

SPECIAL REPORT THE TASTING PANEL's intrepid team brings you what they saw, learned, tasted—and lived to write about—at

Tales of the Cocktail

2009

photos by Jenn Farrington

Tales of the Cocktail is *the* festival of cocktails. Attended by a veritable Who's Who of the cocktail community—mixologists, bartenders, writers and brands from around the world—this year's event drew more than 15,000 people who imbibed for five days as they celebrated the historical and contemporary life of cocktails, in New Orleans, the birthplace of the cocktail.

Tales of the Cocktail was founded by Ann Tuennerman in 2003. With a passion and love for New Orleans, Ann shares her love of food and cocktails through one of the most comprehensive, interesting and fun week-long events on the calendar.

Tales first began when Ann invited a few cocktail writers to join her and other locals

for a walking tour of New Orleans bars, a cocktail hour and a spirited dinner. The event has grown each year since, with new content being added every year. A lunch was added the second year and a couple of seminars the third year. The Spirit Awards were added the fifth year, and Paul Tuennerman joined Tales as CEO; tasting rooms and the Pro Series seminars were added the sixth year. Under Ann's organization and promotion, at this year's event, the seventh, there were more than 130 tastings, seminars, demos, lunches, book signings, tours and spirits-enhanced dinners.

Don't miss next year's event! Mark your calendars for the 8th Annual Tales of the Cocktail, which will take place July 21–25, 2010. —Allison Levine



Tales of the Cocktail
CEO Paul Tuennerman and founder
Anne Tuennerman.



The French Quarter of New Orleans provides the perfect setting for Tales of the Cocktail.

This view of the revolving Carousel bar at the Hotel Monteleone gives a good idea of the dizzying energy present at Tales of the Cocktail.

New Orleans Cocktail Tour

Going back to the event that started Tales, I embarked on the New Orleans Original Cocktail Tour. Led by our licensed tour guide and historian Joe, we ventured down the streets of the French Quarter, 12 blocks long and six blocks wide. While there were up to 20 establishments we could have visited, Joe selected four for this tour.

Home Base: Carousel Bar, Monteleone Hotel

An actual revolving carousel! You sit and revolve around the bartenders—just slowly enough that you don't get dizzy from the ride (possibly from the drinks, though).

Drink: Vieux Carré, a cocktail invented in 1938 by the head bartender of the Monteleone Hotel, is made of rye whiskey, cognac, vermouth, Bénédictine, Peychaud's and Angostura bitters, served in a double Old Fashioned glass over ice.

Stop One: Antoine's

With 17 dining rooms seating 900 people and 35,000

bottles in the cellar, Antoine's has been owned by the same family since 1840 and is the birthplace of Oysters Rockefeller.

Drink: Sidecar, a very classic French drink that is made of Cognac, Cointreau and lemon juice, shaken with ice and served in a Martini glass whose rim is dipped in sugar.

Stop Two: The Court of Two Sisters

Established in 1832 and named after two Creole sisters who optioned the notion shop on the site at the time. Miss Flo has been a fixture there since the 1960s.

Drinks: Mint Julep made with bourbon, mint, sugar and water; and Miss Flo's creation, **The Bayou Bash**, made with Southern Comfort, fresh fruit and red wine. This drink will remind you of your first trip to New Orleans, before the classic cocktails, when you drank Hurricanes. (Pat O'Brien's may not be worthy of a stop on the New Orleans Original Cocktail Tour, but as the home of the Hurricane, it sells more alcohol by volume than any other bar in the world.)

PHOTO: ALLISON LEVINE



Stop Three: Muriel's

Dating back to the 1700s, the building was at one time a pasta factory.

Drinks: Fleur de Lis, made with champagne, Grand Marnier and Lillet Blond, served in a champagne flute. Pimm's Cup, made with Pimm's, sour mix or lemonade, splash of 7-Up, garnished with a slice of cucumber. While I enjoyed a Pimm's Cup at Muriel's, it should be noted that the Napoleon House is famous for bringing the drink from England.

Stop Four: French 75 Bar at Arnaud's

Seating 1200 people and with 20 dining rooms, this is considered the largest restaurant in town and is the location of the French 75 Bar, named after a cocktail that is named after a WWI French howitzer, the 75mm.

Drink: French 75, made with cognac, lemon juice and simple syrup topped with champagne.

PHOTO: ALLISON LEVINE



Last Stop: Sazerac Bar at The Roosevelt Hotel

After two-and-a-half hours, the New Orleans Original Cocktail was at an end, but our tour would not be complete without a final stop at this newly restored hotel bar.

Drink: Sazerac (of course), made with rye whiskey, simple syrup, Peychaud bitters and absinthe, served in a rocks glass with a lemon twist.

—Allison Levine

We Ask the Pros: Why Is Tales So Amazing?

"It's amazing to see the quality of mixologists from around the world and the breadth of people talking to each other, even though they are competitors. I especially loved watching writers sample our vodkas at 8 a.m. at breakfast each morning." —Norman Bonchick, *Van Gogh Vodka*

"Tales is a great event that brings back classic cocktails and a twist on cocktails, along with great people." —Marvin Allen, *Bartender, Carousel Bar at the Hotel Monteleone, New Orleans*

"First you are preaching in a desert, and then you come here and see that what you are doing resonates with others. It's an opportunity to meet others who share your views. It's a show for people who believe. It's genuine." —Alexandre Gabriel, *President, Cognac Ferrand*

"Tales really unites people, opening the dialogue between bartenders who would normally work for competitive bars. We also got to be on the other end of the bar for a change, being the obnoxious customers that we normally complain about!" —Aidan Demarest, *Director of Spirits and Beverages, The Edison, Los Angeles*

Concierge Extraordinaire

"New Orleans is an amazing city," says New Orleans native Michael Beninate, Head Concierge at the Intercontinental Hotel. "We didn't know how special it was until it was gone. It is an inspiration to rebuild it." With more than 20 years as a concierge and 14 years at the Intercontinental, Michael loves sharing his knowledge and experience of the city with the thousands of guests that pass through the Intercontinental each year. As New Orleans is synonymous with food and drink, Michael is a great source for where to go, whether it is a traditional bar or restaurant in the French Quarter, or a new venue that has opened in one of the many thriving districts of New Orleans. —AL



Michael Beninate.

Mischief HORNITOS

Tequila at Tales



Sauza Tequila Ambassadors
Jaime Rodríguez, Eddie Perales,
Jaime Salas and Armando Zapata.



Though there was only one panel discussion at Tales of the Cocktail dedicated exclusively to agave spirits, tequila was extremely well represented at parties, tastings, pairing dinners and in conversation at this important industry event. In fact, tequila came up everywhere.

It starred in the session called Agavepalooza, and the large room in which it was held was filled to capacity. Steve Olson moderated speakers Ron Cooper of Del Maquey mezcal, David Suro-Piñera of Siembra Azul tequila, Dr. Rodolfo Fernández of the Universidad de Guadalajara and mixologist Junior Merino. Topics included the (possibly pre-Spanish) history of distillation in Mexico, the production of mezcal and the terroir of tequila. Tastings of highland and lowland mezcals and tequilas were also included. After the session ended, much of the crowd gathered in the hallway outside the room to hear Merino finish describing his cocktail and other native Mexican drinks. Several people said afterward that this session was their favorite at Tales.

Plenty of tequila was served at the Hornitos-sponsored “Mischief in the Garden of Agave” party at the huge Mardi Gras World East space. The event featured live snakes and alligators, a brass band and several bars—one of which was staffed by industry superstars such as Jason Crawley from Australia and Wayne Collins from London.

Too early on the morning after the party, journalists



Mezcals were sampled in traditional terracotta cups.

were treated to a tasting of another Beam Global tequila brand, Tres Generaciones, at a breakfast at Brennan’s. Beam master mixologist “Bobby G” Gleason led writers through a tasting and mixed up tequila cocktails that worked surprisingly well with eggs. Even Brennan’s traditional bananas Foster was made with añejo tequila instead of rum.

Milagro co-sponsored another meal, one of the Spirited Dinners with brand ambassador Gaston Martinez making cocktails for the crowd. Martinez also led a tasting room at Tales themed around culinary cocktails with Milagro. Another tasting room session was dedicated to agave spirits in general, with both mezcal and tequila brands represented.

Even in the non-agave seminars at Tales, tequila kept entering the conversation. Consulting mixologist Jacques Bezuidenhout mixed tequila and mezcal into two different cocktails at a port seminar. At the Cocktails of the Seven Seas seminar, Robert Hess shared many of the myths of the invention of the Margarita. At a genever seminar, a speaker compared oude and jonge genever to 100% agave tequila and mixto, respectively. And at a cognac seminar, bartender Jim Meehan from PDT in New York compared the Sidecar to the Margarita, in that both drinks are ambassadors for their respective spirit categories.

Though tequila was the subject of only one talk at Tales, it seemed to be all that people were talking about.

—Camper English



The Bacon Sangrita, made with bacon-infused Tres Generaciones Añejo and traditional sangrita ingredients, a breakfast cocktail at Brennan’s restaurant.

Taste Test

Spirits guru **F. Paul Pacult** says your palate is as good as his

Another year at Tales, another delightful tasting with author and spirits expert F. Paul Pacult. What could be better? This year, Paul sets out to show that anyone can be an expert. Although it is said that we all have different ranges for absorbing smell and taste, there are certain things people can do to become good tasters and exercise their palates. You, too, can join Paul Pacult in the high echelon of spirits gurus!

strate that with the blind tasting—he emphasizes to always taste blind in order to keep your sense of smell and taste sharper—even knowing the spirits category can make you lazy.

Don't over-tax your palate.

Paul states that “this is high-octane stuff”; after a small number of tastes, one will no longer be able to distinguish flavors.

Taste as much as you can, as often as you can.

Seems to contradict the previous tip, but Paul is simply saying that spirits lovers should take any opportunity they can to responsibly try new spirits and truly test themselves. Practice, practice, practice!

—Danny Ronen



The beauty of Tales of the Cocktail—a diverse crowd of bartenders, cocktail nerds, suppliers and distributors all in one place for the purpose of learning and sharing their love of cocktails and spirits. Here, two enthusiasts attempt to prove their palates are up to snuff in the How Good Is Your Palate? seminar with Paul Pacult.

Don't think too much.

Smelling and tasting are sensory experiences, not rocket science. Paul always reiterates that everyone's palate is as good as his.

Follow a format of tasting.

Do your tasting the way which works best for you to extract the highest amount of aroma and flavor; then do it the same way every time. Paul follows a strict (and admittedly insane) system: starting at the same time, using the same water and glassware, etc.

Build a reference library.

Practice makes perfect and Paul begins to demon-

Putting It in the Glass

For this tasting, Paul chose the following spirits as the best examples of their respective categories: Plymouth, Absolut, Chivas 18, Glenlivet 15, Redbreast 12 and Martell Cordon Bleu. Paul emulated the educational tastings and bartender trainings he does for BAR (Beverage Alcohol Resource), “the spirits and mixology equivalent of a Masters of Wine or Master Sommelier program,” so this seminar was a sneak preview of their very serious curriculum. Essentially, some of the drinking, without the homework! —DR



Author and spirit consultant extraordinaire F. Paul Pacult walks attendees through a well-rounded tasting at his aptly-named seminar, How Good Is Your Palate?

Consult This!

A panel of top bar consultants outlines what it takes to succeed

At Tales of the Cocktail this year, I had the honor of sitting on a panel with some of the most esteemed people in the beverage industry today. The seminar, entitled Responsible Beverage Consulting, was moderated by Partida Global Brand Ambassador and cocktail wizard Jacques Bezuidenhout; joining me on the panel were Southern Wine and Spirits' Director of Mixology and USBG Ambassador Francesco Lafranconi and celebrated Seattle chef-mixologist and author Kathy Casey.

The goal of coming together as a group was to share a wide array of experiences from all roles in the spirits industry—bar manager, guest, spirits journalist, educator, chef, supplier, distributor—in order to discuss how to properly and responsibly take on clients as a cocktail or beverage consultant.

Jacques aptly came up with a first-rate checklist of items any responsible consultant would need to reference:

Cocktail List

Are the cocktails a reasonable size? Are the classics included? We also discussed the importance of creating a manual for your bar staff, discussing everything from a fresh juice program to protocol in working with the kitchen on sharing ingredients.

Drink Development

Don't overcomplicate the cocktails; know your competition; design your drink and spirits concepts around the theme or feel of the venue; and familiarize yourself and the staff with the food menu in order to bridge to the cocktail list. A bar staff that knows the food menu creates a successful bar. Educate your wait staff on the cocktails as well!

Equipment & Glassware

The biggest hurdle is simply to have the bar staff take ownership of the space—a clean and orderly bar is the key to being a profitable bar. Francesco takes every opportunity to discuss the importance of mise-en-place, and this time was no exception. Although first-rate tools and ice are a must, every item having a place is the most crucial part of a smoothly-functioning bar. As a consultant, you must lead by example and be able to set up the bar so that you can reach for everything you need within one step.

Bartender Training

Training doesn't end with spirits or classic cocktail knowledge; it should also focus on correct and skillful use of bar tools, garnish preparation and maintaining a high-quality customer experience.



Responsible Beverage Consulting seminar moderator Jacques Bezuidenhout and panelists Francesco Lafranconi, Kathy Casey and Danny Ronen discuss that in addition to experience, dedication and patience, a good sense of humor is needed to help clients succeed.



The engaging and active audience at the Responsible Beverage Consulting seminar included folks from different aspects of the spirits industry. Pictured here are Mark Kijoyjima (ProgressiveBar, Las Vegas), Jamie Boudreau (SpiritsAndCocktails.com), Evan Martin (bartender at Naga in Bellevue, WA) and Keith Waldbauer ("Moving at the Speed of Life" blog creator and bartender at Vessel in Seattle).

Working with Distributors & Spirits Companies

Help them help you. Distributors and suppliers are there to help your venue through education, promotions, bartender support, etc. If their products are excellent and apropos to the bar's concept, then your goals are aligned, so work together to help the venue. Consultants are hired to help create an amazing space or improve an existing space, with the ultimate goal of selling more product and bringing success to the venue.

There was definitely a theme to which we repeatedly returned; no matter whom you're working with—a venue, brands, distributors, etc.—in every aspect of the bar experience it comes down to one concept: say it with me, "Know your audience!" —Danny Ronen

Swizzle and Swag

Tales 2009 brings the house down with **“On the Fly”**



Eric Alperin (left) and Marcos Tello.



The swag ran a sundry gamut of products.



New York's Giuseppe Gonzales mastered the winning cocktail.

In 2008 at Tales of the Cocktail, a lucky few witnessed the advent of something special. Midnight, poolside, on the rooftop at the Hotel Monteleone, ten friends stood in as judges and contestants for an unofficial “swag-off,” mixing and testing cocktails made with only what was available in Portland-based bartender and blogger Jeffrey Morgenthaler’s complimentary swag bag of mini bottles, chips, spices and sauces.

Founder Ann Tuennerman learned about the swag-off after Tales 2008 wrapped, via Morgenthaler’s cocktail/bartending blog, jeffreymorgenthaler.com. She invited him to host it on an official level in 2009, and the “On the Fly” competition was born. What occurred at the actual event—one of Tales ‘09 top-attended functions—was a mix of fierce skills behind the stick, a sundry gamut of products and even a Mohawk haircut for good measure.

The 2009 edition of On the Fly took place Friday, July 10, at the W Hotel. “Grand Marnier and Navan were the sponsors from the beginning,” Morgenthaler explains. “They were unbelievably helpful, supportive and flexible, and the official rules stated that the competitors had to use at least a half ounce of either Grand Marnier or Navan in their drink and could only use the ingredients provided in the swag bag.”

While the swag bag each contestant had to work with ran a ridiculous range—including a line of Tabasco flavors, five types of tea, chips, 50 ml. bottles of Yellow Chartreuse and Amarula Cream Liqueur, Freshies Bloody Mary mix, Dirty Sue olive juice, Antigua & Barbuda hot sauce, Tanteo flavored tequilas, Dum Dum lollipops and M&Ms—the brand sponsorship and contestant line-up was a serious nod to quality.

Morgenthaler handpicked contestants Eric Alperin, Misty Kalkofen, David Wondrich, Paul Clarke, Todd Thrasher, Guiseppe Gonzales, Ricky Gomez and Neyah White, and from the start it was obvious this was not going to be a serious, staid bar competition.

Misty Kalkofen, President of LUPEC Boston, brought an all-female cheering section that repeatedly executed “the wave” as she mixed. Eric Alperin shaved himself a Mohawk for the contest, using his fallen locks as garnish by tying them to the stems of Martini glasses. Whether it was due to creative garnish or crowd influence, Alperin took third place and Kalkofen second, with her chai tea-infused Glenmorangie, Yellow Chartreuse, Navan, Angostura and Angostura Orange bitters cocktail. The winning cocktail, by Guiseppe Gonzales of New York, included Yerba Mate tea-infused Glenmorangie, Navan and Funkin Piña Colada mix.

“I think for the spectators it was more of an event than the bar chef competition has been the two previous years at Tales,” laughs Dale DeGroff, one of six judges. “I also thought the two winning cocktails could be placed on a menu tomorrow—and considering what they had to deal with, that’s a miracle. Tales can get so heavy with all the seminars; there needs to be something light. This event is also one that allows the average cocktail consumer to feel a part of something, as well.”

DeGroff and several others have expressed interest in seeing Morgenthaler return to Tales next year to host round two of On the Fly.

—Jenny Adams