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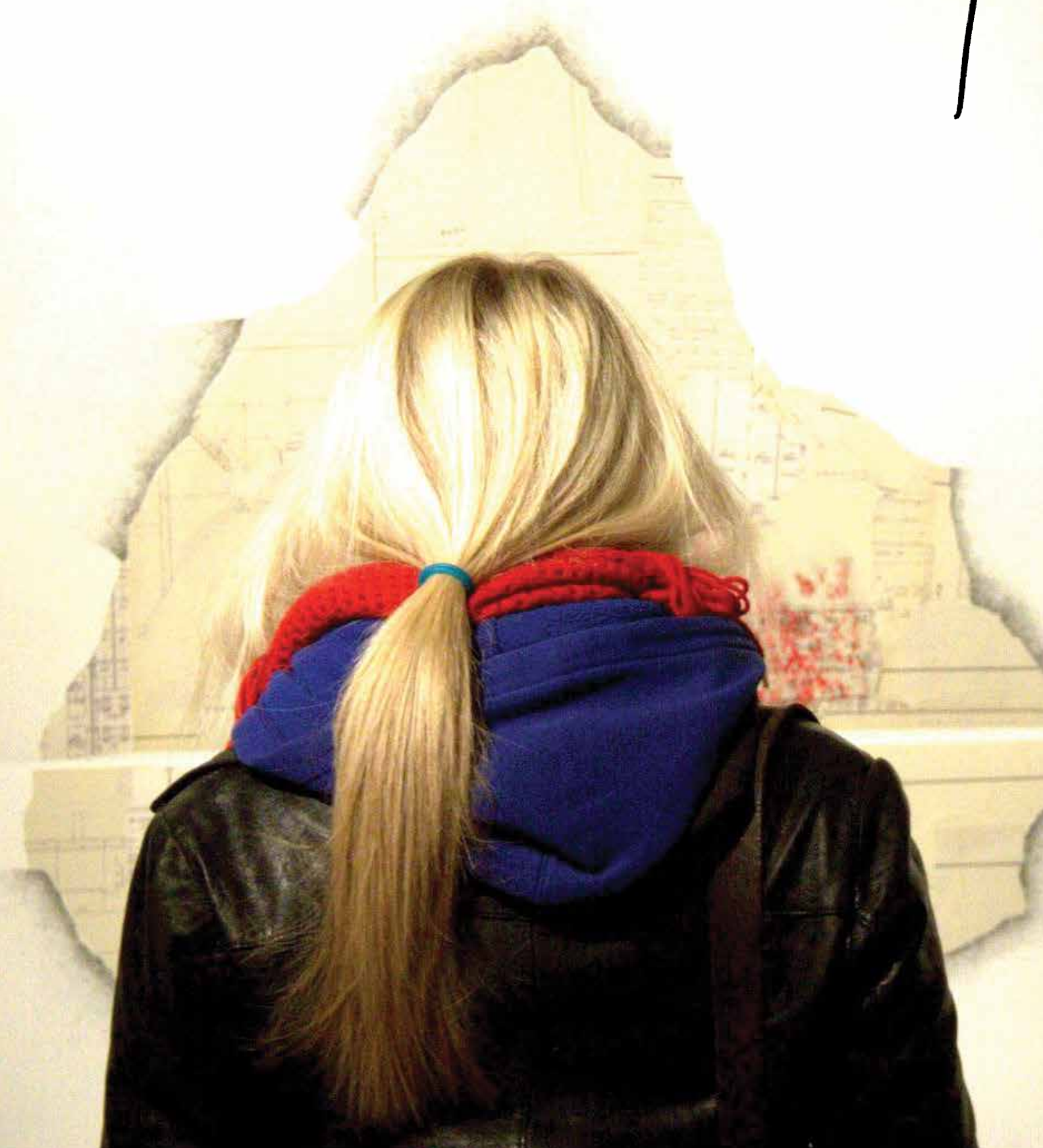
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ON THE COVER

On our cover this issue is a bevy of Moscow Mules made with Tito's Vodka – check out the story of Tito's inside on page 28. Jacob Herrman, of J&K Photography, was our photographer for the cover.



No. 17

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Welcome to the latest issue of *Food & Spirits Magazine*. This issue of FSM is the 'Cocktail Issue', and as you might suspect, includes a great deal of information on cocktails, the 'art' of craft, infusions, garnishes, and where you can find some of the best cocktails in town.

We also introduce two new columns in this issue that will add to our spirits

coverage in the future as well. Bartender Jesse Erickson gives us some insight into the lives of your favorite bartenders and opens the door to you, our readers, to ask whatever questions you would like. Bartenders have a reputation as great counselors, philosophers and amateur psychologists so fire away with any questions you might have and she'll answer them in her column, *Babysitting After Midnight*.

"This issue of FSM is the 'Cocktail Issue', and as you might suspect, includes a great deal of information on cocktails and where you can find some of the best in town."

In our other new column, Dylan Thaemert channels his inner George Thorogood and gets to heart of bourbon, Scotch and beer. Dylan is also a bartender and is an expert when it comes to the alcohol. In his column, *One Bourbon, One Scotch and One Beer*, he'll give you the benefit of his expertise and usher you along the way to discovering new-to-you booze.

Known far and wide in the restaurant community, Hockenbergs also makes an appearance in this issue of FSM. Hockenbergs specializes in restaurant equipment, supply and design, and has made a tremendous impact in many restaurants. One of the best things about Hockenbergs is that they have an Omaha location that is open to the public. So, now when you're in dire need of an industry grade serving spoon, you know where to go. I'm speaking from experience here.

Students from the Institute for the Culinary Arts at MCC were on the prowl again with another progressive dinner tour. This time in Dundee, you can read about all in Baily Price's new piece on *The Supper Club*. Want to find out where some of the best pizza in Omaha can be found? We have a recap of our 6th Annual Omaha's Largest Pizza Review, which was held just recently in June. Like previous years, the event was a smashing success and sold out for the sixth straight year.

Speaking of the pizza event, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all of those that have helped put it together over the last six years. The event has become a much-anticipated showcase for local pizza and it couldn't happen without the help of many, many people;

Jim Johnson and Marc Leibowitz, co-owners of *The Waiting Room*, have provided a home for the event and excellent event advice for me. Those two are truly the 'event experts' in town and it's been very helpful to be able to bend their ear. Brian O'Malley, and all of the other fine instructors and students at the culinary institute, have also lent their expertise to me over the years and the event has been way better for it. I can't tell you how many times they have bailed me out when I forget to bring tablecloths. Oh, wait – yeah, I can. That would be six times and counting.

Of course, without a bunch of solid pizza places in town it wouldn't even be possible to do something like this one year, let alone six. Many of the places have participated every year, but we add new ones every year as well. If you weren't there, I encourage taking a look at the article and going to those restaurants. Not only do they have some great food, but they are also tremendous supporters of our community.

And finally, last, and certainly not least, are those that get excited to attend every year. I would have quit doing it years ago but it's at a minimum, interesting and fun to watch you all devour over 350 pizzas in less than two hours year after year.

So thank you everyone and if you weren't there, I'll see you at next year's event.

Erik Totten – Publisher
Food & Spirits Magazine



FINDING THE FOOD

by Marq Manner



Sometimes, when trying to find places to check out in small towns around the state, you end up finding something good closer to home.

This happened to me recently when a group of friends made a trip to **Avoca, Nebraska**, and the surrounding area, for the annual Quack-Off Duck Races. It was once a less attended affair and more of a small town party where you spent more time in the town's one bar than watching the ducks. Now, it is very well attended with buses carrying people in and the bar no longer exists. Our time here was short as it was so crowded, and people were fall-down drunk before the first race started. It did give us a good starting point though.

"Brownies Watering Hole felt more like a small town than any we had been in that day."

Then we headed to **Weeping Water** and found a bar with the hopeful name of **Hoppies**. Hoppies turned out to be a dive bar in an old bank with a lot of NASCAR big-beer signage on the wall and not a hop-filled craft beer emporium. A bartender leered at us, the

only customers, as we walked in during the early afternoon hours. We gave our orders (a few big beers available and they were out of many major brand liquors) on this Saturday afternoon. The place had a creepy, haunted vibe to it, and our bartender's personality was only helping to push these thoughts forward.

We headed over to **Manley, Nebraska**, a small town with a bar and grill called **The Get-Away**. We walked in and they looked prepared for spill over from the duck races, but it was just a handful of town-folk when we got there. It was a nice bar that had obviously been remodeled in recent years. They had quite a few tables, a shuffleboard table, pool table and a loaded digital jukebox that kept displaying obscure new wave 80's hits as possible choices. I found that to be odd.

We all ordered some food from the typical bar menu of fried appetizers and burgers, French dips, chicken items, salads and such. I ordered some gizzards which came up super overcooked, were hard to eat and not very enjoyable. The burgers and other items ordered looked pretty good for bar food though. This place has a massive beer garden that you could hold live music events in (and they do) easily. It was pretty impressive, especially for a town that is essentially a village.

When out in the beer garden you see a large barn type structure on the horizon. I asked what it was and they said it is called **The Loft** and they do theater there. I was told about an upcoming performance of *The Wizard of Oz* that was happening soon. Shortly, every one of those party buses from **Avoca** was pulling up and the place got very packed. We literally pushed our way through the throngs of people queuing for a drink and women dancing on chairs to Ted Nugent songs to the door.

Once we got back into **Papillon**, we ended up at a place called **Brownies Watering Hole**. Located in their old town area, it resides in a building that has been there since 1906. A large, open dive bar and dining area that felt more like a small town than any we had been in that day. We were seated at the only open table in the place on a busy Saturday night.

I looked at the menu, saw the prices and was pretty shocked. I had to ask if these were the lunch prices. They were not. I ordered a burger and got a very satisfying large, juicy handmade burger made of quality meat on a good fresh bun. The steak fries that were served with the burger were excellent. A burger, fries and a mixed drink on a Saturday night didn't even cost a ten spot (without tip).

It was not patio weather, but being a smoker, I stepped out on it and it looks like one of the best patios in the metro area. A nice, very large and private wooden patio with built-in seats and tables. After driving around the outer fringes of the metro looking for fun and food, it was on the trip back into town where I found a spot that I will be visiting time and time again.

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Omaha's Largest Pizza Review

by Erik Totten

This year's event had over 200 attendees with over 300 pizzas served. Photo by Brian Lacey



Food & Spirits Magazine recently hosted Omaha's 6th Annual Pizza Review at The Waiting Room. As it has been for the previous years, a capacity crowd was on hand to sample pizza from over 15 Omaha pizza restaurants and hear the musical perfection of Brad Hoshaw. Students from the Institute for the Culinary Arts at MCC were also on hand to assist with setting up the event and serving the pizza.

"A capacity crowd was on hand to sample pizza from over 15 Omaha pizza restaurants."

There was a ton (not literally, more like a ½ ton) of pizza on hand and attendees were treated to some fantastic pizza. Before we get to the winners, here's a list of the participating restaurants and what they brought:

Baxter's

House Pizza – Pepperoni, house sausage, mushrooms, garlic confit, oregano and five cheese blend.

Mushroom Pizza – Garlic cream sauce, goat cheese, mushrooms and caramelized onions.

Dudley's

American Steak Classic – Marinated skirt steak, hickory smoke bacon, red onions and our blend of Italian cheeses on our creamy garlic steak sauce.

Chicken-Bacon-Spinach-Artichoke – Delicious, self-explanatory and made with our garlic white sauce.

Frank's

Classic Cheese – The standard by which all pizzas should be judged. Flavors that stand on their own, not hidden by ingredients.

Godfather's

Chipotle Chicken and Bacon – A smoky chipotle pepper sauce, savory roasted chicken breast strips, onion, mozzarella cheese and topped with crispy smoked bacon

La Casa

BBQ Chicken – House-made, Neapolitan thin-style crust, with imported Romano cheese, house made and lovingly seasoned chicken along with Nana Nellie's secret BBQ sauce.

Mangia Italiana

Italian Beef – Olive oil, fresh garlic, seasoned Italian beef and roasted peppers, our cheese blend, fresh mushrooms, onions and topped with Fontina cheese.

Marco's

Hawaiian Chicken – Cheese, ham, chicken, bacon and pineapple with a sprinkling of extra cheese.

Old Chicago

Meat Me Pizza – Loaded with Italian sausage, Canadian bacon, andouille sausage, pepperoni, green olive garnish and fresh basil.

Royal Margarita – Pesto sauce, house-made tomato bruschetta, roasted garlic, fresh mozzarella and fresh basil.

Orsi's

Combo – hamburger, pepperoni, Italian sausage, mushrooms, black olives, green peppers, onion.

Pizza Pie Guy

Green Chile Enchilada – salsa verde, all natural rotisserie chicken breast and topped with mozzarella, pepper jack and cilantro. Served with a side of sour cream.

Pizza Shoppe

The Naughty Johnny – Bisque sauce (blend of marinara and Alfredo), bacon, salami, red onion, cream cheese, mozzarella and oregano.

Prairie Fire

Chicken Blanco – Garlic white sauce, roasted chicken, mushrooms, spinach, balsamic caramelized onions.

Ragazzi's

Buffalo Chicken – Buffalo sauce with crispy buffalo chicken and garnished with green onions and parmesan cheese.

Meat Locker – Pepperoni, Italian sausage, Canadian bacon and seasoned beef.

Salt 88

Chicken Marsala – We've taken a classic dish and placed it on a pie! Marsala sauce, sautéed mushrooms and grilled chicken. Topped with mozzarella and provolone cheese on our signature crust.

Varsity

Over Under Romano – Cream cheese topped with pepperoni and loaded with mozzarella and Romano cheeses.

Vivace

Sausage and Pepper – Neapolitan style pizza topped with oven dried bell peppers, roasted sausage, fontina, Grana Padano, mozzarella and Romano cheeses, and topped with fresh basil.

And the winners are:

People's Choice

1. Dudley's
2. Varsity's Roman Coin
3. Pizza Pie Guy
4. Ragazzi's
4. Baxter's
5. La Casa
6. Orsi's

Judge's Choice

1. Dudley's
1. Pizza Pie Guy
2. Mangia
3. Orsi's
4. Frank's
5. Vivace
6. Pizza Shoppe

Best Game Day Pizza – Ragazzi's

Best pie to eat with a mustache – Baxter's

Best Crust – La Casa

Best Cheese Pizza – Franks

It's All *Greek* to Me

by Erica Viola

When a group of friends is hanging out on Saturday night, tossing around ideas about where to go eat, there are some inspired suggestions that seem almost inevitable, and this is one of them: "Let's go get Greek food!"

There's a good reason for this — America is a melting pot of ethnic foods, and fairly recently, Greek cuisine has suddenly made everyone's top five list. I have been dining at Greek restaurants for twenty years, and though I've been — in this order — a shameless carnivore, a vegetarian, a "poultry only, thanks" girl and finally a pescatarian, I've never had to struggle to find something tasty and satisfying on any Greek menu.

After lagging for many years behind such cultural fare as Chinese, Mexican and Japanese, Greek food is enjoying a burst of popularity. And there's a good reason for this, too: despite the fact that, after having sat down to a hearty plate of marithes and seasoned Greek potatoes (and don't forget the baklava), you feel as if you've gained thirty pounds, Greek food is good for you. Traditional Greek staples such as dark leafy vegetables, lentils, fish and olive oil have been said to reduce your risk of ailments such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Greece has a four-thousand-year culinary tradition; some things have changed, some have not, and some have simply evolved. For example, in ancient Greece, beef-based dishes were almost unheard of; the climate and landscape of Greece is more conducive to raising goats and sheep. (Today, the lamb gyro is still the common favorite, but many American Greek restaurants have now added beef gyros to their menus.)

"America is a melting pot of ethnic foods, and fairly recently, Greek cuisine has suddenly made everyone's top five list."

Several millennia ago, Greek cuisine consisted mostly of wheat, fish and olive oil. Meats have only fairly recently become a common staple, as technology has advanced, making the transportation and preservation of chicken, lamb and beef far easier. Ancient Greece is responsible for lentil soup and that staple of salads, snacks and main courses: feta cheese. Many Greek dishes have roots in Arabic, Persian or Turkish cuisine; moussaka and tzatziki are a couple of examples. It's an age-old story; as civilizations shift around the world, they leave new recipes and new ideas in their wake.

Modern Greek food differs significantly in taste from American Greek cuisine. For example, the purity and taste of the olive oil in Greece is unlike the olive oil that is easily obtainable in the United States. Many regions have their own olive farms, and the difference in the soil adds a crisper taste. This is true, too, with vegetables — the climate, the minerals and the nutrients in the Mediterranean earth deliver sweeter, more sumptuous produce. To atone somewhat for this deficit, a large number of Greek restaurateurs in many parts of the US order items such as macaroni, grape leaves, coffee and gyro meat from vendors in larger cities such as Chicago, who are able to provide more authentic-tasting items. Greek citizens love their food, their heritage, and they particularly love to dine out. (Interesting to note: McDonald's has attempted to break into the Greek market and is failing spectacularly.)

As any amateur connoisseur of Greek food will know, creatively-prepared vegetables are a vital part of any Greek dish. Domatokeftedes are basically tomato fritters, fried in a luscious, salty batter thick with herbs and onions. Spanikopita, a spinach-based pastry filled with, among other ingredients, the inevitable feta cheese, is a popular snack in Greece and features as an entrée in many American Greek restaurants. Not last, and certainly not least, those lemon juice, olive oil and garlic-soaked potatoes are almost impossible to resist. I've ordered entrées in the past simply because the side dish was Greek potatoes. It's not uncommon to see them in the à la carte section of the menu in Greek-dining establishments.

Salads in Greek restaurants can be confusing, and the mix-up of names is often a matter of annoyance to the proprietors. Feta cheese and Kalamata olives do not a Greek salad make. In fact, if you want a salad with iceberg lettuce, order the Athenian salad.

Proper Greek salads are comprised of tomatoes, onions, green peppers, cucumbers, feta cheese and Kalamata olives (careful — they leave the stones in). No lettuce to see here folks, keep going. You're usually offered a choice of either olive oil or the "house dressing," which is generally made from a jealously-guarded family recipe. Frequently, Greek restaurants offer Americanized variations on Greek and Athenian salads, as well; I've seen "Greek Chicken Cesar Salad" on many menus. I'll be honest, I've never tried it. I'm kind of a purist.

Greece's close proximity to the coastline has always made seafood-based dishes both popular and practical. Lavraki is sea bass stuffed with garlic, herbs and often topped with grilled tomatoes (not for the squeamish — the heads are often left on). Marithes, or smelt fish, is a breaded and pan-fried with an array of herbs and spices.



Pastichio is a perennial Greek favorite dish featuring beef. It's something like lasagna, with layers of Greek macaroni and ground beef. Moussaka is an eggplant, tomato and ground lamb (or beef) baked custard pie flavored with cinnamon, allspice and black pepper, combining savory with sweet. And, of course, everyone's famous favorite is the gyro, delicately-thin strips of lamb, roasted on a vertical spit and topped with onions, tomatoes and deliciously-chilled tzatziki sauce (originally a Turkish invention).

The Orthodox tradition of fasting in Great Lent has led to a wide variety of vegetarian and vegan foods. Veggie gyros are available in almost any eatery, loaded with tomatoes, onions and cucumbers. Moussaka can be prepared minus the ground beef, as can pastichio. Kolokythakia tiganita is a dish comprised of thinly-sliced battered zucchini, deep-fried in olive oil. In all Greek dishes, spices are essential. Allspice, cinnamon, bay laurel leaves, dill and oregano lend a sweet or savory zing to every meal.

Greece may be responsible for one of the world's first cookbooks, but most Greek restaurant chefs use their own authentic recipes. Recipes vary from region to region, and what you get when you order pretty much depends on where the chef grew up.

"Different islands yield different recipes," explains **Koula Sgourakis** of Omaha's family-owned **Greek Islands**. "Dishes on my husband's island are a lot different from foods made on the island where I grew up."

Koula and her husband George, along with George's brother Bill and his wife Joanne, started the restaurant over thirty years ago.

"I learned to cook from watching my mother – when we started up the restaurant I wasn't quite sure of myself, but – no cookbooks!" she laughs. "It's all trial and error. I measure with my eyes, not with tablespoons."

It's also important, says the Sgourakis family, to blend traditional dishes with modern creativity. Flair is important – it keeps the menu from getting stale, brings in new clientele and keeps the regulars coming back. Pizza, for example, was most likely a Greek invention; however, in its original incarnation, pizza probably had few tomatoes and very little cheese. Lately, Greek restaurants are creating fusion pizzas; Greek-style, with minimal cheese and tomatoes, but with barbecue or buffalo sauce. The Greek Island cooks are constantly looking for ways to give traditional recipes a twist.

Dina, daughter of George and Koula, has been involved with the restaurant since she was in her teens. "Our base menu keeps us who we are, but we also want to keep it fresh, and be inventive," she explains.

I innocently asked George Sgourakis, "So, you run a Greek restaurant. Why are there hamburgers on the menu?"

He looked condescendingly at me for a moment, threw up his hands and said, "That's why we call it 'Greek-American' cuisine!" It's important, he says, to cater to all tastes. Many people are hesitant to try Greek food, so including a few traditionally American dishes allows groups with mixed tastes to dine together. (They do make a nod to Greece on their hamburger menu with a lamb burger, which is doused in olive oil.)

Ambiance is important in family-style dining, and Greek-American restaurants are no exception. Greeks in Greece love to dine out and immigrant proprietors carry that cozy, old-world style to their American establishments. Dim lighting, murals of Crete and Cyprus, and blue-and-yellow accents prevail in many Greek-American eateries. Just as important as the food, says Dina Sgourakis, is the atmosphere.

"Our main goal is to make sure our customers feel that they've had the ultimate Greek experience."



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NOAH'S ARK WAS A SANDWICH

Local eats on the road with Noah's Ark Was A Spaceship

by John Svatos



Editor's Note: Omaha has developed a reputation as a 'music town' around the nation so we figured a good way to visit some of the food our community encounters was to talk to one of the finer bands in Omaha as they hit the road. John Svatos, guitarist and lead singer for Noah's Ark was A Spaceship, takes us on a culinary tour of the band's fare on a recent road trip.

Many believe that life on the road is glamorous for the members of a touring band. In actuality, it can be a grueling, tiresome process. Despite the monotony that life on the road may bring, I consider myself fortunate to have traveled the country several times with my band, *Noah's Ark Was A Spaceship*.

We have traveled from New York City to the desert playing shows, and have found regional meals to be one of the most comforting parts of these taxing tours. When the nuts, fruit and tuna packets in our van's cooler are no longer appealing after a long drive, we enjoy discovering great food in a new city. As we travel on a budget, this is a highly anticipated and enjoyable change in routine for my band-mates and I.

"Learning about the food culture of another city while simultaneously awakening one's inner rocker can only be described as worldly perfection."

When traveling with my band, I have always found that the best way to experience a new place is to eat what the locals eat. For example, in a big city there is a never-ending plethora of restaurants in which to dine. We usually pick spots within walking distance to the venue or district we are playing.

Take a city like Chicago, for instance. Every time we play there, we pick a new place to eat. One particularly amazing place is a

gourmet hot dog joint called **Hot Doug's**. There is usually a line that wraps around the building of this casual restaurant, but it is totally worth the wait. They serve the traditional Chicago-style hot dog, which includes an all-beef frankfurter on a steamed poppy seed bun, neon green relish, chopped onions, tomato wedges, yellow mustard, a pickle spear and celery salt. While this dog seems extreme, this is only the beginning at Hot Doug's. They have a huge, ever-changing menu that includes something for everyone. They even have exotic game sausages such as elk, bison, and alligator if you are feeling adventurous. Everything is fresh, delicious and affordably priced. Hot Doug's is a must-stop spot for visitors to Chicago.

Moving on to the eastern part of the United States, you will find one of my absolute favorite sandwich restaurants of all time. If you are in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, please do yourself the pleasure of grabbing a sandwich and a cold beer at one of the **Primanti Bros.** restaurants. Originally designed by truckers who wanted a sandwich that had



"If you are in Pittsburgh, please do yourself the pleasure of grabbing a sandwich at one of the Primanti Bros. restaurants."

all the fixings inside so they could eat on the go, the Primanti Bros. is no ordinary sandwich. Starting with two huge slices of Italian bread, the inside of every sandwich contains a scoop of sweet Italian coleslaw, fresh cut French fries, two tomato slices, sharp provolone cheese and almost any type of meat you can think of. My personal favorite is Capicola, a spicy Italian ham, or good quality pastrami. Be warned, however: Primanti Bros. does absolutely no substitutions. If you do not want tomato, or perhaps you prefer fries on the side, too bad. What you see is what you get! This place does not mess around and is a great way to get the true Pittsburgh experience.

Another unique and fun restaurant to visit on the East Coast is a Washington, D.C. landmark called **Ben's Chili Bowl**.

Located next to the Lincoln Theater, Ben's Chili Bowl is a historic restaurant that has been a favorite among several presidents and celebrities alike. Ben's Chili Bowl is famous for its chili dogs, sausages and delicious milk shakes. One of my favorite items on the menu is the Half-Smoke, which is a pork and beef sausage topped with raw diced white onion, yellow mustard and spicy chili all on a warm steamed bun. While not overly complex, this simple sausage on a bun packs quite the punch. Every ingredient is made fresh and tastes fantastic. Other items on the menu include all beef hot

dogs, burgers and, of course, their famous chili, which you can get by itself or on top of almost everything. If you are looking for a discount, please take note of the sign that clearly states that the only people that eat for free are Bill Cosby and Barack Obama. But don't

"The awesome thing about Hoeks Death Metal Pizza is that you can actually hear the restaurant before you see it."

worry; Every item is priced affordably at this celebrated restaurant.

Heading west to one of my favorite cities in America, Denver, Colorado, you will find one of the best restaurants in the country to grab a burger.

The Cherry Cricket is a fantastic establishment where you can customize your own burger. With thirty plus toppings including peanut butter, salsa, a fried egg and everything in between, any burger lover will surely find the right combination at **The Cherry Cricket**. My personal favorite, which came recommended as a house specialty, is the Cricket Burger. This gem consists of a half-pound, all-beef patty cooked to your liking (I recommend medium) topped



with cream cheese and fresh minced jalapeños. The combination of the cool cream cheese and spicy peppers is quite the experience.

This would not be complete if I did not mention pizza. Easily the most consistent type of food that is consumed on the road, it is something that everyone can always agree on. The most unique pizza place I have ever been to is **Hoeks Death Metal Pizza** on the historic 6th Street in Austin, Texas. So what exactly is death metal pizza? It is just what it sounds like: a heavy metal themed pizza restaurant that serves up one hell of a slice of pie. The awesome thing about Hoeks Death Metal Pizza is that you can actually hear the restaurant before you see it. They have two giant speakers that blast brutal death metal from the restaurant's door onto the street, making the restaurant very easy to find.

With pizzas on display at the walk-up counter right off the street, you can simply choose your slice, pay and continue on your merry way. My personal favorite slice, pepperoni and jalapeño, is guaranteed to awaken your inner metal head. The thin crust of this New York style pizza was designed to be portable, allowing patrons to eat and enjoy as they continue to explore the rest of Austin on foot. It is a spicy, delicious way to soak up the booze, and it will get you shredding and back on the streets in no time.

True, the rock and roll lifestyle is not always as fast and exciting as one might believe. Most of our time on the road, after all, has been spent in the close quarters of a 1990 Chevy van. When we finally do roll in to that city where we are scheduled to play a show, the game changes and the good times begin. Finding new great places to eat is part of that adventure. It allows for a cultural experience in a different community. Learning about the food culture of another city while simultaneously awakening one's inner rocker can only be described as worldly perfection.

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Sustain-Table Fare

How technology is bringing Omaha and our oceans closer together

by Kent Cisar

The dynamics of our food consumption are changing faster than ever. Economic, environmental, technological and social factors contribute to what we choose to eat. Sustainable seafood is at the forefront of these changes. By making educated choices about our seafood consumption in **Omaha** and surrounding communities, we can positively impact our health, economy and oceans. To understand sustainable seafood, it's important to understand several aspects of the movement: those that monitor it, produce it, distribute it, and finally those who consume it.

“Fish and shellfish farms are popping up all over the country – including here in Nebraska.”

Our first task is to define sustainable seafood. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), defines sustainability as “based on a simple principle — meeting today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In terms of seafood, this means catching or farming seafood responsibly, with consideration for the long-term health of the environment and the livelihoods of the people that depend upon the environment.”

The NOAA has an “eco label” system similar to USDA label for beef. When you find seafood packages or products marked with that label, it means NOAA inspected the farm or fishery and deemed the process to meet its strict standards on quality, regulation and environmental impact. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is a global organization that promotes sustainable seafood through fisheries outreach (both commercial and recreational), standardization of consumption and consumer awareness. The MSC also has resources for fishermen, retailers and restaurateurs, and consumers to make educated decisions on a micro scale.

Most consumers think of seafood production coming from traditional areas that have direct access to saltwater. In an ever changing economy though, fish and shellfish farms are popping up all over the country – including here in **Nebraska**. **Cardinal Farms** has been a family-owned farm in the **South Sioux City, Nebraska** area since 1968. After years of research, they began their own seafood farming operation in 2013. Seafood offers farmers several advantages that aren’t attainable through other methods of farming.

“Our system is an indoor, closed system that’s not exposed to other weather and climate elements that are beyond our control,” says **Scott Garwood** of Cardinal Farms.

Garwood explained that they chose Barramundi, an Australian sea bass, because it provided a tasty fish that could be farmed attentively year-round in an indoor facility.

“With our indoor system, we can closely monitor our fish’s feed intake and adjust our feeding on the fly with minimal impact,” Garwood added. “A closely monitored feeding and water system reduces our own waste of production, and should provide a more consistent product when it reaches the consumer’s table”.

Thanks to family farms like Cardinal, we may see Australian sea bass and other seafood in our restaurants and stores in the very near future – grown right here, sustainably, in Nebraska.

Accessibility to information is the next key component to sustainable seafood. In addition to the NOAA and MSC, there are several organizations that have apps that you can install on your phone. Seafood Watch by the Monterey Bay Aquarium gives consumers several easy features. Users can search by their GPS coordinates to find retailers and restaurants that provide sustainable seafood. My favorite feature of the app is the ease of which “best choice, good choice and avoid choices” can be found.

“Now that consumers have the knowledge, the interest and accessibility to sustainable seafood, the most important resource is our pocketbook.”

In a couple clicks, consumers can determine if the seafood in front of them is a best choice environmentally or if it’s an “avoid” choice. The app also recommends alternatives to avoid choices.

Thanks to the efforts of the NOAA, MSC and others, it’s actually easier than one may think to find sustainable seafood in Omaha.

I ventured to several supermarkets across the metro area to examine the availability and ease of determining sustainable seafood.

Whole Foods prides itself on their diversity of sustainable choices, and the ease of determining where the product came from. All the fresh and frozen labels detail the species and its origination.

The MSC label is prominently found throughout other supermarkets in the city. Baker’s and Hy-Vee have selections of fish displayed in their seafood case with the MSC label.

They also provide ample choices in their frozen fish with the MSC certification. Shrimp and shellfish require a bit more attention, but both chains had several products with MSC labels.

When making seafood purchases it’s important to be observant and ask questions of vendors. The NOAA encourages customers to trust their senses. “Our seafood inspectors often say “the nose knows” – if a seafood counter or freezer case smells fishy, go somewhere else. Fresh, quality seafood should smell like the ocean, not sour or fishy.”

There is no substitute for knowing your vendors well and the products they provide. **Brian Leinbach**, Retail Manager of the **Absolutely Fresh Seafood Market** at 119th and Pacific Street in Omaha, has noticed a difference in customers’ engagement in the entire consumption cycle. He believes a knowledgeable consumer is a good thing for all three parties: the consumer, the business, and the environment.

“Customers are more educated now, asking more questions about our products,” he said.

“We pride ourselves on our staff having the knowledge of what the product is, where it is from, and how to cook it.”

Ryan Stover, Regional Seafood Coordinator for Whole Foods, says employee knowledge is paramount to their department’s success.

“In a city like Omaha, it’s very important to ask questions of consumers. The variance in taste in seafood is unlike any other meat, so it’s important to know the type of fish they prefer. Once we do, we can make a better recommendation for other types of seafood,” Leinbach said.

“We’ve found farm raised Atlantic salmon out of the Faroe Islands in the northeast Atlantic. It’s an excellent product taste wise, available year-round, and sustainable”.

Now that consumers have the knowledge, the interest and accessibility to sustainable seafood, the most important resource is our pocketbook. Retailers such as Absolutely Fresh and your local supermarket need sufficient demand to make it economical for both their business and the consumer. Positive customer feedback is imperative to a wider selection. The Omaha Whole Foods store recently did a full-scale oyster promotion.

“We realized Omaha had very few places that exposed customers to the best possible consumption of oysters” said Stover.

The promotion included a sale, display, shucking, and education. “We had excellent sustained feedback from customers about the oysters. We’re now making more oysters available to the store because of increased demand” he added.

Farmed products such as the Faroe Island Salmon and Cardinal Farm Barramundi will be brought to the counter fresh and year round with consistent demand. With seasonal wild fish such as Mahi Mahi or flounder, consumers must create a significant market in the peak season to see a consistent supply locally.

Sustainable seafood consumption is a chance for industry and individuals to work together to benefit all parties and our ecosystem. Technology is making it more cost effective for farmers to produce it, retailers to acquire it, and consumers to purchase environmentally sustainable seafood. Small steps like a few clicks on your mobile device and asking a couple questions of your local vendor can bring home a meal that benefits your family and our oceans at the same time.

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The Supper Club:

Dundee Progressive Dinner

story by Bailey Price, photography by Pat Ratigan



Chocolate sorbet with chocolate mousse, shortbread crumble and caramel at Dario's Brasserie

***Publisher's Note:** Omega Omega Omega (Tri Omega), the culinary fraternity at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, strives to provide students with opportunities to apply and develop their skills through unique experiences. One of these experiences is the Supper Club. The Supper Club selects a restaurant once a quarter and works with the chef of the restaurant to provide a unique dining experience to challenge the palate and minds of the students with the unique ingredients and techniques found in that chef's kitchen. The article and photography for this article are also done by students.*

This trip for the Supper Club took the students to historic Dundee to sample three well-established restaurants. 36 students were divided into three groups to take part in a progressive dinner. The participating restaurants were Pitch Pizzeria, Avoli Osteria and Dario's Brasserie.

The group met at Dundee Dell to form smaller groups and head out to the first experience. Each restaurant was asked to make a four course dinner. One group would have an appetizer, a different group would experience the second course, and the last group would enjoy an entrée course and dessert. Then they would rotate.

The first location was Pitch Pizzeria at 5021 Underwood Ave., a louder, lively place that was inviting and had warm smells of crusty bread and cheese wafting over the tables. The décor and set up reminded a few members of a Manhattan loft.

The first course was a paper-thin raw beet salad with arugula, capers and grapefruit supremes. The salad was dressed with a creamy aioli and red wine vinaigrette and topped with a shaved egg. The capers provide the perfect counterbalance to the earthy beets, and the citrus from the grapefruit melded well with the vinaigrette. On the side was a thick cut crostini, with mozzarella browned on top; it was used to clean up the remaining dressing and it was a lovely, savory ending that made you look forward to the next course.

The second course was the pizza of the week: tomato, shrimp, chili oil and artichoke heart. Once the pizza landed people were

nothing but amazed. The pizza was paired with clean peppery sangria that was very refreshing.

The third course was braised pork belly with butternut squash gnocchi, fennel and molasses sauce. The meat melted in your mouth, and had the perfect amount of smoke. The gnocchi and fennel added interest to the dish and helped to elevate the pork belly even more.

The final course was a tiramisu presented in a martini glass. The subtle flavor was well received.

The second stop was Avoli Osteria, at 5013 Underwood Ave., which offered the best combination of locally grown ingredients and internationally renowned favorites. The establishment is like eating at a fancy Italian grandmother's house with mismatched china, paintings and furniture. The grand chandelier lighting fixtures set a very intimate mood for the meal. Each course was started with information about how northern Italian meals are served and what to expect from the meal that evening.

The first course was an antipasti platter that consisted of a Carpaccio of cold smoked beef tenderloin, salumi, buffalo milk cheese, gorgonzola picante, soft ripened goat cheese, grilled ciabatta, strawberry jam, cherry tomatoes, mustard, and celery seed aioli. The members enjoyed all the various combinations made from the platter but the most loved was the strawberry jam with the salumi.

"The overall experience was an eye opener to the wonderful offerings that are all within a few blocks."

The second course was locally grown squash ravioli, in sage brown butter, pumpkin seeds and 24 month aged Parmigiano Reggiano cheese grated on top. The wine paired with the meal was Inama Soave Classico. It was drier, with a crisp grapefruit flavor, and the acid cut the sage butter wonderfully, and provided an earthiness to the pumpkin seeds. The ravioli were savory, sweet, smooth, and buttery, with hints of sea salt. The delicate pasta, once bit into, released gently spiced squash that reminded some of pumpkin pie.

The third course was slightly delayed so the members were given a small plate of paper-thin prosciutto with pickled vegetables and toasted bread. This simple dish changed the minds of a few people who thought prosciutto was stringy, but were delightfully surprised to realize that was not the case with this dish. The main dish was braised short ribs, flank steak, potato puree with carrots and onions. The short ribs were very soft and melt in your mouth amazing with smells that got to the table before the plate did. To go alongside it was a potato puree that was divine. Overall the seasoning was impeccable.

The final course was a very thin deconstructed tiramisu. It had the perfect gelato and a sustaining pannicotta that was a lovely note to end on.

The final stop was Dario's Brasserie at 4920 Underwood Ave., a smaller inviting space, with touches like mismatched chairs and

golden framed mirrors that make it feel like an old-school Parisian neighborhood restaurant.

The first course was mussels served in browned butter and piave cheese. This dish was paired with tripel karmeliet – a light, summery beer. The crusty and salty cheese nicely balanced out the mussels. Many people had not experienced mussels before and look forward to having that dish again. They were also served with Belgian pommes frites that were hot, thick, crunchy, soft, golden brown and perfectly paired with an herb mayo.

The second course was a buckwheat crepe filled with sous vide pork shoulder and potato puree, topped with pickled red cabbage; a beautiful plate to see and consume. The perfectly tender pork flavor was balanced out with the sour cabbage. The sweet and savory flavors of the homey and delicious dish were well paired with a Normandy Apple Cider that provided a fresh, clean taste and finish to the dish.



Braised pork belly with butternut squash gnocchi, fennel and molasses sauce at Pitch Pizzeria

The third course was Carbonada a la Fiomande, which was beef chuck marinated in beer overnight, then braised five to six hours with caramelized onions, nutmeg and tomato paste. The chuck was served in bite size pieces over a roasted carrot purée that was both earthy and sweet. Traditionally this dish is served with prunes but Chef de Cuisine Patrick Micheels said he preferred how tart cherries worked with the dish. The cherries were a welcomed and unexpected burst of sweet tart brightness that balanced out the hearty braised savory flavor. The dish was topped with a sorrel salad with olive oil. The meal was well paired with a Houblen Chouffe IPA that helped to bring out the beer flavor in the meat. To help get every bite, a white cheddar gougère filled with a goat cheese mousse was served. It was the perfect thing to get every bit of puree and beef drippings out of the plate.


The final course was variations of chocolate to just nibble and enjoy – super cold chocolate sorbet, creamy smooth chocolate mousse that countered crisp shortbread crumble and sweet clear caramel, with a darker bitter side of the chocolate cake, simple straight forward chocolate. This dessert is something to look forward to on the upcoming summer menu. Dario himself came out at the end and added a final note: sweet rice cakes in dry ice; if you eat them fast enough, you look like a dragon.

The overall experience was an eye opener to the wonderful offerings that are all within a few blocks. Tri Omega members went home stuffed and inspired, and send a huge thank you to the chefs, owners, servers and everyone who contributed to the awesome evening.

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Hockenbergs' contract and design team. Clockwise from top left: Paul Sinnott, Paul Parr, John Craft and Robert Taylor.

In the Know by Ann Summers

“Everybody knows Hockenbergs.” This is the sort of comment one hears in Omaha when dropping the name of this restaurant design/supply company around anyone in a business that has a kitchen. A certain familiarity stands to reason; Hockenbergs has been around since 1908 and especially in the Midwest, that’s a heck of a lifespan. In the collectibles world, this makes you an antique. In the commercial world, it makes you really good at building and keeping a positive brand.

Hold on, you may say; successful companies don’t have to be old. Warren Buffet probably has socks older than some of the best companies out there. It doesn’t have to take a century to make a name for yourself. And yet today, Hockenbergs is still a thriving part of Omaha’s food service and restaurant biz, and there may be a few surprises in store about this company that originated in Iowa, moved to Nebraska and is spreading beautiful, well-equipped kitchens and dining rooms across the Midwest and to the coasts.

“Not only does Hockenbergs provide years of experience with projects and customers, they can offer expertise on a huge range of concerns.”

It turns out that what separates great companies from so-so ones may have everything to do with time, or at least the use of it. President, Tom Schrack Jr., says that the continued success of Hockenbergs is due to their long practice of building trust and good relationships: relationships with their customers, with their sales team members, with their vendors, and with their source

manufacturers of everything from glass and table wares, to stainless ladles to recycled bamboo patio furniture, to catering carts and storage, to workhorse American-made ranges, to full restaurant and cafeteria furnishings and fittings, right down to the electronic ordering systems.

Tom Jr. says that in terms of both vendors and customers, building relationships is more important than selling a certain brand or pushing certain products or models. And as his father, Tom Schrack Sr., believed, a sense of trust is much more important than chasing a buck. And let’s face it, no supplier one can stay ahead in the business selling nothing but trendy immersion circulators.

Hockenbergs may be in the know, and it’s neither gathering dust nor growing moss. Both Tom Jr., and his brother, Tim Schrack, stress the importance of staying lean as a company, but they also attribute Hockenbergs’ particular reputation for cultivating long-time customers, wherein some 80% of their sales come from 20% of their clients. They also do a lot of education in their sales meetings, and their sales group spends a great deal of time with the manufacturers, forming a feedback loop of information that has, at its core, transparency about the products and their specs. As a result, Hockenbergs has increased sales by 20% since last year alone, has expanded to five different locations with their own sales and distribution, and completed over 500 projects last year. Someone (or someones) is/are clearly doing something right.

But what do I know? Let’s get some expertise in here, shall we? Financial writer, Bob Seawright is the Chief Investment & Information Officer for Madison Avenue Securities, and writes, in his blog “As I routinely emphasize the best performers in all probabilistic fields dwell on process. This is true for great value investors, great poker players, and great baseball players ... Maintaining good process is really hard to do psychologically, emotionally, and organizationally. But it is absolutely imperative

for investment and financial success.” When key team members at Hockenbergs talk about their business, from the president to his sister and Small wares Buyer, **Mary Parr**, it is all about *process*.

“As members of buying groups we are able to buy at much lower prices and pass that savings on to our customers,” says Mary. Prices are a very important part of the food biz, because the whole profitability model depends on how well things are run in the back of the house. Especially when you consider that Hockenbergs serves not only large corporate dining facilities, but also hotel chains, schools, fast food franchises, and small restaurants.

“Staying competitive with pricing is really key because we are in the same business as much larger food supply companies,” says VP, Tim Schrack. Um, trends, experience, and value? Plus those humongous stainless stock pots that get a food writer all worked up? So shiny....

But hey, because it is a family business, Hockenbergs also has a practice of retaining employees for most of their working life. When the company was named “2007 Dealer of the Year” by *Foodservice Equipment and Supply*, it was clear that longtime relationships and training processes with their employees was a major reason they were able to build such a solid foundation. Having focused on the process with their employees and giving them a “sense of ownership and ... a sense of pride in the collective success of our company” has, according to Tom Jr., helped them achieve much higher sales per employee than the industry standard. Want to work with really nice people who value you as an employee? Well, gosh, you could bring your shiny new face over there, and then you and the stock pots can have a contest.

“A rich history of experience means that Hockenbergs will help their customers adapt to the next big thing, whatever that may be.”

To stay current with what’s happening in the food preparation scene, Hockenbergs relies on trade journals, large industry shows, and the current needs of their customers. As you can imagine, many things in the food industry stay the same (get food, cook it, serve it beautifully, do the dishes) but new technologies are constantly assisting chefs and their teams.

“Mostly, the technological innovations are in efficiency,” says Tim. And those techie-changes are revising the amount of energy (both human and mechanical) needed to operate large-scale kitchens and food service. It can be hard to keep up with the pace of changes in all kinds of equipment. But Hockenbergs has the experience. It’s a case of *been there, found a better way to do that*.

But not everybody can just pick the right range or refrigeration system out of a catalogue. No, not even an online one.

“New equipment is a huge investment, even for big chains,” says, Paul Parr, the VP of Contract Sales. He points out that “not everyone realizes that here in Omaha we have a fully operational test kitchen available. Often our customers who are looking at using a particular product will come in, develop and test recipes right here.” He gestures over his shoulder at a beautiful gleaming facility at the back of their main office on F Street, just waiting to be put through its paces. Paul’s time at Hockenbergs is spent bidding for, planning and implementing full kitchen and dining designs and redesigns.

“We use some excellent new technology called Autodesk REVIT,” which is a CAD Business Information Modeling software used by architects, engineers, and contractors to design buildings and their components in 3D, draft them in 2D and track all stages of the process. “It’s quite an investment in money and time, but we

wanted to provide our customers with those new options.”

You may feast your eyes on layouts of countertops and prep space on the website (at Hockenbergs.com) along with full mouth-watering photo-spreads of completed projects.

But no matter what, with Hockenbergs you get something special. Flexibility and options for customers keep cropping up. Not only do they provide years of experience with projects and customers, they can offer expertise on a huge range of concerns. Paul says, “If a facility wants to go green, we have the know-how and the vendor contacts to be able to implement that, from recycled-material cups to how waste is disposed of.” They also offer food safety consulting, (and no one wants to be on reality TV, do they?) as well as receiving and inventory control systems (now where was that last shipment of curly kale, anyway?) if you want to keep track of things start to finish.

Because of their decades of experience, Hockenbergs is also able to offer a wide range of previously owned equipment which they refurbish in-house. “It helps for those that need to get functional pieces while keeping costs down,” says Tom Jr., “and we provide a full warranty. Customers will trade in big appliances, looking to upgrade and we clean them up and get them ready for re-use.”

Listen, I will probably never have an immersion circulator, but if I did, I would call these folks. I didn’t get a chance, but I should have asked, “Good grief, is there anything you guys don’t do?”

But I really think the team (and it’s weird, isn’t it, that they actually work as a team?) would have said that providing so many options for customers allows Hockenbergs to keep up with such a sous vide today, farm-to-table tomorrow kind of industry. Such a rich history of experience means that they will help their customers adapt to the next big thing, whatever that may be. What is it anyway? No seriously, what is it, because I’m pretty sure my husband is going to want one.



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Viva La Tomato!

by Charles Schlusell, photo by Jacob Herrman

I'm sure many of you are like me in my anticipation of the first signs of spring; the chirping of birds and the first tender green shoots peeking out of the ground signal an end to the cold, dreary clutches of old man winter. These warm sun drenched days create a tangible expectation of all the good things to shortly come our way.

Of course, I speak of the glorious event that causes all true food aficionados like us to tremble in excitement with a slightly wild glint in our eyes as we begin our first trek to the cornucopic extravaganza known as the farmer's market. It begins slowly as the season first brings us asparagus, radishes and onions. Then each week builds as more and more notes are added to the veggie symphony til we reach the penultimate moment of summer, the crescendo – when the first tomatoes of the season are harvested – and we all celebrate “Tomato Day”! What, you say you don't celebrate this holiday? Well maybe there isn't a national holiday yet, but I say we start one and celebrate all things ‘tomatoey’.

“As wonderful as a BLT is, the unaccompanied tomato sandwich itself is an even better way to allow the tomato flavors to shine through.”

My journey may be similar to yours; growing up in Nebraska I always appreciated the wonders of the succulent, juicy, sweet, delicious red orbs growing in the backyard. Then one day, when I was all of eight or nine years of age, I was attending my cousin's wedding reception. I spotted a dish that my world traveling great Aunt Hilda had prepared. It consisted of fresh tomatoes marinated in garlic, oregano and all kinds of flavors, and ingredients that looked very exotic to my small town sensibilities. My mom got the recipe and I was on my way to many culinary adventures to come. I've included an updated version of Aunt Hilda's recipe and hope you'll enjoy it as much as I do.

Of course, my favorite way to celebrate is to take the first tomato of summer and do as I have for the last ten plus years. Many moons ago, I was reading *Saveur* magazine's letter from the editor, and the editor described a tomato sandwich I still eat to this day.

He suggested that as wonderful as a BLT is, the unaccompanied tomato sandwich itself is an even better way to allow the tomato

flavors to shine through.

It is simple yet decadent; take two slices of hearty bread lightly toasted,

slather liberally with butter and then with real mayonnaise, add thick slices of tomato sprinkled with kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper, assemble and enjoy. One of my best friends from Virginia and I celebrate with this sandwich each year. We Facetime or Skype as we prepare “The” sandwich, and wax poetic about the rapturous delights of homegrown tomatoes. I dare you to try it and see if you're not hooked after just one bite. Viva La Tomato!

Aunt Hilda's Marinated Tomatoes

Layer in 9 x 13 glass dish:

Homegrown tomatoes, sliced ½ inch thick

2 medium onions, chopped fine

1/2 cup chopped Italian parsley

Mix together and pour over above:

2 cloves minced garlic

1/2 tsp each salt & pepper

2 tsp dried oregano

1 tsp dry mustard

1/2 cup red wine vinegar

3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

Let marinate on the counter for at least two hours minimum and then serve at room temperature. Remember, refrigeration will ruin the flavor and texture of tomatoes.



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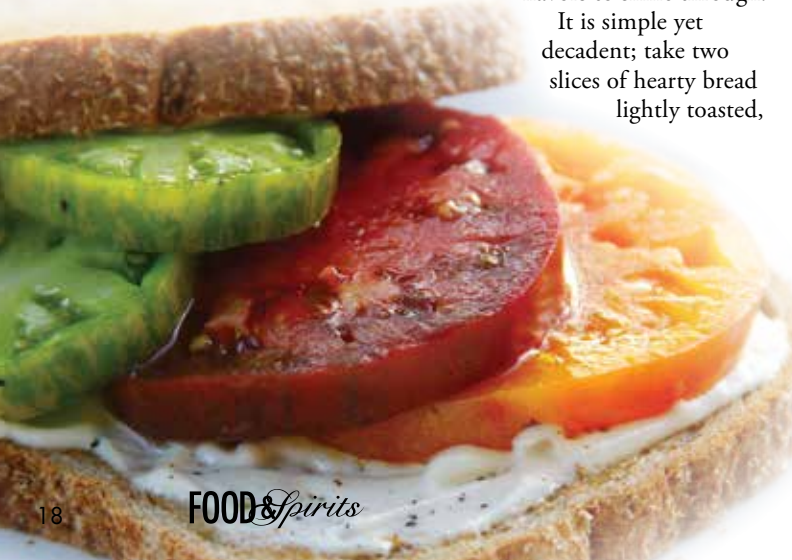


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The Innuendo and The Ole San Antone – two patio pleasers on the cocktails menu at Brix Midtown.
Photo by Lindsey Clements

Spring in a Glass

The flavors of Omaha's craft cocktail scene

by Jessica Clem-McClaren

Along with craft beer and homemade soda, handmade cocktails are making a comeback. Shaken with local bitters and stirred with house made juices, tonics and syrups, variety truly is the spice of the cocktail life. The cocktail has many similarities to farm to table meals; each element has a story that both surprises and thrills the senses, giving the lucky recipient the joy of knowing how

“Omaha is full of talented bartenders slinging some of the greatest drinks around.”

unique this little glass of substance truly is. **Omaha** is fortunate to be near rich farmlands with incredible produce, inspiring creative bartenders to create delicious art under dim lights.

Stone fruits and pear are the winning sweet flavors at the moment, but subject to change as many bars are still creating their spring menus. Smoky mezcal and floral, herby spirits like chartreuse and gin are popular for the warmer months, along with rich, sipping liquors such as brandy.

The following are a few of the best spring cocktails in town, but only represents six of many. Omaha is full of talented bartenders slinging some of the greatest drinks around.

Autumn N' June - V. Mertz

Cozy in the calm of the **Old Market Passageway**, V. Mertz serves some of the best food and cocktails in town. With a reputation for class, patrons enjoy five to eight course dinners that change along with the availability of the fare, currently boasting scallop crudo, chicken roulade pho, and oxtail croquette.

Bar manager **Alex Diimig** is more of a cocktail engineer, a connoisseur of fine spirits who understands how to pair a drink with a desired sensory experience. His cocktail, Autumn and June, was created on a whim for Breaking the Ice, a March event put on by the **Omaha Craft Bartender's Guild**.

The base is Memoire d'Automnes vin blanc sec, an aged and oxidized dry white wine akin to sherry, which is shaken along with pear nectar into a champagne glass. Tying the drink together is a honey and tartaric acid foam, accented with L'Esprit de June, a wonderful liqueur distilled with grape flowers from three wine varietals. Topping the opaque liquor, this foam creates a pillow of fragrance that marries perfectly with the pear.

"Cozy in the calm of the Old Market Passageway, V. Mertz serves some of the best food and cocktails in town."

"I wanted to have something with a foam that was floral," he said. "This pairs well with Memoire d'Automnes, creating an orchard-like drink."

Garnished with a sprig of grapes, the look and feel of this drink emulates a walk through a French orchard with a lover, and is dizzyingly beautiful.

Hera's Gimlet - Jake's Cigars

Gin is the favorite spirit of spring. After months of heaviness and layers, it is lovely to open your palate back up with flavors of flowers and herbs. Jake's Cigars is a **Benson** favorite, and is an interesting hybrid of two bar cultures: one part Tall Boy, one part Pappy Van Winkle.

"With a constantly evolving menu, the bartenders at Jake's enjoy making cocktails with a contemporary take on classics."

In the cigar bar, or 'small' bar, patrons pursue a vast collection of scotch and cigars, pairing each to amplify the flavors of smoke and sweet. The 'big bar' houses the rest of the liquor collection, an entire glass wall of vodka, gin, apertifs and tequilas. Lillet, champagne, fresh juices, and other staples fill the coolers, though Old Style and Miller High Life continue to be dominant sellers.

Jake's is wonderfully inclusive, letting people dip their toes into fine cocktails while holding onto a beer life raft. Above all, the bartenders enjoy helping customers find new favorites and the atmosphere is always laid back and friendly.

With a constantly evolving menu, the bartenders at Jake's enjoy making cocktails with a contemporary take on classics – and there is no more classic a spring cocktail than a gin gimlet. Our modern gimlet is actually a remake of the 1930's style gimblet, three parts gin, to one part lime juice, shaken and finished with soda. The bartender can adjust the sour and sweet to a customer's liking, but in the traditional sense, the gimlet is always a bit tart.

"Gin just says spring to me," said bartender **Linda Lichtenwalter-Evans**. "The Hera's Gimlet is a fun twist on the classic, using a touch of Velvet Falernum for the sweetness and some black pepper syrup to add a little spice."

Refreshing and with a little heat from the pepper, this drink is a perfect cocktail to enjoy slowly over conversation. "We finish it with a little champagne for a refreshing effervescence and a crack of black pepper for aroma."

Cheers to that.

"We really want people to enjoy being outside and have cocktails that are great to sip."

The Innuendo and The Ole San Antone - Brix Midtown

"The focus of the spring menu is the patio," said **Brady Hess**, bartender at Brix Midtown, as he twisted a lemon over my drink. "We really want people to enjoy being outside and have cocktails that are great to sip."

Two "patio-pleasers" that he made for us are sure to be Brix mainstays: The Innuendo and The Ole San Antone.

Light and airy, The Innuendo is pale pink, with an accent of yellow from the lemon and served in a coupe. Pleasing to men and women, this drink is no Zima.

"It has Chartreuse, Luxardo (maraschino liquor), pisco and lemon juice," said Hess. "It's wonderful to sip, but is stronger than you think!"

Assertive in a rocks glass, The Ole San Antone is strong enough for a man, but made for a woman who likes mezcal.

"We had a customer come in and request it," said Hess. "It turned out to be something that is extremely versatile for people who have stuck with one kind of liquor. It's great for whisky drinkers who want to try something new."

With two types of tequila, including smoky mezcal, as the base, Aperol is the light shadow that ties the flavors together. True to the mission, these drinks are unique to Brix and perfect to sip on a warm spring day.

Hera & Aphrodite - Berry & Rye

In classic cocktail culture, vodka has gotten a bad rap. Flavorless (for the most part), and boring but abrasive, this spirit is generally the bridesmaid but never a bride, a compliment to drinks but never the star, and the staple vice of a gal on a diet, the vodka soda.

"An Old Market staple, Berry & Rye is both inviting and exclusive, enticing people to try brilliant drinks."

If anyone can make vodka shine in a cocktail, it is the skilled bartenders at Berry & Rye. An Old Market staple, Berry & Rye is both inviting and exclusive, enticing people to try brilliant drinks with ingredients they have never heard of. With a personal reverse osmosis system and individual ice ball shavers, the drinks at this bar are consistently spot on.

This place is perfect for those who want to get lost in history. Modeled after prohibition style speakeasies, the bartenders are always serious but friendly, dressed up, and wrapped in their work.



The Autumn N' June cocktail at V. Mertz.
Photo by Lindsey Clements



Hera & Aphrodite at Berry & Rye.
Photo by Jessica Clem-McClaren

It is a delight to watch, particularly if you have bartender **Luke Edison**.

"I enjoy making drinks for people who are not sure what they want," he said. "I talk with them and figure out what they like. Sometimes you just create something off the cuff."

The Hera & Aphrodite was my off the cuff drink, and now, my new favorite. A loyalist to the Trinidad Smoke (with 12 year aged rum and actual tobacco smoke), this was a huge leap for me. With a base of Tito's Handmade Vodka, the opera singer of this drink is the Massenez Pear Eau-de-Vie; A light and fragrant pear spirit that absorbs the burn of the vodka. Absinthe, malic acid, sugar and Cocchi Americano round out the drink. Shaken into a coupe with no garnish, I was nearly skeptical of the experience I would have with this naked drink.

"With the proximity to downtown, the stadium and The Slowdown, The Trap Room is the perfect place to enjoy a summer beverage."

If you close your eyes while you take the first sip, you are suddenly underneath a pear tree, biting into the sweetest, softest pear on earth. You can feel the grains of the fruit, and your tongue and mouth respond with a chewing motion. It is an incredible, yet simple, cocktail.

"We use vodka as you would use white paint," said Edison. "We can either tone down a drink with it, or let it be a background that can enhance other flavors."

Powerful and dainty, this drink is yet another testament to the brilliance behind the bar at Berry & Rye.

The Tom Cat - The Trap Room

Remember American Apparel? Neither do I. For the last year the cocktails of The Trap Room have taken over this little corner on 13th and Cuming, making us forget all things neon and spandex. With dim lights, a few tables and an arcade machine, The Trap Room is like sneaking into your older brother's room back in the 60s. Kitschy art, antlers and a record player make you feel nostalgic, and like everyone in the room are old friends from childhood.

Bartender Linda Lichtenwalter-Evans knows a thing or two about cocktails. Known throughout Omaha, she also works at **The Slowdown** and Jakes Cigars, and is a favorite wherever she pours. It was fitting that her drink, the Tom Cat, is one of the favorites in this little corner of town.

"It is a crisp and refreshing cocktail showcasing the wonderful Ransom spirits, specifically the Old Tom Ransom Gin and Ransom Dry Vermouth, which are two favorite ingredients of mine," she said.

With the tartness of lemon juice and ginger ale, and a bit of maraschino liqueur, this drink is perfect for seasoned drinkers and newbies alike.

"The flavors complement each other without overcomplicating the cocktail, leaving a light refreshing flavor that becomes increasingly complex as you enjoy the beverage."

With the proximity to downtown, the stadium and The Slowdown, The Trap Room is the perfect place to enjoy a summer beverage.

"The Tom Cat makes for a wonderful and unique cocktail to enjoy on a patio amongst great friends," she said.

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Harnessing the Harvest

A spring & summer infusion guide

by Mallory Finch



After months of plodding and dawdling, spring has finally arrived. For most, this signifies the end of wintertime doldrums or a fresh start with some new endeavor. The most sacred moment of the green season comes with those tenderest of shoots clamoring up from the black earth, a tip-off to the bounty of fine fruits and vegetables to come with warmer weather. While the variety of green food available can be astounding, availability fluctuates with the season. So how does one capture the best flavors spring and summer have to offer?

“We are inclined to view bitters as a consumable item, lacking the knowledge of bitters in their original purpose – as medicine.”

I thought the answer was obvious. Alcohol, of course.

The simplest means are to incorporate whatever delicious herb or vegetable one seeks to enjoy into a cocktail or punch. Throw some fresh mint in that mojito, muddle some sliced cucumber in that Hendricks and tonic. Keep it simple, stupid.

Then again, some of the more delicate and complicated flavors in the edible world do not lend themselves well to a one-note application. Certain herbs play better with others. In keeping with simple tradition, the most effective method happens to be the easiest: by infusing a spirit base with fresh plant material, one can preserve a long-lasting souvenir of the harvest with minimal effort.

| *Infusion* | a spirit that has been imparted with a particular flavor, through extended permeation of certain fruits, herbs or spices.

There are a million and one applications for these infusions. The flavor combinations are highly customizable, and easily altered. If an infusion doesn't have quite enough of the desired flavor, re-infuse it with fresh materials. If an infusion lacks certain panache, try adding another element. If an infusion is too strong, cut it with more of the base spirit. Infusions are difficult to screw up – the key is using fresh, organic produce and a decent base spirit.

A note on base spirits: alcohol strips plant material of the chemical constituents that make up its color, flavor and aroma, and a higher-proof alcohol will absorb more of these compounds. Cheap alcohol contains impurities, caramel colors and other unnatural additives and should be avoided. Top shelf liquor is not a requirement, but finding a spirit with a good reputation and high-quality flavor will only serve to improve your infusions and subsequent imbibing experiences.

When possible, I recommend seeking out local and regional “micro-distilleries” – generally, a smaller operation means increased transparency in business practices, and support of the craft distillery encourages diversity in a business dominated by conglomerates and international buy-outs. Not all small distilleries produce great product, but there are some fine spirits available in the Midwest to work perfectly for the purposes described below.

Now, on to the fun part: building a flavor profile. When creating a new infusion, I tend to build the profile with three elements: a fresh fruit or vegetable, a fresh herb, and a third part consisting of dried herb, dried flower or citrus. One can certainly add more or

less to the infusion, but this formula finds middle ground between simplistic and overcomplicated. Think of it as three-part harmony – the vegetable holds down that sexy bass line, the fresh herb sings out like a warm tenor, and the dried herb or citrus harmonizes in a smooth falsetto above. Adding the right spirit base will round out that flavor profile into a regular barbershop quartet.

Basic Infusion Recipe: makes approximately 750mL infused spirit

750mL base spirit

2 cups fresh fruit or vegetable

1 cup fresh herb

½ cup dried herb

Prepare plant material by washing, removing any debris, skin, etc. Place plant material in a glass container large enough to accommodate ingredients. Cover material with base spirit; seal opening. Store for one week out of direct sunlight, tasting every other day until desired flavor is achieved. Strain liquid into a clean, sealed container and discard plant material.

At a loss for ideas? Try a few of these seasonal combinations.

Sweet Basil | Serviceberry | Citrus *in a neutral spirit base*

Known by a myriad of colloquial names – shadbush, Saskatoon berry, Juneberry – the serviceberry bush grows vigorously throughout Canada and the northern United States. For a short period in late spring, it yields a delectable fruit, looking and tasting similar to a blueberry. Pair this native wonder with young sweet basil and dried lemon rind in a neutral spirit base to highlight the berry's unique flavor. Mississippi River Distilling Company (Le Claire, IA) produces a corn-based spirit called River Baron – its mild, sweet profile makes it a perfect complement.

Note: if you miss the serviceberry harvest, substitute blueberries to similar effect.

Dill | Cucumber | Pickling Spice *in a vodka base*

Fennel | Citrus | Vanilla Bean *in a millet whiskey base*

Fennel possesses that distinct aniseed flavor – the bulb and aerial plant parts sharing a milder taste than the seeds. Both fennel and anise contain anethole, a chemical compound responsible for both the liquorice taste and medicinal effect of those herbs. To make a fennel-infused spirit, I recommend millet whiskey. The sweetness of fennel and fresh vanilla bean interplay with the sweet vanilla notes already present in the oak-aged spirit, while dried orange and lemon rinds complement its fruit and cereal notes. Koval Distillery (Chicago, IL) manufactures an 80-proof 100% millet whiskey. Bonus: this spirit is certified organic and gluten-free.

Ultimately, a fennel-citrus infusion would be ideal in late winter or very early spring, for two reasons: Meyer lemon and

blood orange. Their complex fragrant flavors really round out the combination of sweet fennel, citrus and grain.

Lavender | Grapefruit | Coriander *in a gin base*

Cilantro | Pineapple | Hot Pepper *in a mezcal base*

The sultry older sister of tequila, mezcal's subtle smokiness makes it a perfect canvas for the sweet-hot combination of fresh pineapple and hot peppers. The level of heat depends entirely on preference – dried peppers tend to play up the smoke in the spirit, while fresh peppers tend to become more dominant within the flavor balance. Use ancho or jalapeño types for less heat, or go bold with the hotter Carib varieties like habanero and scotch bonnet. Cilantro adds its typical *je ne sais quoi* to the mix – use sparingly.

Mint | Peach | Gingerroot *in a bourbon whiskey base*

Sage | Sour Cherry | Caraway Seed *in a white whiskey base*

Rose Petal | Vanilla Bean | Raw Honey *in a single malt whiskey base*

Some classic spirits have effectively bottled the ephemeral, unique character of flowers -- elderflower liqueur St. Germain chief among them – but capturing the classic essence of summer roses can be easily achieved at home. Come June, most roses will be in bloom – seek tea, bourbon and damask types for their intense fragrance. (Never harvest petals from a plant that has been treated or sprayed with chemical pesticides.) Traditionally brandy is the alcohol base of choice in a rose cordial, but a clean, single malt whiskey like **Cut Spike** (LaVista, NE) will elevate this infusion from grandmotherly to elegant. Finish the infusion with fresh split vanilla bean and sweeten with locally sourced raw honey for an old-fashioned, heartwarming liqueur.

| Local & Regional Distilleries: Recommended Products |

Cut Spike Distillery (LaVista, NE): Single Malt Whiskey, Vodka
Mississippi River Distilling Company (Le Claire, IA): River Baron corn Spirit, River Rose Gin

Koval Distillery (Chicago, IL): Bourbon Whiskey, Millet Whiskey, Oat Whiskey

Death's Door Distillery (Middleton, WI): Gin, White Whiskey






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Chasing the Windy City

Story by Jesse Erickson, photos by Brock Miller

As surprising as this may sound, I've grown up in Nebraska. My whole life and, until April, I've never been to Chicago. I know, weird. For some reason I never had the desire to go, even though I only ever heard awesome things. My fiancé Brock more or less surprised me with the trip I didn't know I wanted to take.

Well, our five days spent there completely changed my mind. I fell in love with that city and I'd move there in a heartbeat, if I could afford the lifestyle in which we spoiled ourselves. The spoiling was mostly on delicious food and even better drinks. Considering we're both bartenders, that's not that surprising.

"Chicago: the best vacation I've ever been on and the best drinks I've ever had."

The whirlwind in the Windy City started late on a Thursday night after our flight landed and we dropped the bags off at the Hotel Chicago Downtown. Considering we were staying at one of the most popular drinking hubs in Chicago, it was easy to hit the ground running.

We started off at a weird little country bar while looking for the slightly elusive (if you're an out-of-towner) Three Dots and a Dash Tiki bar. The country bar, which I don't remember the name of, had a rockin' live band, over-priced whiskey shots and a lot of dancing, to which I was not even close to being drunk enough to do. Our shots were taken and we quickly escaped the "yee-haws", "whoops" and whistles.

After asking exactly where to find where Three Dots was, and having bright blue lights showing us the path, we made it around the corner and into an alley where the door stood illuminated in blue. Something I'm not used to in Omaha is lines to get into a bar. That could also be because I work the weekends and my days off are during the week, limiting the line situation. Tiki bars are popping up all over the country – it's a new bar fad.

After waiting in line for a few minutes we were able to walk through a dark hallway, down a flight of stairs, and were transported to a moonless Hawaiian beach, without the sand and the ocean. The décor was fun with wooded walls, Tiki masks palm trees and glistening white Christmas lights. We had plenty of time to take in the scenery waiting for a spot at the bar to open up, but when it did, holy crapsticks!

Their menu is fun and colorful, featuring an array of rum filled goodies. I got the "A Lonely Island Lost In The Middle Of a Foggy Sea" which was made of aged rum, spiced rum, Indian rum, cold brew coffee, pineapple and lime. It was sweet, sour, and nicely bitter from the coffee. Beyond it being a great cocktail, it was served in a great glass – a cute little mug that looked like a skull. Three Dots have a ton of fun mugs, not all of them skulls, to drink out of for each of their concoctions. Many of them pay tribute to the Tiki masks of Hawaii while others pay homage to the tropical fruit, such as coconut and pineapple.

After Three Dots we wandered around downtown, popping our heads into dive bars and clubs, and any bar that had a sign that caught our interest. One of these was Celeste... well, kind of. Brock was craving Fernet-Branca and we couldn't find it. This, by Omaha's standards, is odd. So, thanks to Yelp, we were led

to Celeste. We found ourselves in a fantastic cocktail bar.

For this first night we only stayed there for the one shot and then retired, rather happily intoxicated, to our room. The next night we returned, curious about the interesting menu.

Celeste is one of two bars in the building, both owned and operated by the same people. Celeste is on the first floor, in an old narrow building. The bar takes up half of the floor plan, almost from the entrance all the way down the wall to the end of the building. Their liquor selection is vast and their cocktail menu inspired by the stars in the sky. I'm sad to say that I don't remember specifically which cocktails I had here. However, I do remember them being rather potent in the most wonderful way possible.

Another discovery at Celeste is that it turns into an industry bar after about two am. We met some hilarious and fantastic industry people after their place of work closed. They were all incredibly nice and after a rather long night of taking shots with our newfound friends, we were told about a bunch of other places we had to visit. I suppose my fondest memory of Celeste is not one that you will be able to replicate. It wasn't a cocktail, instead it was meeting people and finding my cheese-loving soulmate who turned out to be a very boisterous, beautiful, lively bartender by night, make-up artist by day, woman. She's a lady that the next time I'm in Chicago I hope to run into again; she made that night more than entertaining.

"If you consider yourself a cocktail connoisseur and haven't been to the Aviary, you have to go – NOW."

To take a few steps back, before going to Celeste Friday night, we spent our evening in Wicker Park, the neighborhood in Chicago that I would LOVE to live in. We began our night at the Violet Hour, a craft cocktail bar that has beautifully crafted and extremely balanced drinks, plus if you're from Nebraska, you're more than welcome. It turns out one of the owners is from here and many of the staff have transplanted themselves from Nebraska to Chicago. The staff was more than awesome. We had great conversations about spirits, cocktails, bartending, life, Chicago and were given, yet again, a very long list of places to check out. From there we took the bartender's advice and hit up the Longhorn next.

The Longhorn is a cozy restaurant that features craft cocktails and some of the yummiest Brussels sprouts that I've ever had. The cocktail I had featured mescal, which offered some smoke, a bit of acid from lime, and agave. It was booze forward, interesting – but in a good way – and definitely highlighted the smokiness that mezcal has to offer, which on the chilly night that it was, made perfect sense to my taste buds.

The Longhorn, as well as The Violet Hour, were both intimate atmospheres and we were ready for a loud beer bar. We headed a few blocks to a bar rather similar to our Beercade, Emporium. It felt like home to me, being that I work at Beercade and was a breath of fresh Omaha air. The bar was huge, with a ton of different options for gaming. Sadly, I wasn't able to get any pinball in because they were all being played the whole time we were there. But the environment was fun, exciting and everyone there was having a good time, which is always an indicator of a good bar.



Three Dots' menu is fun and colorful, featuring an array of rum filled goodies.

There's so much more I can write about in regards to my mostly memorable vacation, but I have to end with the best bar I've ever been to, the Aviary. If you consider yourself a cocktail connoisseur and haven't been there yet, you have to go – NOW. Pack your bag, book a flight or put gas in your car and GO. The menu is incredible and they're doing things that no one has ever thought of before. Brock and I decided to have their pick-three cocktail flights. The first of my three drinks was the Zombie Panda, which has tiny little ice spheres, smaller than marbles, made out of raspberry liquor. That's right, even the ice in this drink gets you drunk. It was sweet and tart and, if I could have those little ice spheres in every one of my summer drinks, I'd be the happiest girl in all of the Midwest.

The second drink I ordered was also fantastic, but didn't even compare to my third. The Thai Iced Coffee is the most whimsical drink that has ever existed. It was brought to me in a classic glass mug with most of the yummy booze sitting on the bottom of the glass. On top of the mug was the daintiest wisp of vanilla cotton candy. Our server ever so gently poured dark rum over the cotton candy, letting it dissolve into the drink. The combination of candy, cardamom, anise, milk and rum, was the only way I could have ended my experience at The Aviary.

After that, we were lucky enough to be snuck into their rather exclusive bar in the basement called The Office. I'm going to be really mean here and keep that experience to myself because you have to go and experience it yourself. There aren't enough words – and definitely not enough space – in this article to sing the praises and the awe of what is the best hidden gem.

Chicago: the best vacation I've ever been on and the best drinks I've ever had. I'm excited to go back and wish I could go tomorrow, but until I do, I hope some of you get the idea. Go drink – skip the touristy stuff and discover the Chicago that I found.



A Zombie Panda at the Aviary.



Tito's Story

Hi. I'm Tito Beveridge and I'm the founder and owner of **Tito's Handmade Vodka**. I'm from San Antonio, Texas. I went to Vanderbilt for a year, then to UT (University of Texas at Austin). I graduated with degrees in geology and geophysics. I got into the oil and gas business and did that in Texas, then down in Venezuela and Colombia where I ran heli-portable dynamite seismic crews. When I came back to Texas, I started a drilling company in Houston, got tired of chasing the buck and decided to move back to Austin.

I did groundwater geology there, got into the mortgage business and it was when I was in the mortgage business that I started making flavored vodka for my friends for

Christmas presents. When rates went up a couple points in the mortgage business, I started going to liquor stores and asking if they'd buy my flavored vodkas. They said "No, go look at all the dust on the shoulders of those bottles there". Then they said that if I could make it where it was smooth, where you could drink it straight, then I might have something.

I tried to get some financing a couple of times and it didn't work out because they said I'd never get my permits; There'd never been a legal distillery in Texas and they said I'd never get a distributor. So, I ended up just taking the money I'd saved up while working overseas and I racked up 19 credit cards to the tune of about \$88,000. I built a one-man distillery, a production still and just got myself into business. I'd go out, make it, sell it, come back and make some more. I was sleeping next to the still and you know, just kind of boot-strapped it up.

At one point we received a phone call to come to the World Spirits Competition. I was fixing a boiler, so I just sent a couple bottles there. We ended up getting the double gold medal – the unanimous judge's choice – and that was up against 72 vodkas from around the world including flavored vodkas. That helped spur things along.

I appreciate ya'll supporting Tito's Handmade Vodka. It's really been a dream come true for me and it's really due to all the word of mouth that we've had. It's all pretty much just been from people going into liquor stores or bars and asking for it. So if you are in a bar and they don't have it, ask to speak to the bar manager. Our distributors are on our website at Titosvodka.com. Thank you very much.

The Garnish

by Rachel Mulder

The ever important game of one-upmanship is a staple in the world of craft cocktails. The bar with the most interesting, the most strange, or the most beautiful drinks has become a title to aspire to – a title that seems to transfer itself to the ordering of the cocktail.

A strong pour and a shot of cola isn't enough, people want the experience; people want something they can Instagram. There's a complex art to making an incredible drink. One has to think about the consistency, the taste, the temperature, etc... Even if these criteria are reached, if the appearance is off, the whole drink experience can be ruined. Presentation is key.

Watching a skilled drinksmith prepare your cocktail is mesmerizing. It's like a dance, their movements are fluid and confident; you know what you're experiencing is truly special. Then, just when you think they're done creating your masterpiece, they add a little embellishment. Garnishing can make or break a drink. Too much can overpower the subtleties of the beverage. The wrong flavor can throw off the balance. The wrong color or shape can detract from the beauty.

“Garnishing can make or break a drink. The wrong flavor can throw off the balance. The wrong color or shape can detract from the beauty.”

Everyone is familiar with the lime wedge on a gin and tonic or the celery in a Bloody Mary. These drinks wouldn't be the same without them. Try replacing the lime with cucumber in a Hendrick's gin and tonic and you have an entirely new experience; still refreshing but cool and more nuanced. Bloody Mary's have been reimagined in dozens of different ways in Omaha alone. Garnishes have changed to pickles, bacon, limes, jalapeños and who knows what else - each catering to a different consumer. The Benson neighborhood has, in my opinion, the finest Bloody Marys in town (try Jake's Cigars and Spirits or Krug Park).

If you're looking for something a little more adventurous, Omaha has a surprising number of progressive establishments with passionate and creative bartenders. My favorites include Jake's, The Boiler Room, The Grey Plume, and the Sidedoor, but go early when it's less crowded to get the full experience.

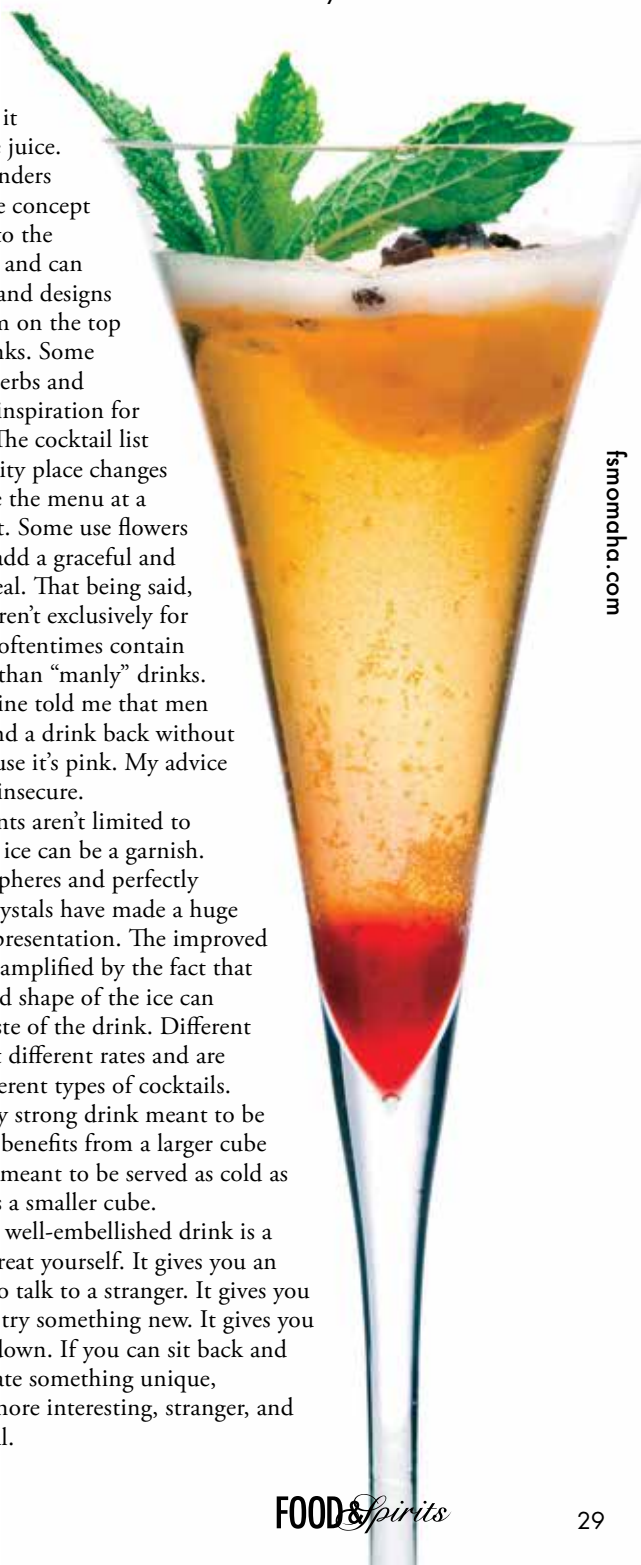
The citrus twist is a very popular addition. Bartenders somehow turn a lame piece of rind into a corkscrew that delicately teeters on the edge of a glass. Using just the rind, as opposed to a chunk of fruit, allows the drink to obtain the flavors from the essential

oils while not overpowering it with all of the juice.

Some bartenders have taken the concept of “latte-art” to the cocktail scene and can create shapes and designs using the foam on the top of certain drinks. Some use seasonal herbs and vegetation as inspiration for their drinks. The cocktail list at a high-quality place changes seasonally like the menu at a fine restaurant. Some use flowers as garnish to add a graceful and feminine appeal. That being said, these drinks aren't exclusively for woman, they oftentimes contain more alcohol than “manly” drinks. A friend of mine told me that men sometimes send a drink back without trying it because it's pink. My advice is don't be so insecure.

Garnishments aren't limited to the rim. Even ice can be a garnish. The popular spheres and perfectly cubic, clear crystals have made a huge difference in presentation. The improved appearance is amplified by the fact that the quality and shape of the ice can change the taste of the drink. Different shapes melt at different rates and are suited for different types of cocktails. A purposefully strong drink meant to be sipped slowly benefits from a larger cube while a drink meant to be served as cold as possible needs a smaller cube.

An elegant, well-embellished drink is a great way to treat yourself. It gives you an opportunity to talk to a stranger. It gives you the chance to try something new. It gives you time to slow down. If you can sit back and really appreciate something unique, it makes life more interesting, stranger, and more beautiful.



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Favorite Summertime Cocktails

by Erik Totten

Like food and beer, the cocktail scene has gone through some dramatic revisions over the last couple of years. Craft cocktails are the latest rage, and that follows a big upswing in the popularity of infusions, bitters and other house made ingredients. Craft is indeed king right now.

But making a cocktail need not be as difficult as the craft scene would have you believe. Making a cocktail is essentially as easy as just combining two or more ingredients to make an alcoholic drink.

“Making a cocktail need not be as difficult as the craft scene would have you believe.”

As long as one of the ingredients is alcohol, you can add anything else you want and voilà, you have a cocktail. That doesn't make you a bartender, but it does leave you with a drink, of something.

With that in mind, here's a list of some of our favorite summertime cocktails to be found throughout the area. They may not have a burnt orange peel as a garnish, but they will still sate your thirst and leave you satisfied none the less.

España – Mojito

The mojitos at España are perhaps the best to be found in Omaha. Made in the traditional fashion, with white rum, limes and mint, the mojitos at España can also be infused with blueberry or raspberry, or flavored with cherry, coconut, guava or mango. These are especially delightful on a warm summer day.

Jake's Cigars & Spirits – The Huckleberry Hound

This drink, or shot, may not be on the menu at Jake's, but I personally have invested a great deal to make sure that all the bartenders are up to speed on this one. Made with St. Germaine, citrus vodka, sour and bar sugar, this works great as a cocktail or a simple shot.

“If you've got a craving for top-notch sangria, Nosh is located very close to the Century Link Center and TD Ameritrade Park, so it makes a great pit stop.”

M's Pub – Love Potion No. 9

M's is good at everything they do, but this simple and delicious concoction is hard to resist anytime I go in. Infused strawberry vodka and lemonade are all this cocktail needs to be to make anyone's list of summertime cocktail classics.

Dixie Quicks – Renetini

I've personally made this one a ton, and people, this is a special drink. Named after Dixie Quicks co-owner Rene Orduna, this cocktail is a hybrid of a jalapeño spiced martini and a grapefruit margarita.

Indian Oven – Mint Julep

Nothing satisfies quite as much as a mint julep on a baking hot summer day, and Indian Oven makes one of the best you'll find in Omaha. They've got the traditional silver cups and they know what they're doing when it comes to making some excellent cocktails.



Love Potion No. 9 at M's Pub.
Photo by Ron Samuelson



fsmomaha.com

Red and white sangria at Nosh. Photo by Lila Anderson



Mint Julep at Indian Oven. Photo by Erik Totten

Nosh – Sangria

If you've got a craving for top-notch sangria, Nosh has got you covered. It's made with their house wine, a Pinot Grigio, for the white sangria, and their red Zinfandel for the red sangria. Then they muddle in some orange, lemon and lime, add a dash of a couple top secret liquors, and top it with sprite for a completely refreshing summertime libation. Nosh is also located very close to the Century Link Center and TD Ameritrade Park so, if you find yourself coming or going to the various events held at those places, Nosh makes a great pit stop.

Salt 88 – Omaha Ice Water

Deceptively simple and totally refreshing. Bombay Sapphire, vodka, lime juice and lemon lime soda make this great summertime cocktail. As if that's not enough, they've got one of the biggest and most spacious decks in all of Omaha.

Pitch – The Sure Thing

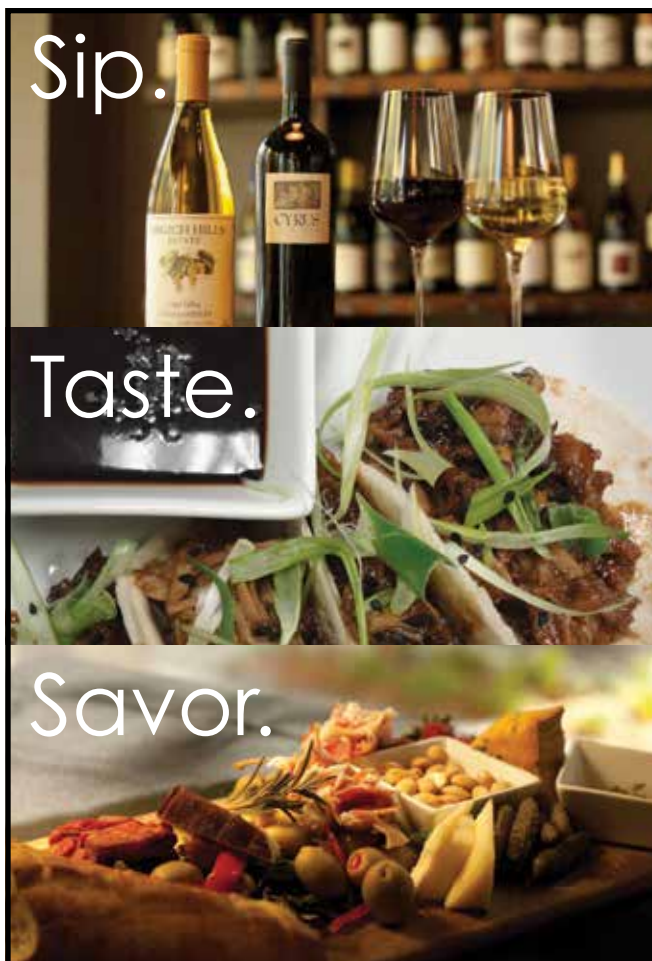
This beauty is created with muddled basil, jalapeño, Tito's vodka, fresh lemon juice and sparkling water. With its subtle combination of fire and ice, this is a crowd pleaser on any summer night.

Rose & Crown – anything with two ingredients

They make their drinks exceedingly stiff here and sometimes that is exactly what is called for. Keep it short and you will be rewarded. While their deck isn't as large as Salt's, Rose & Crown also has a great deck that's swaddled in the trees.



The Sure Thing at Pitch. Photo by Jeremy Estill



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The *Craft* of the Bar

by Binoy Fernandez



Cocktails have always been big. Maybe not as big as beer or wine, but bartenders have never been short of orders for a mixed drink, and, understand me, that *is* all a cocktail is: a mixed drink consisting of at least two separate liquid components. The definition has changed over time to become what it is, but that is essentially what a cocktail is now.

Around a year ago I became a member of an organization, the US Bartenders' Guild (www.usbg.org). It's a pretty neat group comprised of not just bartenders, but individuals from all areas of the industry – ranging from those that make the spirits, to those that use the spirits, and all the way to those that consume the spirits. The thing about the USBG is that once you join you get access to the forums, where you can interact and learn from all these people. It's probably through there that I began to see something happening in the drinking culture, something I was contributing to at the time, and something that began to cause me no little amount of concern.

“The drinks we get, whether cocktail, beer, wine, or water, are all products of the craft, but aren't craft in and of themselves.”

I remember it was around Christmas time that I was at home fixing myself a Manhattan. I had left the bulk of my tools at the shop and was getting ready to stir it up with a tablespoon inserted upside down in a round double old-fashioned glass rather than a proper mixing glass. I found myself sipping on my drink while catching up on some of the USBG blogs available through the forums when it struck me: what makes a Manhattan a *craft* drink at one bar and just a cocktail at another? The drink is two parts American whiskey, one part Italian vermouth, and a dash of aromatic bitters. Given two places that are using the same proportions and ingredients, why was it that one place would claim

a craft cocktail while the other would just serve up a Manhattan? Then it hit me: *there is no such thing as a craft cocktail*.

You see, it all started with the USBG forums, and then it flowed into the fledgling chapter meetings I attend once a month in Lincoln. Then I started thinking about those bartenders and colleagues in the industry. A cocktail, beer, glass of wine... even a soft drink, these are all products of the craft of bartending, but that is all they are. *The craft lies within the bartender, not the product*. The more our bartenders see what they do as a profession, as a craft, the more likely they will put together a better experience for their customers.

And it is about the *experience*. You can have the best bartender in the world, creating some of the most delectable and amazing liquid concoctions imaginable, but if that bartender can't create the experience you are looking for, chances are you aren't staying for a second drink. Bartenders have an interesting job: we are part scientist, sort of like a pharmacist, sometimes a psychiatrist, and often a friend. We specialize in moving a very specific drug called alcohol, and I believe those that are interested in getting better at it are constantly working to learn and grow. It's this process of learning and growing that I believe lies at the heart of the craft.

I'm more a scientist type of bartender than any other kind. I'm constantly tinkering, trying to improve both my palate and my skills, pondering new flavor combinations whilst at the same time going back to old established ones. Right now I'm helping bartenders who work in volume bars that specialize in getting beers out to the masses learn about techniques such as rapid infusions, stirring and such, while they simultaneously teach me about how to better spot fake IDs and more efficient ways to manage large and multiple orders. I've begun to see what we do as the same thing: the craft of bartending, but that we specialize in different areas. It's an interesting thing, and, if you stop to think about it, really cool.

The craft of drinks applies just as much to the local volume college bars as it does to your specialized cocktail bars. The drinks we get, whether cocktail, beer, wine, or water, are all products of the craft, but aren't craft in and of themselves. What makes something craft, my friends, lies within the bartender.

Support Your Local USBG Chapter

by Jill Cockson

For the past year, I have been working with many of my beloved industry comrades to establish the Omaha-Lincoln chapter of the United States Bartenders' Guild. For those who are not familiar, the USBG is our domestic branch of the IBA, the International Bartenders' Association. These organizations are primarily dedicated to establishing/maintaining the profession of tending bar through comprehensive product and etiquette training, incredible networking opportunities, access to healthcare benefits, and both national and international competition platforms, all for less than \$10 per month in membership fees!

I first became aware of the USBG a few years ago, and was particularly drawn to the fact that they offered access to healthcare with group rates. In the face of Obamacare, that aspect of the USBG has lost some of its luster, but I have since become obsessed with the nearly sublime networking aspects of USBG membership.



"I have been working with many of my beloved industry comrades to establish the Omaha-Lincoln chapter of the United States Bartenders' Guild."

As soon as I joined the USBG, I also became a blogger on the USBG Pulse site, which is only accessible to members. The best way to describe Pulse is a Facebook page specifically for serious bartenders and industry personnel. Whether you work at a dive, resort, beer, wine, sports, or craft cocktail bar, the Pulse site offers an accessible pool of experienced people who are glad to share their knowledge and advice constructively and free of charge.

A short time later, and still trying to spread the word about our potential chapter, I applied and was accepted to attend Portland Cocktail Week, an AWESOME week-long, education-centered event for serious bar folk/geeks. I am pretty certain that my name, in association with my blog (Bombay Sappho) on the Pulse site, played a role in my acceptance to attend. I chose to attend classes based on the theme of product development, as I was developing

a business plan to sell my pre-prohibition style tonic syrups commercially.

I nearly talked myself out of the trip based on the travel and hotel expenses, but I am SO THANKFUL that I went, for the incredible connections I made there with folks who have become integral in the formation of my tonic company, **Rabbit and Turtle Beverage Corp.** One of these connections has resulted in a reference to my product in *Saveur* magazine out of Brooklyn, NY. The same connection resulted in the demoing of my product to a national chain restaurant looking to expand their craft cocktail program. The gears are turning to feature my product, **Colonel Jesse's Small Batch Tonic**, on their menu. These blessings have all been afforded to me as a result of my USBG membership.

The USBG Omaha-Lincoln chapter is currently in pending status; we are 26 members strong, but need to reach 40 members before our chapter can be officially recognized. Whether you are a career bartender, a beer or cocktail enthusiast, sales rep, or other industry professional, I urge you to invest the very small amount in yourself to become a USBG member today. If you are interested in becoming a member, or simply want more information, go to USBG.org, or e-mail me at jillcockson@gmail.com.



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Babysitting After Midnight

by Jesse Erickson

Welcome, dear reader, to the newest column in *Food & Spirits Magazine*, *Babysitting After Midnight*. You might ask, “Why is it called that?” Well, having been in this business for half a decade, I can honestly tell you that more often than not, once the clock strikes midnight, the patrons of most bars don’t turn into pumpkins, but instead into sometimes obnoxious four-year olds. I feel like four years of age is a very apt maturity because many don’t like the word “no” when the bartender says it in regards to them getting another drink.

“I intend for this column, with crowd participation, to be about the life of a bartender.”

Sometimes those cute little rascals don’t know how to maintain bodily functions, such as how to vomit in the appropriate place (and in case you were wondering, a urinal is not one of those appropriate places, even though it does indeed flush). With that being said, I intend for this column, with crowd participation, to be about the life of a bartender, and that of the patron. If you ever have questions about anything bar related, please ask by e-mailing me at editorial@fsmomaha.com – you’ll help me fuel this column to greatness.

Now, onto the nitty gritty... what I’m about to write about is currently in the forefront of my mind, because it just happened. Hitting on your bartender 101. Whether or not you’re sober or drunk, be prepared for these outcomes. It’s not 100 percent of the time, but it is usually the case. In all honesty, hit on us all you

want, we’re flattered, no matter the severity of your drunkenness, but please don’t be excessive... that’s not cute. If we’re nice enough to tell you our names, please don’t stand at the bar yelling at us, hoping to have a “real” conversation with us. We’re working. We make money because we’re working, plus we can’t run away from you, we’re stuck behind the bar all day or night. A casual “how’s your night going” or “you look very pretty/beautiful/handsome/cute tonight” is always appreciated.

Keep in mind however, that hitting on any given bartender does not warrant you a discount or a free drink. You’re very, very lucky if the bartender hooks you up at any time. Just because you hit on your bartender does not mean they are indebted to you. We work in the service industry, we HAVE to be polite, which means our interest in your casual conversation does not mean we are interested in going out with you. However, at times that might not be the case, and your bartender totally wants to hang out with you outside of work. If that’s the case, they will let you know.

When in doubt, give the bartender your number. Most of us don’t give out our digits on the job. From experience, the best way to get your hands on a bartender’s secretive phone number is to coincidentally run into them when they’re off the clock. When I say *coincidentally*, that’s what I actually mean. Please don’t stalk your bartenders; That’s the easiest way to get banned from your favorite watering holes. Feel free to approach and start a casual conversation about that one time they were tending bar and you found them attractive or funny or whatever reason why you want to hang out with them. It took my soon to be husband a while to figure out I was hitting on him when we were on the same side of the bar... but he figured it out, hence the beautiful ring he put on my finger.

With that being said, if you see a ring on that special finger, more than likely it's real and they're in a serious relationship. I know, there are some of us that wear fakes, but even then take it as a sign that we don't want to date one of our customers. I'm sure you're a really rad person, and who knows maybe in the future when you coincidentally bump into them when they're not working, they'll be interested – or maybe not. Take their disinterest with grace because I'm sure they were still flattered.

“The best way to get your hands on a bartender's phone number is to coincidentally run into them. When I say *coincidentally*, that's what I actually mean.”

The relationship world within bartending is rather interesting. Of all of the bartenders I know that are in relationships, the majority are dating someone that has also worked or is still working in the industry. Our hours are weird, so it helps when our significant others are on the same time schedule. Most of us don't get home until four o'clock in the morning, so it's nice and convenient when our “person” is also getting home at the same time. We're basically vampires of the non blood-sucking variety. We work all night, go to bed when most of humanity is waking up and we wake up when normal human life is about to get off work. However, if you want to attempt a relationship with one of our kind, we'll try to see daylight if we really like you. There is always hope.

I'm sure I missed many aspects of hitting on your bartender 101, but I'm sure you get the gist. I'm also excited and honored to be writing this column. I mentioned before that if any of you awesome *FSM* readers ever have questions about bar life, bartending, anything to do with the bar world, please ask! The questions and even concerns you have will help me develop *Babysitting After Midnight* to a vibrant future. I'm very much so looking forward to reading your e-mails!

Quick Review:

- *Don't be excessive.* Once, maybe twice you can hit on your bartender before that want to swat you away like a fly.
- *Just because we told you our names does not mean you get to yell it trying to get a drink.* Patience is a virtue; it's more impressive you if wait and say “thank you (insert bartender's name here).” This will also score you major brownie points.
- *We don't give out our numbers.* Be the brave, awesome soul you are and put yourself out there. Give us your number. Maybe you'll wake up to a nice text from the bartender. Or maybe not.
- *DON'T STALK! Period.*
- *If you hear the words “boyfriend”, “girlfriend”, “significant other”, etc. coming out of our mouth, we're taken, and we're probably not going to date you anytime soon.* If you bravely still try to give us your digits, don't be upset when there's no phone call or text.
- *We're night owls;* be prepared if we do want to hang out. Our schedule is basically the exact opposite of most people. It's tough to date us, partially, because of that very reason.

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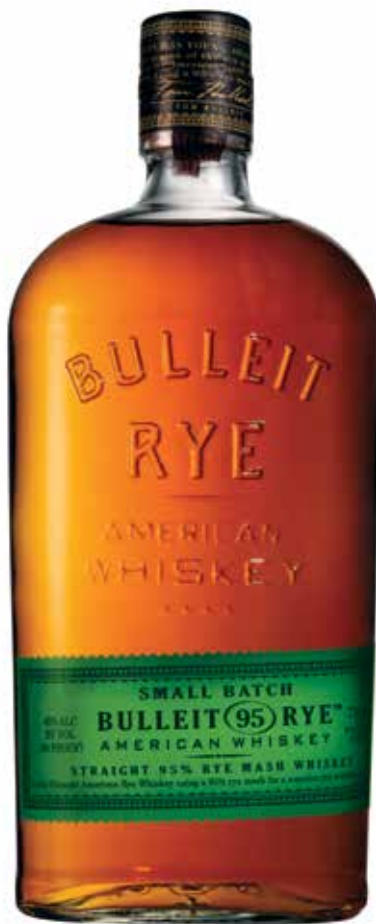
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It's time to dine



One Bourbon, One Scotch, *and* One Beer

by Dylan Thaemert

Welcome to my new George Thorogood-inspired column, where instead of drinking alone/by ourselves, we will discuss various issues facing consumers and producers in the booze industry today. Quality over quantity is our mantra and the format will be loosely based on my three favorite types of alcohol: bourbon, scotch, and beer. As this column is a gateway for me to have a new way to think and talk about spirits, my first theme will be the gateway itself.

When I say gateway, I'm talking about products that can help usher consumers of alcohol out of comfortable, basic, marketing-based purchasing decisions into realms of more quality and variety of flavor. It's not as simple as this = bad and that = good; It's a

balance of what product deserves your hard-earned dollar and how good of an experience it is going to provide.

Now, admittedly some people, like the character in Thorogood's song, drink to numb their interior pain. This is not the kind of drinking we're talking about and alcohol should not be used as a medicine. If you or someone you know is experiencing this issue, I encourage you to seek help from outside the liquor industry. We're looking for quality over quantity, even if it costs a bit more, and we're looking to give our money to a company who has earned it by making a quality product, not bought it with marketing and name recognition. Let's talk about how to do that.

We'll start with beer. If you watched television from seven to 10 pm last night, you could be forgiven for thinking there are only six or seven different beers to choose from. Go to the liquor store and you will see there are dozens of brands of beer that don't have money in their budget for television advertising. Instead of using "the most interesting man in the world" or a limo full of babes having an absurdly good time, these smaller brands communicate with attractive packaging, and ultimately, the quality of what's in their can or bottle. Brands without big advertising budgets don't have the opportunity to remind you about their product everywhere you turn (TV, sporting events, billboards, magazine and newspaper ads) so they have to rely on the quality of their product to grow their reputation and keep customers coming back.

"The Friek from Odell is a tart Belgian-style ale brewed with cherries."

So what beer brands keep me coming back? Our neighbors in Colorado have a booming craft beer scene, with breweries and brewpubs in nearly every city. Two of my favorites are Great Divide and Odell. Both companies present themselves with attractive, distinctive packaging, offer creative and seasonal beers alongside their yearlong offerings, and rarely miss when they try something new and different. The Friek from Odell is a tart Belgian-style ale brewed with cherries. It is sweet and effervescent, almost like a sparkling white wine, but loaded with cherries. Their flagship IPA is the gold standard of American India Pale Ales, it is hoppy, floral, full-bodied, and delicious. Great Divide's Yeti series of Russian Imperial Stouts is a rotating menu of chocolate, espresso, and oak aged stouts that are wonderfully thick, bold, and warming treats for the colder months.

I also like to drink local and Belgian beers. The Belgians have been making beer for hundreds of years, and in that time they have figured out a thing or two about how to make a delicious beer. Delirium Tremens and Petrus are both life changers in terms of flavor and value. We have several breweries here in Nebraska that have not been up to the task quite as long, but have been churning out some pretty promising results, and it's fun to keep tabs on what they are up to. Zip Line, Lucky Bucket, and Nebraska Brewing Co. all make a variety of quality beers that are available at many bars and liquor stores.

"Bulleit has seen its popularity soar over the past five years. It has very attractive, distinctive packaging and is marketed as a 'small batch' product."

So are you "up for anything?" Then how about making a decision to try something new, craft, or local? The cost is typically the same, or slightly higher, for a glass in a bar or a six pack at the shop, and the experience of giving your palate something new and different to chew on is well worth the extra money. Trying something completely random can be fun but when in doubt, ask your bartender or shopkeeper what they like. More times than not they will have experience and opinions that can help you make a good decision.

Bourbon is a similar story. There are so many more options appearing on the shelf that it can be overwhelming. But people want to branch out. Sure, Jack and Cokes will do the job, but all that sugar masks the flavor of the booze you're drinking. People are starting to realize that when made well, this stuff is good and can be enjoyed on its own or with a couple cubes of ice.

Bulleit is a brand that makes a bourbon and a rye that has seen its popularity soar over the past five years. It has very attractive, distinctive packaging and is marketed as a "small batch" product. This term is both ubiquitous and meaningless in the whiskey industry today. It literally has no legal definition, and make no mistake; the batches being churned out at the Bulleit distillery that straddles the Kentucky-Indiana border are about as large as they come. It's important not to become too swayed by this kind of marketing when searching for a quality product. Jim Beam, for example, recently released their Jim Beam Small Batch and Signature Craft editions despite the existence of their very successful small batch collection (Knob Creek, Basil Hayden's, Baker's, Booker's). When I asked why the need for another series of whiskeys under this moniker, a representative of Jim Beam's answer was simple. To capitalize on the obsession with "craft" and "small batch" products to consumers who don't associate the already-existing small batch collection with Jim Beam.

"Elijah Craig is made at Heaven Hill distillery, one of Kentucky's biggest and oldest producers of bourbon."

Age statements are perhaps a better indicator of quality, but they are becoming more rare as the demand for bourbon (and whisky in general) increases globally and the old stocks continue to dry up. Elijah Craig 12 year old is probably my favorite bourbon for the money. It is made at Heaven Hill distillery, one of Kentucky's biggest and oldest producers of bourbon and it usually can be had for about \$27.

The other side of this coin is the rise in true "craft" distillers. These are smaller, independent companies whose products sell more on a basis that they are truly small batch and handmade, often with hand-numbered labels, and no marketing at all. While attractive, my experience with the majority of these products has been overwhelmingly negative. I won't name names in this case but the products I've tried tend to be spirity, thin, and young. I don't know if it's the massive difference in resources between the smaller companies and the giant distillers that causes the gap in quality to be so large, but they certainly have not caught up yet in that respect. Don't pay extra for something that looks and claims to be super-authentic and expect that your extra money will equal extra quality.

I'm almost out of room for this issue so I'll just mention one quick note about scotch to hopefully get you thinking on your quest for quality drinking. Age statements, as I said, can be an indicator of maturity and quality, but they can also be misleading. Many more high quality scotches are being released without an age statement simply because there isn't enough older whisky to guarantee that every drop is at least 10, 12 or 15 years old, so they mix in some younger whisky. Some of these can be quite good while something that's much older might carry a very steep price tag that its juice cannot live up to, So buyers beware.

Until next time, good luck on your journey.

The Modern Lemonade Stand

story and photo by Linda Lichtenwalter-Evans

I am sure we have all worked a lemonade stand growing up with friends of ours. Mine consisted of Kool-Aid brand refreshments, whatever my friends and I could find scattered in the kitchen cupboards. We would sit and, if we were lucky, someone coming home for lunch or a jogger on our path would stop to grab a little paper cup of sugary lemonade (or whatever flavor we found). Needless to say, it was nothing special and certainly not fresh, but we were cute kids, so we would make a couple bucks (literally, probably \$2-3 each).

Now I can say I no longer drink those overly sweet powdered beverages. I strictly make my citrus drinks from scratch and have been able to play around with adding different flavors to my drinks. I have come to realize that those citrus drinks, though delicious on their own, don't have to be boring. Why not jazz them up a bit? All it takes is some citrus juice, infused syrup and a little enthusiasm.

"Citrus drinks, though delicious on their own, don't have to be boring. Why not jazz them up a bit? All it takes is some citrus juice, infused syrup and a little enthusiasm."

First, let's talk about the main ingredient, citrus. Of course, the popular summertime beverage would be lemonade. There are two popular varieties of lemons for lemonade. There is the Eureka lemon, which is your classic variety, having a distinct tart flavor. Then there is the Meyer lemon, believed to be a cross between the lemon and the mandarin orange. Meyers have a less acidic flavor and slight sweetness, as well as a beautiful deep yellow color.

"Rose, lavender and hibiscus are all readily available in dried form and pair deliciously with fresh citrus."

If you have a sweet tooth, you could also make some orangeade this summer. The common variety found would be the Navel orange, which has a subtle tartness to it. There are also Cara Cara oranges, which have lower acidity and a slight berry note to the flavor. If you want even sweeter orangeade, Mandarins or Tangerines may be your ideal citrus to use, as they have a sweeter flavor and even lower acidity than the Cara Cara. Blood oranges would also make for a lovely, unique orangeade with their slight berry flavor and beautiful rosy color making a vibrant beverage.

Limeade is also a delicious summertime treat, however, with the current lime shortage, you may want to save this one for a special occasion. The common market variety, known as Bearss, among other names (like "expensive"), is slightly less tart than a lemon, with a slight bitter note. There are also Key limes, which are much smaller and slightly more sour and bitter.

Now that you know your options for your base, let's talk syrup. First of all, your basic simple syrup is just equal parts sugar and water, heat up and stir to dissolve and it's good to go. Now for the fun part, let's add some flavor. You can add different ingredients along with the sugar and water to infuse into your simple syrup making your refreshment unique. After you allow your ingredient to infuse let your syrup cool and strain the syrup.

Your additional ingredient amount may vary, depending on the natural flavor strength of your ingredient, as well as how strong you want it to be in your final product. Here, you can add other fruits into your simple syrup. Berries work particularly well for lemonade and orangeade.

Dried flowers are also a nice addition to fresh beverages. Rose, lavender, and hibiscus are all readily available in dried form and pair deliciously with fresh citrus. Herbs are an often overlooked ingredient in refreshing beverages, and they really should be used more. Some great flavors that work wonderfully with citrus are basil, thyme, and mint.



Gin basil cooler

Now that we have covered our bases, let's make some 'ade. This is surprisingly easy. Start with equal parts citrus juice, syrup and water. Now if you like your drinks on the sweeter end, add more syrup. If you are a fan of tart, as I am, add more citrus. I would suggest when making orangeade to add a touch of lemon juice to it, as oranges do have a fair amount of natural sweetness to them.

So, it is just a matter of figuring out what delicious ingredients you want to pair together. Maybe make your own pink lemonade with some raspberry syrup – a summertime favorite of mine is basil lemonade. If you feel like splurging, why not make Moscow limeade with some fresh ginger syrup?

“For more adult gatherings, throw gin or bourbon into the mix for a delicious, refreshing cocktail.”

Hopefully, I have brought you over to the dark side of exciting summertime refreshments. Mix one of these up for your next backyard BBQ and I can guarantee it will be a hit. These are quick and easy to do; they just simply need time to chill before your friends arrive thirsty. For your more adult gatherings, throw gin or bourbon into the mix for a delicious, refreshing cocktail to go with your kabobs on the grill. Or just keep a pitcher in the fridge with one long curly straw for your own personal enjoyment. Either way, enjoy.

Recipes

Basil Lemonade

4 cups fresh squeezed and strained lemon juice
4 cups water

4 cups basil syrup*

Mix all ingredients together and chill for a couple hours until cold. Add ice and serve!

*To make basil syrup, combine 4 cups sugar, 4 cups water, and 2 cups packed fresh basil in a large pan. Bring all ingredients to a boil, stirring occasionally. Once boiling and sugar is dissolved, remove from heat and cool. Strain out basil.

Cocktail idea: Gin Basil Cooler

1 ½ oz premium gin

4 oz basil lemonade

Serve over ice with a basil leaf garnish.

Hibiscus Orangeade

3 cups fresh squeezed and strained orange juice

1 cup fresh squeezed and strained lemon juice

4 cups water

4 cups hibiscus syrup*

Mix all ingredients together and chill for a couple hours until cold. Add ice and serve!

*Hibiscus syrup: combine 4 cups sugar, 4 cups water, and 2 cups dried hibiscus flowers in a large pan. Bring all ingredients to a boil, stirring occasionally. Once boiling and sugar is dissolved, remove from heat and cool. Strain out flowers.

Cocktail idea: Sparkling Flower

1 oz hibiscus orangeade

3 oz Champagne

Pour orangeade into a flute, top with Champagne. Garnish with a hibiscus flower canned in syrup.



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Bebe Mezcal Todo Dia

(Drink Mezcal Everyday) by Lucas Korth

“Para todo mal, mezcal, y para todo bien también.” I’m going to assume most of you chonguses don’t speak the Española, so let me put on my little translation glasses and get really close to the monitor. Ah yes, it means, “For everything bad, mezcal, and for everything good, the same”. This here is a very old saying from the Oaxaca region of Mexico, where mezcal is produced. Mezcal, the word itself, is derived from the Nahuatl word *mexcalli*, which means oven-cooked agave – the plant from which it is derived.

Now many moons ago, in pre-conquest Mexico, the agave or maguey plant was considered sacred and was greatly involved in all facets of Aztec culture. Its importance would subsequently skyrocket once it was discovered you could make booze out of it. Using techniques very similar to modern beer brewing practices, those Aztec fellas would ferment the sweet juice of the agave to create a potent potable called pulque. I am not a worldly fellow and thus have not ever had pulque, but the internet’s best description is, “it is the color of milk, somewhat viscous consistency and sour yeast like taste”. Wow, sounds great. I’ll be sure to put that one on the old bucket list (in that I just vomited into a bucket).



“What makes mezcal special, and very different from your garden variety tequila, is the manner in which it is produced.”

Unfortunately for the Aztecs, they were not familiar with the magic of distillation, and had to wait several centuries for the agave plant to reach its full potential. Beginning in the 16th century, the Spaniards would bring this knowledge, along with guns, germs and that dingleberry, Hernan Cortes, or as he was known to his men, Hernie. My guess is the conquistadors tried pulque and were all, “Holy CRUD, this stuff is hell a nasty. Let’s make some dang liquor out of it, Hernie”. And so, it was.

What makes mezcal special, and very different from your garden variety tequila, is the manner with which it is produced. The best

mezcal is made using traditional methods, basically the same way it was done over 400 years ago. First the agave is harvested and trimmed, leaving the “pina”, or heart of the plant. The pinas are then cooked in an underground kiln for several days. The kiln is a deep pit lined with stone and has a wood fire at its base. The pinas are dumped atop the fire and the pit is covered with earth.

This smokes the pina and gives the mezcal its distinctly unique flavor. Once they’ve been sufficiently caramelized, they are crushed using a “tahona” which literally means “donkey mill” (I made that up). If you’ve ever seen a John Wayne movie you’ve seen a tahona. The resulting mash is fermented, distilled and yada-yada-yada.

Indeed, mezcal is true artisanal liquor, and should be enjoyed properly. In Mexico, it is drunk straight, with no ice or other liquids added. It should be considered like a fine scotch or bourbon, add ice if you find it too potent, or perhaps a few drops of water to release its bouquet. And por el amor de Dios, don’t shoot it. Don’t ask for it chilled. Don’t ask for training wheels. I will personally burn your house down if you do this.

Now that we’re clear on that, I’m going to recommend some brands for you. Well, honestly it’s really just one, Del Maguey. Del Maguey is the undisputed king of mezcal, and they have a large, diverse portfolio imported from different villages throughout Oaxaca, for which they are named. Chichicapa and Minero are my two favorites, but they’re all excellent and very easy to spot; each bottle has a beautiful depiction of the village of origin painted on the label. Do yourself a favor and try one.

There’s another really great saying about mezcal that I neglected to mention before, “From the heart of the agave, and the soul of the village”. I can’t stress enough how cool that is. You are literally drinking a small region of Mexico with every sip in a way that only wine lovers could understand. Even if you don’t like it, you damn well better respect the work that went into it. From el jimador to the el palenquero and all los trabajadores in between, Mezcal is truly a craft spirit. These days ingenuity quickly capitulates to industry, so mezcal is a rarity indeed. I implore you to enjoy it while it lasts.





Beer Chat: Great Beer Fests

by Jason McLaughlin

One of the best ways to throw yourself headfirst into the ever growing craft beer scene is to attend a well-run beer festival represented by some of the best breweries in the land. There are hundreds of great festivals to choose from each year and hundreds

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more are added annually. Most of these offer endless samples in an allotted time, or over the course of a few days.

Although this certainly sounds exciting, a tremendous amount of discipline is required to complete your journey while retaining the memory that you even showed up. A good event will have ample water stations to keep you hydrated and plenty of “dump buckets” to dispose of samples you don’t feel are absolutely necessary to finish. Pro tip: Do not feel that you are insulting a brewer by dumping out a sample without completely finishing it. Rather, think of it as a means for you to try more samples without blasting through your sobriety with reckless abandon.

Here are some festivals I’d like to recommend for your future beery explorations:



Great Taste of the Midwest (Madison, Wisconsin)

www.greattaste.org

The second longest running festival in the country takes place outside on the scenic shores of Lake Monona in Madison, and is hosted by the Madison Homebrewers and Tasters Guild. One of the best things about this particular event is the purposely low ticket sales which translate into short lines and a lot more opportunities to meet your favorite brewers face to face. One can expect more than 100 breweries offering over 1,000 different options to sample. Tickets can be a little tricky to come by outside of Madison and requires mailing a check or money order postmarked on a specific date.

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Great American Beer Festival (Denver, Colorado)

www.greatamericanbeerfestival.com

Possibly the most well-known beer festival in the US, the Great American Beer Festival (also referred to simply as GABF) is absolutely massive in size. Founded in 1982, the event has grown by leaps and bounds over the decades. Last year's festival saw 624 breweries pour more than 3,100 different beers over the three-day event.

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In addition to the endless sampling being consumed by the public, the breweries beers are also being judged behind closed doors by panels of professional judges in hopes to take home coveted GABF medals. This also means all the beer gods are in town, in case their name is called to walk across the stage to receive their award. And if that is not enough to keep festival goers happy, the entire town turns into a beer party outside the convention center walls. Nearly every brewery and craft beer bar in Denver (and surrounding towns) is simultaneously hosting their own separate events over that week. Bring a spare liver and taxi-fare.

The Festival (Portland, Maine)

www.sheltonbrothers.com/festival

Possibly the simplest of all festival names, but it is hardly simple in execution. It's hosted by two of the nation's premier small batch brewery importers: Shelton Brothers and 12% Imports. This unique

craft beer festival is packed full of eclectic breweries from outside of America as well as a few from within our borders. Most of the featured brewers make their way across the vast oceans to stand behind the table and pour your sample.



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Many of these guys hold rock star status amongst the hardcore aficionados. Brewers from Belgium’s Cantillon, Norway’s Nøgne Ø, and Denmark’s Amager pouring in the same room as America’s Hill Farmstead, Jolly Pumpkin and Prairie Artisan is a one of a kind experience. Lest you forget, it all takes place in beautiful Portland.

Big Beers, Belgians and Barleywines Festival (Vail, Colorado)
www.bigbeersfestival.com

Its name says it all. This yearly winter event brings the world’s top brewers – along with their 7% ABV or above beers – to the snowy slopes of Vail. The fest is loaded with the top brewers in the craft industry working behind the taps for you, which makes this a rare winter chance to rub elbows with the legends.

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There’s also a great lineup of seminars available for those wishing to learn more about the craft from the masters. With the ski season at its peak during the festival, there is no reason not to make this

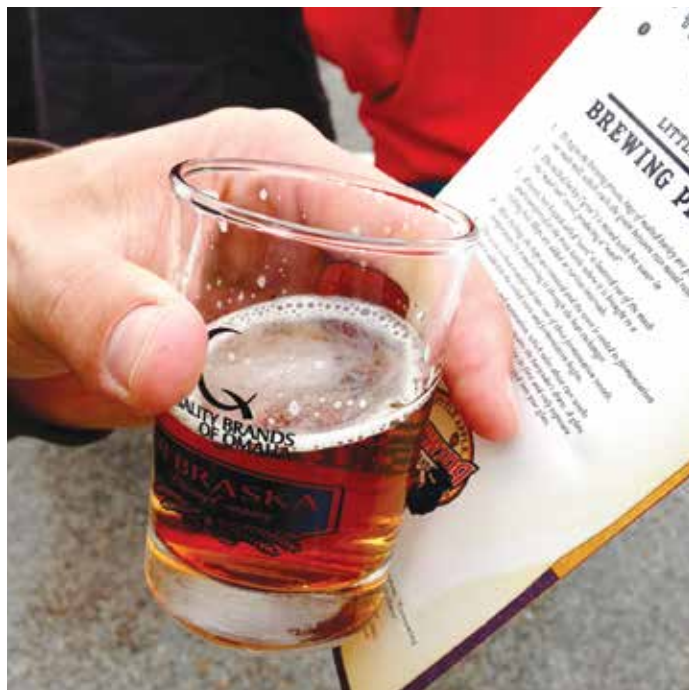
one into a full-blown winter vacation. Beware, the beers are strong and the altitude is high.

Great Nebraskan Beer Festival (Papillion, Nebraska)
www.greatnebraskabeerfest.com

One of the top festivals happens to be right here in our own backyard. In its sixth year of existence, the event has moved to its new massive home in **Werner Park**, home of the Omaha Storm Chasers. What makes this particular event stand alone in our region

“One of the top festivals happens to be in our own backyard... a ‘can’t miss’ event.”

is their ability to draw breweries that are not normally available in Nebraska. With 80+ breweries serving over 400 different brews, past breweries have included Firestone Walker, Cigar City and Crooked Stave – just to name a few. For locals, this should definitely be a “can’t miss” event. It requires minimal travel plans, but be sure to have a designated driver. Another option is to call it a night at one of the two hotels within two miles of the ballpark.



Blind Buying

by John Finocchiaro

Purchasing wine can be a daunting task. Restaurant lists and store shelves are loaded with seemingly endless brands and varieties from which to choose, and it is impossible to know about all of them. As a result we often find ourselves buying blind.

Navigating the ocean of available wines can be, at best, imprecise. The decision making process is like a fork in the road, only this fork has about a dozen prongs to consider. Strictly speaking, consideration should be given to the country of origin, producer, appellation, vintage, the food it may accompany and even the company it may accompany. There are wine ratings as given by the 'experts', complete with ever so colorful wine notes that include such delectable and mouth-watering flavor descriptors as "earth", "tar" and "wood".

"It's one thing to blow \$5 on a beer and quite another to waste \$20 or \$30 – or more – on a couple bad glasses or subpar bottle of wine."

Also, there is price to consider. While one side of your brain asks, "How much do I want to spend?" the other side is probably responding with, "How much do I need to spend in order to get something good?" If answering your own question with another question sounds frustrating, well, that's because it is. After all, we aren't buying a car or a house or even an article of clothing. Whatever we buy will most likely be consumed soon and gone forever. Shopping should be fun, right? Then why is this so difficult?

The recent boom in popularity of craft beers is somewhat similar to the American wine boom of the 1980s with one major distinction: the price tag. Experimenting with a bottle or six pack of unknown beer is relatively cheap. If you don't like your beer selection, you are only out a few bucks and unless you are completely throwing darts and don't know a stout from a wheat beer, this probably won't be the case. In the rare instance that this does occur, simply choose another; It's no big deal.

Wine is different. Wine can be expensive. It's one thing to blow \$5 on a beer and quite another to waste \$20 or \$30 – or more – on a couple bad glasses or subpar bottle of wine. Because the tab is more expensive, you are far less likely to dispose of the undesirable wine than you would a beer. The cork has been pulled and you're stuck with that bad date for the evening. Fun just left the building.

So, what exactly should be considered when making a wine selection? Here is a rundown of common criteria upon which to make an intelligent buying decision.

The vintage of a wine is the year in which the vast majority of the grapes (85% or more usually) were grown and harvested. Its importance is largely overrated. Granted, for expensive wines the vintage can be of significance, particularly in old world wines (think Italy, France and Spain), but in the past

twenty years winemaking technology and viticulture practices have advanced tremendously. Good producers and winemakers are putting out wines much more consistently from year to year than in prior decades. Cool vintages may yield wines stylistically different than warm vintages, but the wild annual swings in overall quality are, for the most part, not to be feared. Again, this is true more so for new world wines (USA, Australia, etc.) than old world wines. Unless you are buying expensive collectibles to be cellared for years to come, you can probably leave your vintage chart at home.

A reputable producer or winery is generally a safe place to begin your search, but be careful. Not all wines produced by such a winery are of the same quality. A good cabernet producer may not be as adept with, say, chardonnay or pinot noir. When it comes to quality wineries, bigger is not always better. Wonderful wines can definitely be found in the smaller, largely unknown wineries. Reliance on the more popular brands may be a somewhat safe place to start, but does not always produce the best bang for your buck.

Wine ratings can be quite helpful but they are far from infallible. For one thing, the rater's taste preferences may not be the same as yours. Remember this redundant phrase: taste is a matter of taste. One person's darling may be another person's dreck. A lover of Bach may find Led Zeppelin unbearable, and vice versa. Equally important as the rating is the actual publication from which it came, as some are definitely more reputable than others. It is not unusual to find good ratings on wines that coincidentally pay for advertising within the same pages of some magazines. Now, isn't that convenient? Although not an exact science, ratings from a reliable publication can be helpful.





“Taste trumps all rules and ratings. If it tastes good, then it is the right wine for you.”

A wine's appellation designation may be the single most significant general indicator of its quality. In nonspecific terms, appellation is the geographic region where the grapes were grown. Every designated region has unique characteristics, and each grape variety has certain preferred appellations that are more conducive for producing better fruit. The majority of what you taste in wine comes from the grape itself, not the post-harvest machinations of the winemaker, so it only makes sense that the grape's appellation is key to producing excellent wine.

There are hundreds of appellations in existence. No worries – learn but a few and grow your knowledge from there.

Pinot noir from the reputable Willamette Valley in Oregon, or Russian River Valley or Carneros in California, or the Burgundy region of France are certainly among the finest. Zinfandel from Lodi or Dry Creek Valley can be quite reputable. Cabernet from Napa Valley is a no-brainer. You get the picture. Become familiar with a couple of these regions, then read the wine labels and find the renowned appellation designations for the particular grape variety you are interested in. Buy accordingly.

Regarding price, it is assumed that the better wines cost more. However, know that not all grape varieties are created equal. Finding a decent pinot noir for less than \$20 is difficult, but spending more than \$20 for a palatable malbec, sauvignon blanc or zinfandel is probably not absolutely necessary. The price for a quality wine varies by grape variety. A knowledgeable wine steward or store clerk can be most helpful in guiding your selection here. The good news is that the quality/price ratio for most wines is much better today than it was a generation ago. The world's wines are better than ever. Today you can get some pretty tasty stuff for \$15 or \$20. If you don't want to spend that much, do not apologize. Discovering a nice little \$8 bottle of wine is one of life's great pleasures. Bargains can be found.

The absolute best method of selecting a wine for purchasing is to taste it. Granted, this is not always possible. Search out a wine shop or restaurant that allows you to sample wines affordably, one that holds regular tastings, or one with a knowledgeable wine staff that can assist you with your selection – you will be glad you did. Trust your palate. Taste trumps all rules and ratings. If it tastes good, then it is the right wine for you. After all, the only palate you need to please is your own.



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402-390-6096
7900 West Dodge Road



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Dixie Quicks

712-256-4140
157 W. Broadway, Council Bluffs



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España

402-505-9917
6064 Maple Street



España is Omaha's only authentic Spanish/Mediterranean restaurant, bar and club featuring over 60 tapas or "small plates". Featuring performances by flamenco guitarists, Latin jazz musicians & flamenco/salsa dancers. Reverse Happy hour (10pm -12am) features \$3.50 glasses of Sangria.

IO

402-342-4856
1010 Howard Street



The restaurant that adds spice to Omaha! We prepare signature, traditional Indian dishes, slow-cooked and made-from-scratch. Each of our wines or made-from-scratch cocktails pairs naturally with our food menu. Open Mon - Sat, 11:30am - 2:00pm, 5:00 - close.

M's Pub

402-342-2050
1110 Howard Street



M's Pub has been serving Omaha's discriminating diners in the heart of the Old Market for over 33 years. Our cutting edge, award winning cuisine is complemented by the Wine Spectator-recognized wine list, and served by our knowledgeable, courteous staff! Make reservations today and join us.

Mangia Italiana

402-614-0600
6516 Irvington Road



In our kitchen, recipes today taste much as they did in the "old days". Long-held customs prevail here in the style, taste and presentation of traditional Sicilian cooking. Featuring pasta, sugo, meatballs and our award-winning pizza. Located 1 block north of Sorenson Pkwy on Irvington Rd.

Nosh Restaurant & Wine Lounge

402-614-2121
1006 Dodge Street



Located in downtown Omaha blocks away from the Century Link Center, Holland Performing Arts and the Old Market, Nosh is the perfect place to gather and celebrate good times. Guests are sure to enjoy our comfortable relaxing atmosphere, diverse wine list, impressive cocktails and food that will please any palate. Open at 11 AM Daily.

Orsi's Italian Bakery

402-345-3438
621 Pacific Street



Located in the heart of Omaha's Little Italy, Orsi's has been family run since 1919 and in the same location since 1934. Famous for our pizza and bread products, Orsi's now features an Italian deli including Italian cheeses, meats, homemade Italian sausage and imported olives.

Petrow's

402-551-0552
5914 Center Street



A family owned Omaha tradition since 1957. The whole family will love this original diner's look and taste. The menu features all the classic staples, from hot beef and pork tenderloin to made-from-scratch pies and homemade ice cream. Open 6am through 9:30pm.

Shucks Fish House & Oyster Bar

402-827-4376
1218 South 119th Street



Shucks Fish House & Oyster Bar is a locally owned restaurant that is inspired by many different areas along the coast. We've been opened for over eight years and now have three convenient locations in Omaha. We offer a very casual environment with Omaha's best seafood. Open 7 days a week.

Ted & Wally's

402-341-5827
1120 Jackson Street



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1110 Howard Street



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402-391-1881
7834 Dodge Street



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FOOD & Spirits
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The Dumpster: You Are What You Eat

by Michael Campbell

Some say you are what you eat. That's fine, I get it: if you eat carrots, you feel good. If you eat a cheeseburger and waffle fries, you feel better. If you eat gluten-free paleo tofu, you feel like a sucker.

"If you tell me what you're eating, I, the great and powerful Campbellini, can tell you where you are."

I'm offering a different take on that old saw. If you tell me *what* you're eating, I, the great and powerful Campbellini, can tell you *where* you are. Kind of like a tongue psychic. For example:

If you're picking wee bits of meat off a boar's head while a farmer, who still has the rest of the boar in the back of his pickup, sits at your table and tells you blissful tales of its former life ("She was a shy piglet, an orphan, but her aunt loved her and looked after her as if she were her own"):

You're at: **The Boiler Room**

If you're eating rabbit sautéed in duck fat after enjoying an appetizer so small it was brought to you on a spoon, but the real reason you're there is because the chef is so goddamn good-looking:

You're at: **The Grey Plume**

If you're eating a \$45 steak:

You're at: **Sullivan's**

If you don't care because the bill is going on someone else's Amex Black credit card:

You're at: **Omaha Prime**

If you're filthy rich but you went to a cheap steakhouse where every dish comes with a side of spaghetti:

You're at: **Piccolo Pete's**

You're not filthy rich but you're politically connected:

You're at: **Cascio's**

You're neither:

You're at: **Venice Inn**

If you're surrounded by autographed photos of famous people from the 1960s in a room that's shaped like the steak you're eating:

You're at: **Johnny's Café**

If you're eating mac & cheese made with a blend of five cheeses you've never heard of:

You're at: **Marks Bistro**

If the mac & cheese is bright orange and has hot dog chunks in it:

You're at: home, you're high, eating out of the pan

If you're eating Mexican food in a restaurant where there isn't a Mexican in sight:

You're at: **Cantina Laredo**

If you're eating a cheeseburger at 11pm surrounded by noisy actors:

You're at: **Goldberg's**

If it's 2am, you're drunk and you shout out the first thing you see on the menu:

You're at: Burger King's drive-thru

If you're eating ice cream with bits of fresh spinach and sage in it:

You're at: **Ted & Wally's**

If they offer to put your name on a pint of it:

You're at: **eCreamery**

If you're drinking a gin and tonic that's brown and tastes like patchouli:

You're at: **Lot 2**

If it's brown and tastes like lemonade:

You're at: **Side Door Lounge**

If it's clear and tastes like straight gin:

You're at: **the Green Onion**

It tastes like straight tonic:

You're at: **Harrah's casino**

If you don't care how it tastes, you're just there to get laid:

You're at: **The Interlude**

If you waited 20 minutes for it because the bartender carved mountain spring water ice into the shape of his own head, then made you say please and thank you before he gave it to you:

You're at: **Berry & Rye**

If you're drinking PBR while telling everyone around you that you were personal friends with Conor Oberst back in high school:

You're at: **Pageturners**

If you're drinking wine from a tap:

You're at: **Brix**

If you're drinking champagne from a tap:

You're at: **The Homy Inn**

If you're drinking sangria out of a pitcher:

You're at: **España**

If you're eating authentic Italian food delivered by a waiter who insists on mispronouncing it:

You're at: **Spezia**

If he pronounces perfectly even though he's from Sarajevo:

You're at: **Avoli**

If there are only two things on the menu but you took five minutes to decide which you wanted:

You're at: **Amsterdam Falafel**

If you're choosing between chicken fingers and fried mozzarella balls with Ranch or honey-mustard dip, there are retro signs on the wall, your server is wearing a red Oxford shirt with black pants and just finished singing a customized version of "Happy Birthday" that had the restaurant's name wedged into it:

You're west of 84th Street. I'm sorry, but I can't be any more specific than that.

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