



## Q&A

### THE ART OF SPIRITS

Cocktail, anyone? That's the question Portland, Ore.-based professional cocktail and spirits consultant *Ryan Magarian* of Liquid Relations and Aviation Gin often asks when stirring up new and delicious concoctions. The master of mixing shares his insights from his exhilarating career in the world of liquids.

**How did you become a professional mixologist?** I fell into all of this after college when a good friend found me an opportunity to work behind the bar in Club Med. Interestingly enough, after about a year, the simple delivery of shots and candy-sweet drinks began to wear on me, and I headed back to the Pacific Northwest where I found 'cocktail religion' working with one of the planet's most creative consulting chefs, Kathy Casey, and spending time with cocktail historian, Robert Hess.

**What do you like most about your job?** I wouldn't even be able to list all the things I love about my gig, but what I enjoy most is that I feel I am helping [to] create a much healthier public understanding and appreciation of spirits and cocktails. And how is this done? By applying the same joy, passion and principles of precision, freshness and seasonality to mixing drinks as a chef does to his/her solid creations.

**What is the difference between a mixologist and a bartender?** I feel the term bartender refers to an all-encompassing beverage service profession while the word mixologist refers to a person who specifically practices the art and science of making cocktails—a craft that can be practiced by professionals and amateurs alike. Believe it or not, while most of today's mixologists are bartenders, some of the world's best have never actually taken shifts behind a bar.

**How do you come up with names for new cocktails?** It has always been important to strike an emotional chord with the name of a drink, be it through humor, controversy, stupidity or direct intent.

**What tips do you have for people trying to pair cocktails with food?** I look at food and cocktail pairings in three dimensions: flavor, body and acidity. Flavors should be complementary or contrast in a way [that's] pleasing to the palate. The weight of the drink should, generally, match the weight of the dish (i.e., pair heavy spirits like whiskey and brandy with richer dishes like red meat and heavier sauces; and light dishes, including fish, chicken and salads, with light spirits like gin and vodka). In the case of citrus-based cocktails, the acidity should be crisp enough to refresh the palate outside of being too tart or sweet to pull it out of balance with the acid in the dish. —*Kasey Bowser*

Ryan Magarian's favorite concoction is his associate, Christy Pope's, *South Central Cocktail*. To make it at home, mix equal parts El Tesoro Platinum Tequila, hand-pressed cucumber, mint and freshly squeezed lime juice. Serve it with a mint sprig.