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Command performance has an interesting finale

By Gary Regan

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

I was in London for the Bar Show in June, and I had the good fortune to be invited to a wrap party in a private home. I was in the presence of greatness. It came flying at me from every direction. Palpable, it was. Some of the world's very best cocktailian bartenders were there. Each and every one of them made drinks for us. It was a glorious night.

One of the bartenders at the party is a little reclusive these days. Few people even know where he works. Keeps to himself, he does. I promised not to reveal his name, and I'm going to stick to my promise. I'm not going to name any of the other bartenders, either. They all get plenty of ink without my help.

For me, the party began with putting together a barbecue kettle. It had been purchased that afternoon, and it was still in its box when I arrived a little early for the event.

"You're having barbecue tonight?" I asked one of my hosts.

"Oh, yes, Jim's bringing the meat later."

"Think we might want to put the grill together before he gets here?"

"Hmm, yes, I suppose we should."

He wandered back into the kitchen to grab a beer.

I busied myself with screw A, nut J, and long hinge D. Short hinge K came later. I was finishing up when the guests began to arrive.

"Gary, let me help you . . ."

"Go get a drink and leave me alone." It's the only way with barbecue construction.

At around midnight, I found myself chatting to he who prefers not to be named when another bartender approached us brandishing cocktails. She explained that the drink was a variation on a little number she had created a few years ago, but



The Interesting Cocktail

Makes 1 cocktail

2 ounces Don Julio, El Tesoro, Milagro or Partida Blanco Tequila

¾ ounce Aperol

¼ ounce dark creme de cacao

¼ ounce fresh lemon juice

4 grapefruit twists

Instructions: Pour the Tequila, Aperol, creme de cacao and lemon juice into a mixing glass. Release the oils from three of the grapefruit twists into the glass by gently twisting them, then add them, along with lots of ice, to the glass. Shake for approximately 15 seconds, strain into a chilled Champagne flute and add the remaining grapefruit twist as garnish.

JOHN LEE / Special to The Chronicle; styled by ALEX MALAMUD

since one of the liqueurs in the recipe wasn't available at the party she'd used a different ingredient in this version.

My friend and I sipped the drink.

"Interesting," said the recluse.

He hadn't had the original. I had. I knew that the drink had incredible potential. I also knew that this version fell short of the mark.

When the bartender was out of earshot I asked my shy friend what he meant by "interesting," and as I suspected, he explained that he always used the word "interesting" when he wasn't very impressed with a drink. Would that he could have tasted the original. A masterpiece, it was. I told him so.

A couple of hours previous to this occurrence I

had been called to the bar and asked to make a new drink on the spot. I put on my pensive face so that nobody could spot my panic, and threw together an unusual concoction that, to my delight, just happened to work quite well. Thanks, God.

I was kept at the bar for around 45 minutes making the drink for more or less all and sundry. They seemed to be impressed. Some came back for seconds. Quite made up with myself, I was. The recluse made his appearance in the middle of all this, and a friend of his took him one of my new creations. I joined him a few minutes later.

"Is this the drink that you created tonight?" he asked me.

"Erm, yes. Yes, it is."

"Very interesting," he said.

Gary Regan is the author of "The Joy of Mixology: The Consummate Guide to the Bartender's Craft." E-mail him at wine@sfchronicle.com.