

Wine & Dine / Cocktails

Warm Up With Whiskey

ITS RICH CHARACTER AND TIMELESS APPEAL MAKE THIS VERSATILE SPIRIT THE IDEAL INGREDIENT FOR COZY COCKTAILS THIS FALL.

By ASHLEY RYAN



As autumn breezes sweep through Laguna Beach, whiskey drinks emerge as the perfect companion for cozy meals and sunset happy hours.

With ample flavor profiles ranging from smooth bourbons and peppery ryes to distinct varieties like peanut butter whiskeys, the warm, rich nature of this beloved spirit serves as a brilliant contrast to the chill in the air.

Whether you're seeking a classic cocktail or an inventive libation full of twists, these local drinks are sure to spice things up this fall.

FINNEY'S CRAFTHOUSE

Although best known for an all-encompassing selection of rotating brews, Finney's Crafthouse also offers an impressive cocktail menu. As beautiful as it sounds, the Whiskey Smokeshow mixes Buffalo Trace bourbon and citrus amaro with fresh-squeezed lemon juice, egg white, raspberries and a rosemary syrup to add some fall flavor. "We strain it over a king cube with our signature 'F' logo, then we smoke the rosemary garnish with a butane torch," says David Annaguey, beverage director for the chain. "Lastly, we put a dome over it and fill it with a citrus smoke." The goal, he adds, was to create a fruity whiskey drink with a thrilling presentation to create an experience that diners will remember. (949-484-8140; finneyscrafthouse.com)

The Whiskey Smokeshow at Finney's Crafthouse features a citrus smoke.



Clockwise from top left: Mexican Old Fashioned at Bodega Laguna Cocina & Cantina; Black Magic Woman at The Drake; Bell Witch at Broadway by Amar Santana; Irish Coffee at Rumari

BODEGA LAGUNA COCINA & CANTINA

For a cultural twist on an old classic, try the Mexican Old Fashioned at this local cantina. "The way it is prepared and the ingredients [are] very simple," says Roberto Rodriguez, mixologist and manager at Bodega Laguna. Although tequila is normally the Latin liquor of choice, this drink is crafted with Abasolo whisky, a spirit from Mexico made from corn. Combined with demerara brown sugar and two dashes of chocolate bitters, then garnished with an orange peel and a cherry, this playful take on one of the most beloved cocktails of all time pays homage to Mexican heritage while enchanting diners. (949-715-1002; bodegalaguna.com)

THE DRAKE

Stop in for dinner and a show, as music is as much a part of the menu at this lively restaurant as its showstopping cocktails. "All of our drinks are inspired by music—either musicians or song titles," says Janaka Bandaranaike, lead bartender at The Drake. The whiskey-based Black Magic Woman, named for a song by rock band Santana, is crafted with Elijah Craig bourbon, Frangelico (a hazelnut liqueur) and walnut

bitters, which is combined and poured over a large ice rock then garnished with a cinnamon stick. "The charred cinnamon stick adds fall-inspired flavor," Bandaranaike adds, noting that the cocktail has been on the menu since the eatery first opened in 2019. (949-376-1000; thedrakelaguna.com)

BROADWAY BY AMAR SANTANA

This downtown eatery, helmed by chef-owner Amar Santana, is known for its creative bar program—and the new fall menu lives up to the hype with a variety of cocktails that are perfect for fall. Opt for the Witching Hour, which uses rye whiskey infused with sage, rosemary and cinnamon, or the Spey'd & Spiced, which features spiced scotch and maple syrup. Another option is the Bell Witch. "I named it after an American family that was haunted by what they believed to be a witch in the ... 1800s," says bartender Jade Bustamante. This take on a Manhattan is made with an Old Forester bourbon that is infused in-house with corn, then shaken with sweet Cynar Ricetta 33 liqueur and Chinese five-spice bitters—a true delight for warming up on cold nights. (949-715-8234; broadwaybyamarsantana.com)



RUMARI

The menu at Rumari is filled with cultural flavors, from Italian pastas to Greek delights. But the global touches don't end there. This fall, cozy up with an Irish coffee, found on the restaurant's dessert menu. "This ... drink is unique for people that love coffee and whiskey, [and] great for after dinner, [to] enjoy with your favorite dessert or by itself," says Jorge Rodriguez, mixologist and manager. Espresso is brewed with raw sugar, then added to a cup of hot water and Jameson Irish whiskey. The easy-to-craft cocktail is then finished with heavy cream that is slowly added using a bar spoon. Rodriguez suggests pairing it with the chocolate soufflé for a sweet touch. (949-494-0400; rumarioc.com) ■

TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM RIGHT: SAMANTHA WHARTON; TOP RIGHT: JADE BUSTAMANTE