

The Colchester cocktail at Sable in Chicago



EXTREME COCKTAILS

MIXOLOGISTS CONTINUE TO PUSH THE LIMITS OF INGREDIENTS & TECHNIQUE

BY JACK ROBERTIELLO

If you can find it a TGI Friday's, can it still be extreme? As cocktail trends ebb and flow with the drive to be fresh and intriguing, it's hard to make a splash without reaching for extremes. Which may be how a drink made with charcoal was featured at one of the largest mainstream chains last year.

What seems a bit extreme today will head in one of two directions usually: to become a widely accepted ingredient or technique, or be sent straight to the ashbin of cocktail history—remember drink spherification? Perhaps solidified cocktails seemed too much like Jell-O shots, but whatever the case, some things simply don't stick.

Smoke has: even syrup supplier Monin offers hickory smoke in a bottle, and with many ways to smoke a cocktail—from bespoke barside fires, to hand smokers, charred planks and cold-smoked ice cubes, smoke is now a regular part of the bartender's flavor kit.

As noted above, charcoal has emerged as an ingredient, driving enough curiosity that last year Friday's rolled out a limited time offering called the Black Friday, essentially a Long Island Iced Tea, turned a dark color from activated charcoal.

Activated charcoal is said to have detoxifying effects, but adds little flavor. Many bars have toyed with it—for example the Black Magic Mimosa at San Diego's Madison on Park; and The Batman at Jimmy at the James in New York City, made with rum, charcoal, pineapple juice, lime juice, agave, and mint.

Trash Tiki hit the zeitgeist at a time when bar folk have increasingly looked

for ways to address the collateral waste of drink-making. So often, being "green" seems like eating your vegetables, but Trash Tiki, created by UK bartenders Kelsey Ramage and Iain Griffiths as a pop-up and online platform, demonstrated as they toured the U.S. their ideas for extreme recycling





in the spirit of sustainability. “We’re going to show you that reducing your environmental impact has an emotional and economical impact that should put a smile on your dial,” says Griffiths.

The duo’s recipes use fruit stock from citrus shells; coconut cream replacement made with whey and egg yolks; and apple pulp whiskey sours, among others.

The idea is spreading—bartender Jess Lambert (Boleo in The Gray Hotel, Chicago) makes cocktails with stale bread. At LA’s Honeycut, the Deadly Fog uses orgeat syrup made from steeping avocado pits. Mission Chinese in NYC featured the Sufferin Succotash, made with coffee grounds steeped in Cognac.

BEYOND BACON

There are still plenty of bacon or Waygu beef-washed drinks around, but now, fat washing of a different type is emerging. At Alta in San Francisco, the Lemon Bomb is made with Santa Teresa Rum, butter, lemon juice, pomelo syrup, egg yolk, sea salt, topped with an egg white and lemon foam. At Travelle in Chicago, Corn, Bread and Butter includes brown

Above, left: the White Star Line cocktail at **Fine & Rare, NYC**, is at the extreme high end of price (\$80) as well as complexity; it includes squeezed-to-order grapefruit and lemon juice. For Fine & Rare’s Smoking Old-Fashioned, guests can select the wood smoke—hickory, applewood, mesquite or cherrywood. Right: **Sable’s** Message in a Bottle has dual serving vessels for distinct aged spirits.

butter fat-washed white whiskey. At Buffalo Proper in Buffalo NY, the Tijuana Tea Time employs red peppercorn oil; at the Velvetreen Rabbit in Las Vegas, duck fat-washed brandy appears.

Technological advances like draft cocktail systems have finally lodged solidly in the bar business—for example at newish Parlor Pizza Bars in Chicago, Sangria, Margaritas, Punches and cold-brew coffee cocktails all pour from taps.

With the help of suppliers, other forms of fast service cocktails are possible, as Beam Suntory rolls out their Japanese-style highball machines. There’s a very happy user in Chicago’s Lowcountry owner Pan Hompluem.

“It’s quick and easy, but more importantly, the Suntory Toki Highball machine creates a level of carbonation that makes a familiar product unique and superior. The difference between a highball made from a canned product or soda gun versus the machine is night and day. It allows us to pour the perfect ratio without ever touching a jigger,” says Hompluem.

The machine can produce effervescent water with other brands, making highballs of any type and carbonated cocktails easier to serve.

SLOW RIDE, HIGH PRICES

Add to that category sous vide cocktails, once a demonstration tool but now found more frequently in application. Lauren Corriveau, of Nitecap in New York City, for Boogie Wonderland infuses Maurin Quina with cacao nibs. And at Portland’s Trifecta, Colin Carroll infuses Jameson Black Barrel, Cocchi Vermouth di Torino and Dolin G n p  des Alpes with charred sugar maple.

As cocktail prices nudge higher, some places are taking the leap to include pricey spirits. High-end service can include drinks like what’s available at Sable Kitchen and Bar in Chicago where the “Message in a Bottle” with Glenfiddich 21-Year, Zaya Gran Reserva 12-Year Rum and Bual Madeira is served in a double-barreled bowl on glass tray with crystal glasses.

Creator Mike Jones served the drink in a sphere within a sphere with pour spouts which hold different spirits. Priced at \$75 a pop, the order provides a small sample of the Scotch on the side.

On the menu the “Lap of Luxury” drinks start at \$40. “We have an incredible collection of spirits and people don’t necessarily understand that making drinks with them can bring them to another level,” he says.

And then there’s the illicit; tobacco has once again made a return in drinks, but the big grower is cannabidiol (CBD), a compound found in cannabis extolled for its pain relief properties. At Hollywood’s Gracias Madre, the CBD Snow Cone is made with agave, lemon, hibiscus and CBD. In a twist, it’s featured in the “On the Wagon,” alcohol-free portion of the drink menu. ■



One More Chance cocktail at **Boleo** in Chicago