

THE BEST OF THE BAR

By CHERYL VAN TUYL JIVIDEN

It's no secret there's been a resurgence in the world of libations. From artistic mixology to inventive bartending, the craft cocktails of today are elevated, subtle or complex and infinitely intriguing. Lucky for us, two of the best of the bar call Texas home. They are young, creative, accomplished and impacting the future of the bar industry.

ZULCORALIS RODRIQUEZ:

29, FROM PUERTO RICO

The Esquire Tavern: Bartender at San Antonio's historic and oldest bar on the Riverwalk. EsquireTavern-SA.com

Bar Cred: Miss Speed Rack Texas 2015 (a bartending competition that raises funds for breast cancer research), *Beverage Director Magazine's* Top 8 Women Bartenders to Watch 2015, San Antonio Rivertini 2016 - 2nd place, BarSmarts Advanced Certified, Behind the Barrel Program. (Photos by Kody Melton)



JUSTIN LAVENUE:

28, BORN IN AUSTIN,
RAISED IN BOULDER

The Roosevelt Room: Mixologist and co-owner of the industrial chic cocktail bar in Austin's warehouse district. TheRooseveltRoomTX.com

Bar Cred: 2015 United States Bartender Guild's & *GQ's* Most Imaginative Bartender in North America (included Canadian competitors as well), Bombay Sapphire Most Imaginative Bartender Competition 2015 - Texas Regional Winner, ranked one of *Food & Wine's* Top Mixologists of 2015, *Eater Austin's* Bartender of the Year 2015, and *Zagat Austin's* 30 under 30. (Photo by Julian Bajsel)



UH: What drew you to the profession?

ZR: After graduating from San Antonio College with a degree in Mortuary Sciences, I decided to focus more in the world

of craft cocktails. I was 23 years old and at that time my sister was bartending in clubs. She was financially stable and seemed to be having fun. Working smarter was a good idea then, so I decided to follow her steps.

JL: I started bartending when I was 20 at an Indian restaurant while attending the University of Colorado at Boulder, and was quickly promoted to Bar Manager. When asked to create a new drink menu to match the fresh, bold flavors found in Indian cuisine, I developed an obsession for artfully crafted cocktails and fine spirits. In the summer of 2011, after graduating Valedictorian of CU's Leeds School of Business, I began work at The Bitter Bar, one of Colorado's first cocktail bars, as Head Bartender. Then the opportunity to open a bar in Austin and take advantage of the burgeoning culinary scene arose, so I decided to move back to my hometown.

UH: What inspires your work? What influences your creativity?

ZR: Honestly, my accomplishments are a reflection of my hard work and education. I feel that if I invest myself in the industry, it might inspire others to do the same, regardless of gender. I draw creativity from my heritage and my co-workers. I always tend to include something from where I came from in my cocktails, as well as following some leads and influences from bartenders I respect.

JL: Simply put... anything and everything. I think that anything can be used to create a drink. An example of this is Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, which I used to create my L'Etoile de la Nuit cocktail for the Texas regional competition. Other examples are memories, people, places, works of art, songs, books, etc.

UH: What's your personal favorite cocktail?

ZR: I love boozy, bitter cocktails: Negroni, Old-Fashioned, Manhattan and Palmetto are personal favorites.

JL: I honestly do not have one, as my favorite cocktail changes depending on the time of day, my mood, who I'm with, whether I am going to eat or have already eaten, and if I have any engagements scheduled for early the next morning. My personal favorite cocktail to make is a Daiquiri because it is extremely simple on paper (just rum, lime and sugar/simple syrup), but to make it perfectly is an amazingly difficult feat that we believe we have been able to attain at The Roosevelt Room.

UH: What spirits deserve a place in the home bar?

ZR: Mezcal, sotol, bitters and rum. Living in San Antonio, I have seen a growing interest in agave spirits and rums. Mezcal and sotol are exotic, sexy spirits from Mexico, and everyone wants to taste them. Our new summer menu at The Esquire Tavern includes a lot of rum cocktails, and people are interested in learning more about rums and its styles. In the bartending community, bitters are in!

JL: Sherry has been blowing up for the last two to three years as a cocktail ingredient, and rightfully so. It's versatile due to its many styles — at least one of which will pair with most anything under the sun. It also provides an amazing nutty and/or raisiny finish to cocktails.

UH: What do you like best about your job?

ZR: I love interacting with guests, sharing my knowledge and inspiring other people. It really is worth knowing that the time, knowledge and education I invest in myself can be shared with fellow bartenders as well as with guests. It's fun, dynamic and appreciated.

JL: Short answer, everything. Long answer, bartending is one of the few professions where nearly every school of study is utilized on a daily basis. A bartender uses not only physical expertise to produce a cocktail, but must also understand the principles of economics, psychology, mathematics, hospitality, sociology, chemistry, biology, etc., in order to maximize their guests' enjoyment of their time spent at their establishment.

UH: What's ahead? Any new projects in the works?

ZR: I'm working on some cool ideas for a take-over series inspired by musicals. I have been participating in small competitions recently, just to get in the game. And I was accepted into Cane Camp this year! Cane Camp is held in Puerto Rico and provides educational beverage and cultural opportunities designed to inspire bartenders with the passion and flavor of the island.

JL: We'll be launching some exciting things at The Roosevelt Room in the next few weeks: A new drink menu which we are really excited about, a food program so guests will be able to enjoy both delicious drinks and elevated bar snacks, and a punchcard for our 53-drink classic cocktail menu. Our big project is renovating and transforming The Roosevelt Room into a larger concept called De Rigueur. I'm taking time off from competing, but will be judging. I'm also studying for my BAR Master Certification.

UH: What do you like most about living in SA and Austin?

ZR: San Antonio has grown tremendously over the past several years. It's a mecca for music, food, cocktails, art and culture. But what I enjoy most about living and working in San Antonio is the people. Everyone's heritage contributes to the lively and friendly society, and it draws people to visit and experience San Antonio.

JL: Austin is the most exciting city in the U.S. right now. Its growth is bringing new talent and ideas from every part of the globe in nearly every industry. As a bar owner, it makes every shift exciting because I get to hear about all of the amazing things happening around the city from my guests. Also, the weather is a lot better here than in Colorado. I prefer six months of summer over six months of winter!

Zulcoralis shares her latest recipe called Black:Guayaba; a velvety, bittersweet rum cocktail that portrays her Puerto Rican heritage (available on The Esquire Tavern's summer menu).



BLACK:GUAYABA

1.5 oz. Ron Del Barrilito
3 Star Rum
.5 oz. Fernet-Vallet
.5 oz. Guava Nectar
.5 oz. Honey
.25 oz. Lime Juice
Pinch of Salt

Shake all ingredients with ice, double strain into a coupe and garnish with an orange peel.

Justin shares his award-winning cocktail, The Poet's Muse, which won him the title of Most Imaginative Bartender in North America. It's a best-seller at The Roosevelt Room.



COURTESY OF GQ

THE POET'S MUSE

2 oz. Bombay Sapphire Gin
.75 oz. Poet's Cordial
.75 oz. Citrus Blend
2 dashes Umami Tincture
Hard shake ingredients over a large ice cube, strain into a coupe, drop in ice cube and garnish with a lime peel rosette.

To make the above ingredients:

Poet's Cordial

1 L. Pistachio Milk (one part unsalted pistachio meat, two parts water, blended and strained)
800 ml. Wildflower Honey
2 Cinnamon Sticks
4 Star Anise Pods
1 Vanilla Bean
2 tbsp. Matcha Green Tea Powder
Combine ingredients, rest for three days, finely strain and bottle.

Citrus Blend

15 parts Fresh Lime Juice
1 part Yuzu Concentrate
Mix well and bottle.

Umami Tincture

30 Shiitake Mushrooms (chopped)
2 tbsp. Unsalted Butter
6 oz. Bombay Sapphire Gin
1 tbsp. Himalayan Salt
Sauté mushrooms in butter for 10 minutes, add Bombay Sapphire Gin and salt and steep for another 10 minutes, strain off mushrooms and freeze to let fats coagulate, strain off fats and bottle. ❖