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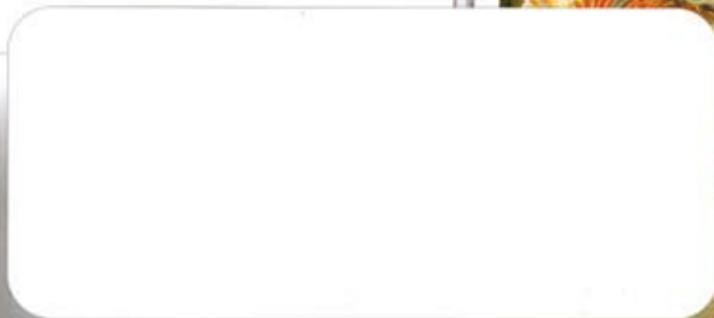
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Exploring trends in cocktails, spirits and the stars behind the bar.



HOLIDAY CHEERS! Tequila for Bourbon and Cognac Lovers

"There's a Tequila for everyone," says Cameron Bogue, Bar Manager of Bar Pleiades at The Surrey (the.surrey.com) hotel in New York City. For Bourbon and Cognac enthusiasts, Bogue recommends añejo or extra añejo Tequilas, which are aged for at least one year in French or American oak barrels, and often offer smoke, vanilla, wood and spice notes.

How best to enjoy añejo Tequilas? At Providence restaurant in Los Angeles, resident mixologist Zahra Bates serves it as a sipping Tequila; Bates raves about the "distinctively different" Riazul Añejo Tequila, which is aged for two years in French white oak barrels that formerly held Cognac or Brandy. Bogue favors sipping, but also suggests mixing añejos in classically inspired cocktails that call for aged spirits, such as an Añejo Old Fashioned or Añejo Manhattan; his añejo of choice is Casa Noble's French white oak single barrel Tequila. And for those who have a sweet tooth, pair a snifter with crème brûlée, pecan pie or—for a grand finale on Thanksgiving—pumpkin pie.

—LILLY KUWASHIMA

A SCOOP OF SCOTCH, SIR?

The trend started with boozy JELL-O shots, and migrated to liquor-infused cupcakes. Now, alcohol has become the flavor-du-jour for ice cream, too.

The forerunner is San Francisco's Humphrey Slocombe (humphreyslocombe.com), where the most popular ice cream flavor is Secret Breakfast, a concoction of ice cream with Bourbon and toasted cornflakes, incorporating so much Jim Beam that the scoops always run soft. Beer-based ice creams also are favorites, with flavors such as Collaborative Evil Ale, Eight Ball Stout, Guinness Gingerbread, and Russian Imperial Stout. Sorbet flavors include Jesus Juice (red wine and Coke); and a Limoncello-spiked Italian Ice.

In Scottsdale, Ariz., Lee's Cream Liqueur Ice Cream Parlor (leescream.liqueur.com), features house-made premium ice cream with about 5% alcohol (yes, ID required). Flavors include Appletini, Long Island Iced Tea, Piña Colada and Champagne.

Meanwhile, in Portland, Ore., Fifty Licks (954-294-8868) sells Single Malt Scotch ice cream from a mobile ice cream cart, as well as Slabtown Whiskey, made with small-batch hooch from local House Spirits Distillery. (When the boozy stuff isn't available, try their carbonated Red Bull Cola ice cream, or Maple with Bacon.)

New Yorkers also have locally inspired flavors from ice cream delivery service MilkMade (milkmadeicecream.com), such as Frozen Hot-Toddy, made with Bourbon from Tuthilltown, an upstate New York distillery, and Twist & Stout, made with Sixpoint Brewery's Otis Oatmeal Stout.

And it's not just ice cream shops, either: at Coi (coirestaurant.com), an upscale restaurant in San Francisco's financial district, a Frozen Mandarin Sour on the dessert menu relies on a mandarin-vodka gel for punch. Now that's something worth screaming about.

—KARA NEWMAN



TREE OF LIFE

The spirit of Africa's marula fruit goes far beyond the glass.

The marula tree has figured strongly in African lore for centuries—as aphrodisiac, as medicine, as good luck charm for hopeful parents. A tall, umbrella-shaped tree which reaches heights of over 50 feet, the marula bears a small fruit, the size of a plum, which is packed with Vitamin C and delicious lychee-like flavor. It has been eaten by African tribespeople for thousands of years, and has also been brewed into beer. Migrating elephants are drawn to the fermenting fruit too, though tales of drunken animal rampages are more fiction than fact. Most people outside of Africa know the fruit as the key ingredient to Amarula Cream, straight up, on the rocks, or mixed into a cocktail.

Enter the The Amarula Trust, a South African charity organization supporting the indigenous people in South Africa and Kenya who make a living harvesting marula. The trust's main initiative is to protect the ecological balance of the trees' native lands by regulating harvest; workers via the trust enjoy the benefit of sponsored daycare centers for their children and educational scholarship opportunities, including training to become a game park ranger. Elephant conservation programs are also at the top of the list. Amarula Cream Liqueur is the largest single purchaser of marula fruit, and the trust's mission, "Sustaining Communities and Conscious Conservation," is supported by every bottle purchased. To learn more about the trust, go to amarulatrust.com. To order Amarula Cream and for Amarula cocktail recipes, go to amarula.com.

—MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSSEN