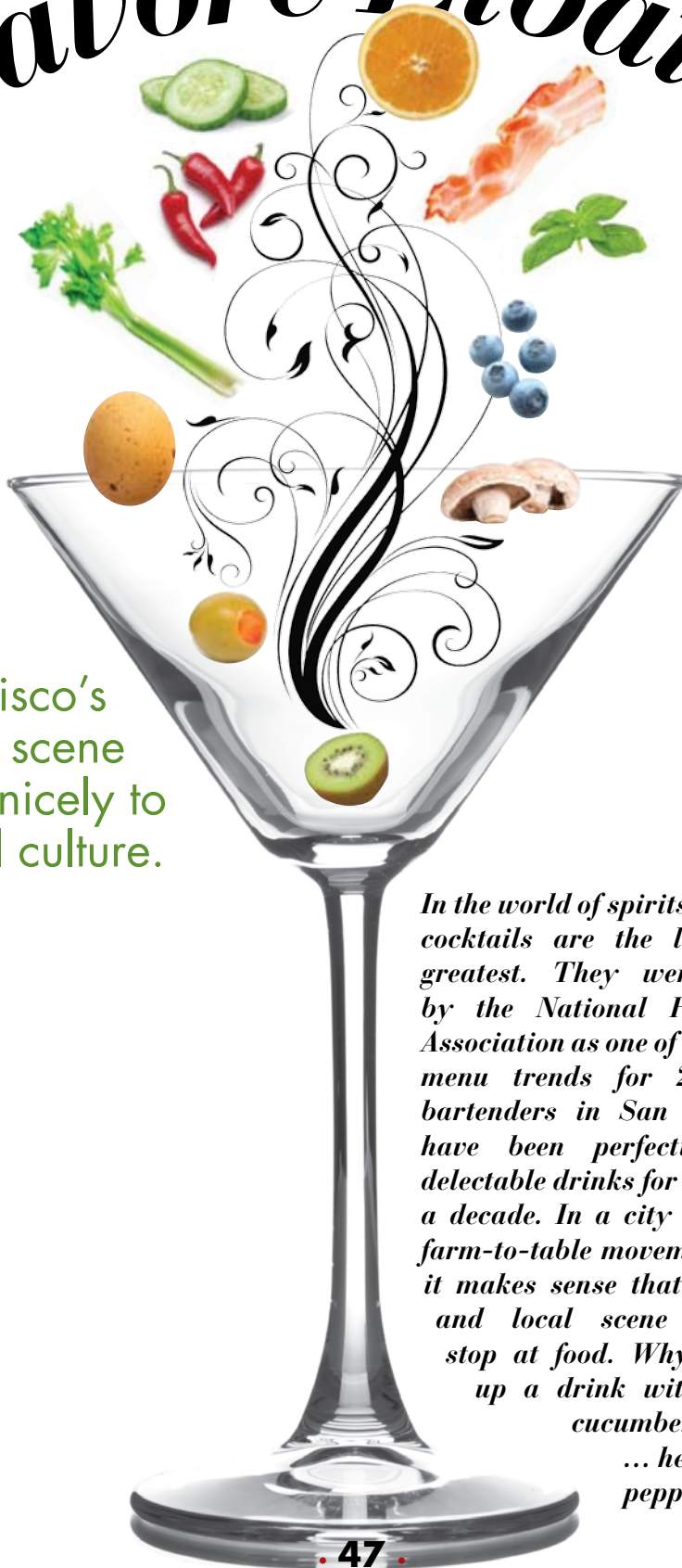


BY TARA TITCOMBE

Locavore Libations



San Francisco's fresh food scene translates nicely to its cocktail culture.

In the world of spirits, culinary cocktails are the latest and greatest. They were named by the National Restaurant Association as one of the hottest menu trends for 2011. But bartenders in San Francisco have been perfecting these delectable drinks for more than a decade. In a city where the farm-to-table movement began it makes sense that the fresh and local scene shouldn't stop at food. Why not mix up a drink with organic cucumbers, olives ... heck ... even peppers?



MIXED-UP (clockwise): mixologist H. Joseph Ehrmann at Elixir, Basil Gimlet at Rye, a Pretty Pepper at Elixir, and the menu at The Alembic

TASTING TIPS

When ordering your culinary cocktail, keep a few things in mind:

- Expand your horizons. Don't be afraid to try something new, and don't let the ingredients scare you.
- Be patient once you've ordered. These drinks are works of art and can take some time to create.
- Pay attention to a bar's house rules (if they have them), and be respectful.
- Try visiting these bars on weeknights to avoid crowds.
- Make a reservation. While not required at all bars, it can ensure getting a table.



And that's what culinary cocktails are all about. Much more than your typical Cosmo, these drinks blend fresh ingredients (think egg whites, basil, mushrooms, and, yes, even bacon!) and high quality, rare spirits (gin, bourbon, scotch, and rum top the lists). The result is a feast for the senses — the drinks are not only delicious but also visually stunning and aromatic.

The people behind these cocktail creations are mixologists. More like scientists than bartenders, mixologists create innovative blends with refined craft and technique. To watch them mix a drink can be mesmerizing — envision a bartender chipping ice off a huge block, putting it in a bag, and smashing the heck out of it with a bat.

Sound fascinating? It is! If you're

heading to San Francisco, don't miss these must-sips, in the perfect sip-through city.

The Alembic

Although The Alembic stands unassuming in the Haight-Ashbury district, its cocktails are anything but. Poured like they should be — strong — the drinks here are a mix of new and old school. If you're a contemporary craver, order up the Gilded Lily, a shining combo of Plymouth gin, yellow chartreuse, orange flower water, and sparkling demi-sec topped off with a flake of gold leaf (See, we told you it shined!).

More of an old-timer? The Alembic has perfected the art of the oldest cocktail. Its Old Fashioned is made with Buffalo Trace bourbon poured over a few ice cubes with a couple of dashes of bitters, a little sugar, and a lemon peel twist. alembicbar.com

Bourbon & Branch

Possibly one of the coolest bars in the City by the Bay, the Tenderloin district's Bourbon & Branch is a process for all patrons. Step one: Make a reservation. (Yes, you need one for this bar, but it's worth it.) Step two: Remember the password you're given to gain entrance. Step three:

More like scientists than bartenders, mixologists create innovative blends with refined craft and technique.



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) DARRIN EDWARDS, COURTESY OF RYE, COLLIN CAROL, AND JENNIFER YIN



Stroll in and be immediately transported to the 1920s complete with rustic wood paneling, exposed brick walls, and lantern-lit tables. This is, after all, a speakeasy that operated illegally during the Prohibition era.

Step four: Order from the bar menu featuring “market fresh cocktails” that change daily. Try the Eva Peron (Fernet-Branca, Carpano Antica, ginger liqueur, lime juice, and ginger beer). bourbonandbranch.com

Elixir

As one of the oldest operating saloons in the city, Elixir has been serving up the good stuff since 1858. Equal parts saloon and dive bar, the Mission neighborhood establishment

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offers one heck of a cocktail, and most of the drinks are seasonal and organic. Try the Pretty Pepper with hibiscus-infused Square One organic vodka, habanero and red bell pepper-infused Corralejo Reposado tequila, Cointreau, agave nectar, lime and lemon juice, and topped off with a dried hibiscus flower. And if you'd like to play along, head to the Make Your Own Bloody Mary Bar, a buffet of hot sauces, seasoning salts, olives, peppers, celery stalks, and yes, even bacon. elixirsf.com

Rye

One part chic and two parts down to earth, Rye is surprisingly modern without the pretension. Think sleek black leather sofas and low dark wood tables, but add a pool table and exposed brick walls. The bar is lined with candles, but manned by some of the nicest mixologists ready to answer your questions — and pour you a divine cocktail. We recommend the popular Basil Gimlet, Plymouth gin mixed with fresh basil leaves, agave nectar, and fresh lime juice. Then move on to The Flash, No. 209 gin, organic simple syrup, lemon juice, fresh kiwi, and plenty of cucumber. ryesf.com

Spruce

This Presidio Heights destination features an oversize bar that blends into the rich chocolate walls. Sink into one of the creamy faux-ostrich chairs and take your pick from the dual cocktail list — classic or house. If you're up for a little spice, try the La Fresa Fresca (Corazón Blanco tequila, strawberry, basil, agave nectar, lemon, lime, black pepper) or be sure to check out the seasonal bar offerings like the springtime Violet Beauregarde (Beefeater 24 gin, violet liqueur, blueberries, lemongrass, and lavender). sprucesf.com



The Alembic



Spruce

DIY

Think you've got what it takes to craft cocktails? Try this delish recipe compliments of Brandon Clements, bar manager at Spruce:

SMOKE & FIRE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Bacchus Partners Reserve scotch whisky
- ½ ounce Qi tea liqueur
- ¼ ounce Drambuie
- ¾ ounce lemon juice
- ½ ounce vanilla-honey
- 3 thin slices of bird's-eye chili (plus 1 whole for garnish)

METHOD:

Combine ingredients in a mixing glass. Add ice and shake vigorously. Double strain into a chilled coupe glass. Garnish with a whole chili on the rim of the glass.