

Spontaneous Concoctions

THE INDUSTRY SENT IN THEIR BEST TO REPRESENT DISTRIBUTORS
AT OUR FIRST **IRON MIXOLOGIST** COMPETITION AT WSWA

by E. C. Gladstone / photos by Tom Clark



Caterina Machi-Miltenberger of Glazer's Wholesale was crowned Iron Mixologist at THE TASTING PANEL'S first Iron Mixology competition at WSWA.

There are a lot of bartenders who can craft a wonderful drink these days. But who can take a mystery ingredient and make magic from scratch—with the clock ticking? That's what THE TASTING PANEL wanted to find out when we sponsored the inaugural Iron Mixologist competition at this year's Wine and Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) Convention and Exhibition in Orlando, Florida in April.



Drew Levinson of Wirtz Beverage Nevada.

With our own Tony Abou-Ganim as Executive Director, we challenged six wholesaler mixologists to create an aperitif, a long drink and a dessert drink, using surprise ingredients. Each was allowed to bring any ingredients and tools they wished, but had to share with all contestants.

The competitors:

- Chris Chamberlain of Capital Wine & Spirits, Pioneer Division/Charmer Sunbelt
- Sly Cosmopoulos of Republic National Distributing
- Drew Levinson of Wirtz Beverage Nevada
- Caterina "Cat" Machi-Miltenberger of Glazer's Wholesale
- Tim Rita, Jr., President of USBG Hawaii and Mixologist, Lewers Lounge at Halekulani Hotel, Honolulu, representing SW&S
- Nathan Way of Horizon Wine & Spirits



Tim Rita, Jr., President of USBG Hawaii prepares his cocktail as Tony Abou-Ganim looks on. "I saw an impressive improvement in understanding creative use of ingredients," said Abou-Ganim.



Sly Cosmopoulos of Republic National Distributing.

Judging the contest were award-winning mixologist and consultant Tobin Ellis; Kit Codik, CEO of Liquor.com; Camper English, independent spirits writer and blogger for Alcademics.com; and this reporter. Cocktails were rated on sliding scales for taste/texture, creativity/originality/use of secret ingredient, presentation and, finally, overall impression.

In the Aperitif category, with surprise ingredient ginger, entries were impressively varied, from Tim Rita's cocktail combining Magellan gin with Kai Young Coconut shochu, yuzu, fresh ginger and lemon, to Cat Miltenberger's Clergy Aperitivo using Chartreuse, muddled ginger, peach bitters and an Aperol foam. But the winner was Drew Levinson, whose entry combined Hendrick's gin and Domain de Canton ginger liqueur with fresh ginger syrup and lemon juice, muddled basil leaves and Martini & Rossi Asti sparkling wine.

For the Long Drink, with surprise ingredient passion fruit, Chris Chamberlain made a Dominican Passion Mojito by muddling mint leaves with simple syrup, adding lime juice, Brugal Dominican rum, fresh passion fruit and topping with club soda and ginger beer; Sly Cosmopoulos's Fresh Passion mixed bison grass vodka with St-Germain elderflower liqueur, passion fruit purée, lime juice, Monin lavender and ginger ale. But the best entry was Cat Miltenberger's Passion Gimlet, which combined Effen Cucumber vodka with Yuzu Luxe Sour, passion fruit purée, simple syrup, a float of New Amsterdam gin, lemon bitter soda and a sorrel-lemon garnish.

With the Dessert Drink, using mango as the surprise ingredient, competitors all showed their strongest—not only because they were already warmed up, but also perhaps because it was the most creatively open-ended. Nathan Way combined Riazul Añejo tequila with mango nectar, simple syrup and cream; Tim Rita mixed Kai Coconut Pandan vodka with blackberry rum, fresh mango, pineapple and orange juices, a top of sparkling wine and garnish of cinnamon, pineapple and mango slices. But the winner, again, was Miltenberger, with an outstandingly pretty and delicious São Paulo Batida made from Sobieski Karamel vodka,

Coco Don Q rum, Coco Real coconut cream, cream, Maker's Mark vanilla syrup (bourbon, vanilla bean, peach bitters and simple syrup) and a garnish of fresh mango coated with caramel and coconut.

So, with two wins and a strong first entry as well, Miltenberger was unanimously declared the first Iron Mixologist by the judges. "I'm blown away. This is the first competition I've done like this," she said afterward. "I had some crazy thoughts going on—I had an out-of-body experience—but I brought six ideas with me, and I was very focused."

Who will compete against her next year? ■

Cat Miltenberger's winning dessert drink: São Paulo Batida made from Sobieski Karamel vodka, Coco Don Q rum, Coco Real coconut cream, cream, Maker's Mark vanilla syrup and a garnish of fresh mango coated with caramel and coconut.

