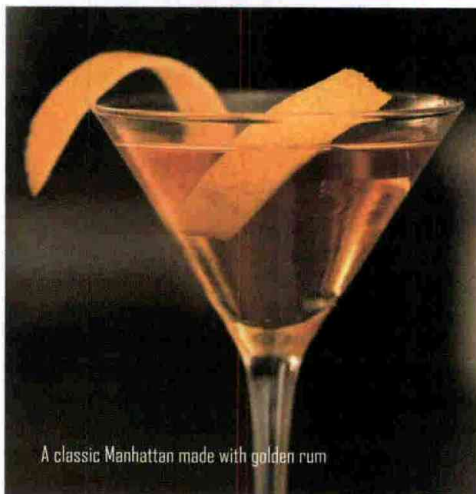
TGI Friday's – one of the most high-profile champions of flair – believes steadfastly in the appeal of bartending as entertainment. Last month, Carlson Restaurants unveiled a revamped TGI's at Lakeside shopping centre in Essex which, according to managing director Karen Forrester, illustrates how the venues are about fun and personalities. Changes included a higher ceiling specifically so that TGI's bartenders had more space to "display their incredible award-winning cocktail skills". So, while the focus on ingredients and flavours grows, flipping, spinning and balancing are still in demand.



Joe McCanta



TGI Friday's continues to champion flair



A classic Manhattan made with golden rum