

# DO TELL

**M**y recent endeavors in creating specialty cocktails were inspired by a happenstance meeting in New York's East Village. Last January, Vincent and I spent several days in Manhattan, and I included a handful of dining recommendations from this trip in my February article. One establishment I left off my list is a tiny restaurant with an enormous Zagat rating. Its food was underwhelming; in fact, I am amazed it holds the same Zagat rating as such stars as Eleven Madison Park and Gramercy Tavern. I bring it up now not to describe our meal (perhaps I will return at some point to taste more and write a review), but because the story begins at one of its square counter-height tables.

The host installed us at one of these tables where three other couples were already enjoying their first courses. Hence, we discovered that the seating was communal. I believe this detail should be mentioned when making a telephone reservation, but I digress. While I was skeptical about dining with complete strangers in such tight quarters, I am now thankful for the experience. It led to stimulating conversation with the young couple (she is an attorney!) with whom we were bumping elbows and an invitation to a nearby speakeasy. Our charming new friends had a highly sought after reservation at "Please Don't Tell," and we were up for an adventure in "The City That Never Sleeps."

Within ten minutes of paying our checks, we arrived at a hot dog stand on St. Mark's Place in the East Village. We walked down a few steps and entered the "shack" to find diners snacking on bacon-wrapped and chili dogs after midnight. As I was taking it all in, our guide entered a phone booth in the left wall, engaged in a brief conversation, and

then led the way through a secret door. We were ushered into a mysterious bar with taxidermy lining the walls and handed a leather book of cocktail options.

While one of our companions told the server she was in the mood for egg whites and her beau for Mezcal, I spotted a concoction containing "Suze." At the time, I did not know that Suze is a French bitter flavored with the roots of the gentian flowering plant that grows in the Jura and Auvergne mountains. I simply recognized it as my dearest friend's nickname for me. In any case, my instinct served me well as the citrus and floral notes complemented Suze's bitterness. While I have not yet experimented with Suze in any of my signature cocktails, the spirit (pun intended) of the evening inspired me to try my hand at mixing ingredients that I would not otherwise consider. And, I am able to compare notes with our two friends in NYC!

The below cocktails are ones that I have created based on reading cocktail books (especially *The PDT Cocktail Book* by Jim Meehan) and online recipes. The key ingredient in all three is Damrak Gin, which contains over a dozen botanicals, including juniper berry, coriander, lemon and orange peel, cinnamon, and honeysuckle. I typically do not enjoy gin, but the smooth texture and citrus flavor of this brand have won me over.

Also, in my recipes, 1 part = 1 shot or jigger (about 1.5 ounces). I serve these cocktails in vintage champagne coupes, which hold about 5.5 ounces. For all of the recipes, I add the ingredients to a cocktail shaker in the order listed, shake over ice, and strain.

## THE GODMOTHER

- 1 part Damrak Gin
- 1 part Cointreau
- 1 part Lillet Blanc
- 1 part freshly squeezed blood orange juice

## JUST A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

- 1.5 parts Damrak Gin
- 0.5 part Cointreau
- 0.5 part freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 0.25 part simple syrup
- 1 egg white

## COCKEVED OPTIMIST

- 1 part Damrak Gin
- 1 part Lillet Blanc
- 0.5 part maraschino cherry juice
- 0.5 grapefruit juice
- 0.5 freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1 maraschino cherry for garnish

Enjoy these refreshing cocktails with hors d'œuvres before a summer meal. And, no need for secrecy, feel free to pass them along... 🍸