



Raising the Bar



FOODSERVICE *news*
The Industry's National Newspaper



Proudly Presents:



THE SEMI-ANNUAL BEVERAGE MENU MAKE-OVER CONTEST

One lucky restaurant will win 2 days of hands on staff and management training by master mixologist and renowned flair bartender Gavin MacMillan, focusing on:

- accuracy
- speed
- flair
- cocktail synergy
- time management behind the bar
- review of current menu and full menu makeover.

Here's what to do: Complete the ballot below (one entry per establishment). Mail/or fax your ballot to the coordinates listed below. We'll take care of the rest. Gavin will visit your restaurant to help your staff 'Raise the Bar.'

Name: _____

Establishment: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

5255 Yonge street Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario M2N 6P4 Or by fax 416.512.8344

Imagination and Culinary Creativity Shake the Bar Scene

You may have heard the old cliché that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. For many restaurants, service and product quality in the bar represent that weak link.

Through years of systemizing our hospitality concepts, only a few operators have successfully maintained their level of training and product quality. Quite often, it's easier to practice management by abdication than management by delegation. In other words, it's easier to fill a position with someone who has enough skill to get by, than to take the time and effort to train them to be great! The trouble is your front line employees deserve nothing but the best training; they are after all, the first and last impression that your guests will have of your operation.

Back in prohibition times when moonshine tasted like gasoline, juices and sugars were added to create "cocktails" which would make spirits more palatable. Today we enjoy the benefits of technology, which afford us quality spirits and liqueurs which taste great and certainly don't need to be covered up. I have written in the past about balancing the flavours in a cocktail, making sure that a drink is not too sweet or sour, and that the strength of the base spirit isn't wasted with too much mix. Now that we have this abundance of quality ingredients, curious bartenders are becoming mixologists and bar chefs and the level of both service and cocktail quality is going up in more than just the major urban centres.

Someone once said that a bartender was a pharmacist with a limited inventory. The difference is that there are few bartenders who pursue training with the same vigor as our pharmaceutical partners, largely because of how generic the bartending profession has become over the past 10-15 years. Many establishments simplified their systems so anyone could be a bartender, and bartending became a job where you could make great money while you were finishing school or waiting for your next audition. Unfortunately, this change towards simplicity has sacrificed guest service and product quality to the point where a quality cocktail is almost unrecognizable because it's so far from the vast majority of drinks served today.

There are, however, signs that this may be changing, with the recent popularity of more labour intensive drinks like the caipirinha and the mojito. Slowly but surely, the craft of mixology is inching its way back into the mainstream. More than a handful of bartenders have begun recreating cocktails from the ground up, replacing post-mix syrups with fresh juices, re-introducing fresh garnish ingredients which may provoke your curiosity more than a wedge of lime thoughtlessly perched on the rim of a glass. Why did my bartender just grate nutmeg on top of my drink? Maybe a garnish is there for reasons other than decoration?

Recently, two of the world's best known mixologists, Tony Abou-Ganim (The Modern Mixologist) and Dale DeGroff (The King of Cocktails) began taking their message of proper cocktail preparation on the road. Dale's book "The Craft of the Cocktail" is an essential read for anyone who is serious about raising the level of product quality and service in their establishment. They teamed up with Finlandia Vodka to create "Finnishing School" a one-day course offered around the world - teaching bartenders and consumers how to create the perfect cocktail with the freshest ingredients. For more information on when you can catch the seminar, contact Kim Charney, 502-774-7291 or Kim_Charney@b-f.com.



Closer to home, Canadian-born Calgary bartender Graham Warner combines a little flair showmanship with his finely tuned mixology skills, creating imaginative cocktails with culinary precision at the Raw Bar in the Hotel Arts. Warner worked and trained in England where he mentions that high-end mixology bars are plentiful and he felt like he was one in a million in terms of skilled bartenders. Europeans seem to be light years ahead of us here in North America, and back at home in Calgary, Warner has taken what he learned in England to help position himself as an industry leader, where he continues to blaze a trail for bartenders in years to come. Warner cites "The Joy of Mixology" by Gary Regan as essential reading material, and his own personal drinks bible. His Toronto counterpart, Rob Montgomery, of Toronto's Vertical Restaurant has recently begun working on molecular mixology, another concept which has made the leap from culinary applications to the bartending front. Concepts like foams and mists utilizing the different densities of spirits and liqueurs to create solid or gelatinous cocktails may seem like a completely foreign concept, but with a little bit of training, these ideas aren't as scary as they may seem. Check out next month's issue for more on molecular mixology.

The bottom line is that bartenders like De Groff, Abou-Ganim, Warner and Montgomery are few and far between, but these trailblazers are driving the message that the same attention that is paid in the kitchen should also be paid to the bar. There is no substitute for proper training and although not every restaurant will be a high-end cocktail bar, every restaurant or bar should be putting their best foot forward in terms of the products and service they provide. The life of your business depends on it.

Until next time keep 'raising the bar', because if you don't, someone else will!



Gavin MacMillan was Canada's Top Ranked Flair Bartender in 2005. He trains, competes and performs all over the world and operates Canada's Premier Bartender Training Facility, BartenderOne. You can reach him at gavin@bartenderone.com.