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Inspiring Craft Cocktails and Spirits Ignite the Senses

By Susie Iventosch



FAIR Spirits Café Liqueur Bread Pudding
Photo Susie Iventosch

Ashley Myers from Forge Pizza in Danville, pleased the crowd with Fall's First Fire, a blend of Zaya rum, Drambuie, and a dash of cream with a Laphroaig rinse, all garnished with pumpkin spice gelato quenelles.

Third place, audience favorite and top amateur winners were Matty McGee from Flora Restaurant in Oakland, Rachael Kruse of Corners Tavern in Walnut Creek, and Amy Jeter of Moraga. Their creative concoctions were the Vesuvio Swizzle, the Drunk'n Pumpkin and the Call a Cab, respectively.

Myers' recipe is featured on this page, but you can visit the Orinda Arts Council website (see Info Box) and request these other recipes.

Myers, who has been a bartender for six years, really enjoys her job and says she loves meeting people from all over the world, with different experiences, and always in different points in their lives.

"I've learned incredible things from unexpected people about humanity, business, nature, relationships, loss, conflict, and everything in between from my side of the bar," she pointed out.

This was her first mixology contest, and she said she wanted to make a seasonal cocktail that would make a person feel something as much as taste it. She used a Laphroaig rinse (Scotch whisky from the Isle of Islay), to lend smoky aromatics to a sweet, spiced cocktail.

"I wanted it to make you feel like you were sitting next to the fireplace, enjoying the first fire of the season," she noted.

Myers didn't have the opportunity to sample as many of the craft cocktails as she would have liked.

"But, I did get to try the winning cocktail, topped with mulled wine foam. It was stunning and came from a gem of a bartender," she remarked.

And ... speaking of spirits, I was recently introduced to FAIR Spirits, a unique fair trade-certified brand, featuring just three spirits so far - vodka, rum and coffee liqueur. In order to be considered fair trade, FAIR must comply with about 200 rules to make sure that they pay the farmers at a fair price. This enables the growers to cover their production costs and to make a livelihood from farming.

FAIR spirits are distilled in Cognac, France, but imported and distributed locally by Bay Pac

The craft cocktail Art of Mixology Contest hosted by the Orinda Arts Council in late October was a big success, according to Kal Deutsch, vice president of communications for the Arts Council.

"The event was great," Deutsch said. "The crowd was approximately 250, who braved a few sprinkles. We also had a blow-up screen to show the World Series."

According to Deutsch, the event had great feedback, so a second annual Craft Cocktail contest is likely!

"We had one request that we do one contest in the spring and one in the fall," Deutsch added.

The overall winner was Joe Cleveland from The Cooperage American Grill in Lafayette. He won first prize for The Perfect Pair, a combination of Rye Bourbon, St George Spicy Pear Liqueur, Tobacco Syrup and lemon Juice, topped with a hot mulled wine espuma (froth or foam). Second place winner,

Beverages out of Danville. The FAIR Spirits products are stocked at Moraga Wine & Spirits, Whole Foods and Jackson's Wine & Spirits in Lafayette. Currently, the line features Quinoa Vodka, Café Liqueur, and the brand new Belize Rum. The rum is sourced from fair trade sugar cane grown in Belize.

The quinoa for FAIR's vodka is sourced in Bolivia where FAIR works with a fair trade-certified growers' cooperative. The coop is comprised of 1,200 independent farmers. The quinoa is then shipped to France, where it is made through a single distillation process. The product is gluten-free, and was awarded 96 points from the Beverage Tasting Institute and received their Platinum Medal award in 2014.

The Café Liqueur, is made with coffee beans sourced in Vera Cruz, Mexico and I suggest using it in coffee-flavored desserts, such as my coffee frozen yogurt mud pie, or this bread pudding from Cristian Molina, FAIR's brand ambassador at Bay Pac. (The mud pie recipe will be featured in the next issue!)

"I really am passionate about this company and our commitment to fair trade," said Quasebarth. "We are so pleased to be bringing sustainable, socially-responsible, fair trade spirits into Northern California."

Please see the FAIR Café Liqueur bread pudding below. It makes a fun and festive holiday dessert!

Orinda Arts Council Mixology Winners:

<http://orindaarts.org/arts-news/art-mixology-winners>

FAIR Spirits: <http://www.fairspirits.com/>

Bay Pac Beverages: <http://www.bay-pac.com/>

Beverage Tasting Institute Award Description: http://www.tastings.com/search_spirits.lasso?se=k&kw=FAIR%20Quinoa%20vodka&sb=All&sf=ScoreForSort

Fall's First Fire

Recipe by Ashley Myers of Forge Pizza, Danville

INGREDIENTS

2 ounces Zaya Rum

2 ounces Drambuie

3 drops cherry bark bitters

Laphroaig rinse

DIRECTIONS

Use a small amount of Laphroaig to line the inside of a brandy snifter. Remove any excess scotch. Combine room temperature ingredients in a shaker and stir. Pour gently into rinsed snifter and garnish (on a spoon over the rim of the glass) with a pumpkin gelato quenelle. The relative warmth of the beverage should play nicely against the cold gelato. Sip your cocktail and taste the gelato alternately, letting the fresh pumpkin flavor calm the sweet spices of the cocktail.

Quenelles are beautiful football shaped scoops of any soft dessert item (or any food item for that matter). If this cocktail is served fresh with unlimited resources, a quenelle is its best accompaniment. I tried deep freezing quenelles at home in my conventional freezer to preserve their shape (Forge doesn't have a deep freeze!) and ended up scooping up the gelato with a tasting spoon instead. The flavor effect was the same, so if quenelle making isn't your thing, scoop some ice cream into a bowl and call it a day!

FAIR Spirits Cafe Liqueur Bread Pudding

By Susie Iventosch

INGREDIENTS

6 slices day-old baguette, cut into medium size chunks
2 eggs
1/4 cup firmly-packed light brown sugar
2 ounces FAIR Café Liqueur
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch of salt
1 1/2 cups milk
1/2 cup evaporated milk
1/4 cup raisins

DIRECTIONS

Lightly butter a 6-inch square baking dish. Spread the bread cubes in it.

In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, brown sugar, Café Liqueur, cinnamon and salt until well blended. Pour the milk mixture over the bread cubes. Let stand, pressing down on the bread occasionally, until it is evenly soaked, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Scatter the raisins evenly over the surface of the soaked bread and press to submerge the fruit. Set the baking dish in a large, shallow roasting pan. Add very hot tap water to the roasting pan to halfway up the sides of the bread pudding dish.

Bake for about 20 to 25 minutes, or until a knife inserted comes out clean.

Serve with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or gelato and top with 1/2 ounce of Café Liqueur.

Susie's notes: I didn't have a 6-inch square baking dish, so I used two smaller dishes, more like 4-inches square. Also, I put the raisins in with the bread before adding the milk mixture and I used a mixture of bakery whole wheat bread and baguette pieces. And, finally, mine baked for closer to 30-25 minutes in the water bath.

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