

# WHAT PEOPLE DRINK

## CHARLES JOLY

Chief Mixologist - The Drawing Room

Interview by Chris D'Amico // Photography by Ian Andreae



You'd expect someone who just won \$100,000 making cocktails to have a built-in absinthe fountain in his home, right? The Drawing Room's Charles Joly, the winner of the third season of NBC's web series, "On The Rocks", brought the check back to Chi-City and talked to Mutineer about his EPIC home improvement plans.

#### **WHAT WAS THE LAST THING YOU DRANK?**

My last drink was Templeton Rye with a few cubes at my local haunt, The Orbit Room. Sunday night is one of my few nights off, so I often meet friends there.

#### **WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE TWO AND THREE INGREDIENT COCKTAILS?**

We work very seasonally, so it changes with availability. On the spirits end, I love Del Maguey mescals, North Shore's Distiller's Gin No. 6 and their aquavit (completely underrated and overlooked). Right now in non-alcoholics, I'm loving local Seedling Farms apple cider.

#### **CONGRATS ON YOUR RECENT "ON THE ROCKS" WIN. WHAT WAS IT LIKE HAVING TO PERFORM BEHIND UNFAMILIAR BARS?**

This industry is all about working under adverse conditions. I've done every job behind the bar from busser to GM. I've done extensive off-premise events where you learn to expect nothing to be there. Being prepared is key.

#### **ANY IDEAS ON WHAT TO DO WITH THE CASH?**

I joked with a reporter at the Tribune that I would pay taxes first— that's true though. I have a lot of work to do on my home, which I've been renovating bit by bit over the past couple of years. Travel is definitely in the forecast as well. Definitely going to do some things for my family too— we're a small but tight-knit clan.

#### **WHAT NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DO YOU DIG?**

I really like the n/a stuff from Fentimans. Their sodas do a really nice job. I'm huge into tea as well; the range of flavors and aromatic profiles is staggering.

#### **THE COCKTAIL MENU YOU DESIGNED FOR THE DRAWING ROOM INCLUDES PRE-PROHIBITION DRINKS. WHY GO OLD SCHOOL?**

You need to know your history before you can invent (or reinvent) the future. I believe in a balanced menu with a showing of some classics and seasonal/original offerings. We are balanced about 30/70- classics/original. I have strong opinions about menu design. I choose to keep it concise with a good range of flavors, spirit categories and profiles. I'd rather have my guests enjoying a cocktail than reading a tome.

#### **LOTS OF MIXOLOGISTS WORK WITH SEASONAL INGREDIENTS. DO YOU FEEL SPIRITS ALSO HAVE SEASONALITY?**

I don't think spirits should be limited to a particular season. When you know the profile of a spirit, you can figure out how to highlight it any time of year. Using cachaça only in warm months and applejack only in cooler months is a pretty narrow approach. Naturally our minds are drawn more to certain spirits at certain times of year, but none of it is written in stone.

#### **ARE THERE ANY DRINKS THAT YOU THINK GO WELL WITH BREAKFAST BESIDES THE USUAL MIMOSA AND BLOODY MARY?**

Depends what time you're having breakfast. I enjoy a good bloody mary— that North Shore aquavit makes a killer one. I wouldn't turn my nose up at a chilled glass of manzanilla or fino sherry while I was wiping the sand from my eyes.

#### **THE DRAWING ROOM DOES TABLESIDE MIXOLOGY WHICH IS A PRETTY UNIQUE EXPERIENCE. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM SITTING AT THE BAR?**

The tableside bartending was born specifically due to the small size of our bar. There's little doubt that the bar is the best seat in the house at most places. We wanted to bring the experience to the table so guests that wanted the interaction didn't feel like they were missing out. You get a real one-on-one experience that is as interactive or laid back as the guest prefers.

#### **WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FOOD AND COCKTAIL PAIRING?**

Tough question- I eat out a lot and have widely varied taste. There's not much that I won't try or absolutely stay away from. I did a food cocktail pairing for the sherry competition a year or so back. It was a cocktail called the "Bread & Wine" with Balvenie 12 year old, Lustau Dry Oloroso sherry, a touch of maple, citrus and absinthe rinse. It was paired with my chef's Bacon<sup>2</sup>, which is a dish that has evolved a bit but generally has been braised pork belly wrapped in bacon with varying gastriques and accoutrements depending on season.

#### **WHAT IS THE ONE COCKTAIL BOOK EVERY ASPIRING MIXOLOGIST SHOULD OWN?**

If you only own one, you don't have the same sickness that a lot of great bartenders I know do. I just rearranged my bookshelf and was surprised at just how many I've gone through— many of them two or three times. For a great basic book, Dale Degroff's new "The Essential Cocktail" is great. If you wanted a lesson in seasonality and fresh ingredients, Bridget Albert's "Market-Fresh Mixology" is key. Once you're ready to dive in, pick up "Imbibel" by Dave Wondrich. Round out the collection with Regan, Hess and some tasting notes from Paul Pacult ("American Still Life" is also a great read). Felten's "How's Your Drink?" is a good read. For the classics, go to Mud Puddle Books/Cocktail Kingdom and the immaculate reprints they're doing. I realize I totally blasted the "one book" question, but it's tough. This is a lifelong pursuit. You'll never know everything, and you constantly need to dig deeper. Moreover, you should want to. What's better to read about than booze and its history? It literally touches every point in human civilization. I would have done better in history class if my teachers chose the books differently.

#### **WHAT'S YOUR BAR SETUP AT HOME LIKE?**

My home bar is a bit of a mess right now. "On the Rocks" will definitely help pull this together. I have a plumbed wall ready to be finished for a fully functional bar and back bar. I'm extraordinarily excited to have it all come together in the next few months as my ingredients and tools are living in so many boxes and kitchen drawers. With a little help from some friends, the finished project should include a built in absinthe fountain. (I know, I know...that's the benefit of designing it yourself. I did mention the sickness we have right?)

Charles Joly deftly carves a lemon twist garnish at The Drawing Room.