

# Cocktails & Cuisine

MIXED DRINKS MOVE FROM THE BAR TO THE DINNER TABLE

story and photos by Richard Carleton Hacker

When Lobby Lounge guests at the Forbes Five-Star **St. Regis Monarch Beach** order the resort's signature Bloody Mary or Mandarin Blossom, they also may request hors d'oeuvres prepared by Executive Chef Frédéric Castan (a Maître Cuisinier de France) especially to match these cocktails. And for the launch of Moon Mountain organic vodka at **Hatfield's** restaurant in Los Angeles, Bar Manager Peter Birmingham worked with distiller Gerry Webb to create a different cocktail for each course. Meanwhile, at **The Forum at Caesars Palace** in Las Vegas, General Manager Brian Mongeon of **BOA Steak House** created a tasting menu with cocktails and steaks that proved so popular he is bringing it back this spring. If you sense a trend, you are right.

"Cocktail and food pairings are available in any of our restaurants," says Brent Berkowitz, Operations Director of BOA's Innovative Dining Group. "They might not be as prolific as BOA Las Vegas, but it is a part of all servers' and bartenders' training to know and understand what cocktails go with which food items."

Serving cocktails instead of wine with food not only gives the waitstaff a talking point ("Would you like a Martini instead of a Chardonnay with that trout meunière?"), a cocktail pairing menu adds to your customer's dining experience while adding to your bottom line.

"We are starting to train our staff to suggest a certain cocktail with a customer's meal," notes Christian Rassinoux, who oversees 12 restaurants as Executive Chef of **MGM Grand** in Las Vegas. "For example, chocolate desserts lend themselves to cognac-based cocktails. Spicy foods suggest vodka. Tapas are another great way to match food with cocktails. In **Fiamma**, our Italian restaurant, we are expanding the bar menu so instead of wine with dinner, customers will have a wider range of cocktails to choose from."

Even DISCUS (the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States) offers cocktail and cuisine guidelines. "Consider food pairings to enhance the flavor of your chosen cocktails," reads the organization's press release. "Fresh seafood and breads accentuate vodka cocktails, spiced and smoked meats and cheeses complement bourbon and Scotch whiskeys, and fruit enhances rum and tequila flavors."

Just be sure the garnish complements the entrée. ■■



At the **St. Regis Monarch Beach** in Dana Point, CA, Executive Chef Frédéric Castan created this picturesque and flavorful mission fig and port wine confit especially for cocktails made with blanco tequila, vodka or gin.



One of the signature cocktails of the **St. Regis Monarch Beach**, a Strawberry Lemonade made with Ketel One Citron, pairs well with Executive Chef Frédéric Castan's heirloom baby beet salad and goat cheese topped with truffle vinaigrette.



Bringing 125 years of New York eating and drinking history to Las Vegas, P. J. Clarke's at the Forum Shops at Caesars Palace features a \$250,000 "Phoenix Bar" carved in France, hearty American food and "manly" cocktails, as evidenced by their classic corned beef Reuben with Swiss cheese and homemade sauerkraut, plus onion strings, cleverly paired with a Knob Creek Manhattan.