

EAT & DRINK

IN the MIX

There's something thrilling—and kind of mysterious—about mixologists. Maybe it's their typical late-night schedule or the wide array of things they've seen from their vantage point behind the bar. Or maybe it's their innate ability to dream up beverages that taste delicious with just a few perfectly selected ingredients. Whatever the reason, there's no denying that the notable locals you'll find in these pages have stories to tell. Read on to discover how they explore balance, expand their creativity and craft exquisite cocktails that you can enjoy at bars and restaurants right here in Newport Beach.

LOCAL BARTENDERS
SHARE THEIR
FAVORITE DRINKS
TO MAKE AS WELL
AS MEMORABLE
EXPERIENCES FROM
CRAFTING BOOZY
COCKTAILS.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

TREVOR JENSEN,
THE CANNERY

DRINK GRAPHICS: ARTCO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; LEFT: WALES COMMUNICATIONS

Inga Tantisalidchai

OLEA, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK



FAVORITE
DRINK TO MAKE:
ON TOP OF
OLD SMOKEY

Everything that Inga Tantisalidchai touches turns to gold, or so it seems. Her inherent skill to innovate is evident with each drink she develops as lead bartender at Olea, Cellar-Craft-Cook. "I've worked in the restaurant industry since I turned 18 and, as soon as I turned 21, I jumped on the chance to go behind the bar," she explains. "From there, I learned to evolve with the cocktail culture and found myself loving the creative aspect of it."



Cocktails made by Inga Tantisalidchai, including, (clockwise from top left) Chili Water; Fair Play, inspired by the OC Fair; Social Butterfly; and Duck.. Duck.. Goose



In addition to her role at Olea, Tantisalidchai is a rum runner for Papa's Pilar, a brand associated with the Hemingway family, as well as mixology director and consultant for MarkeTeam, a hospitality-focused marketing agency. Yet, somehow, she still finds the time to regularly develop unique beverages with expertly crafted, over-the-top presentations that delight her regulars at the restaurant.

A special treat they're able to enjoy is her Cocktail Journal series: Adding a new drink each month, this collection of secret menu sips come with a special card detailing the inspiration for the drink and its ingredients. Some of her customers have been collecting these since she first launched the program five years ago. For 2024, each drink is themed after a movie or television show, like January's fruit-forward I Dream of Peachy (inspired by "I Dream of Jeannie") and February's

rose petal-topped Pretty in Pink; the March iteration is stirred up in honor of "Soul Train."

But her creativity doesn't stop there. She has experimented with unique cocktail toppings like cotton candy that doesn't dissolve in the drink or icons such as butterflies or rubber ducks, clarified drinks that are devoid of color and magic-inspired beverages injected into hollow ice spheres that have to be broken open to allow the cocktail to escape.

But another thing Tantisalidchai prides herself on are liquid renditions of her favorite dishes, like the On Top of Old Smokey, a play on caprese that won her Most Creative Cocktail at OC Travel Magazine's Mixology Masters competition in 2022. Fresh cherry tomatoes and basil are muddled in a strawberry syrup, balsamic vinegar and gin, then garnished with crispy prosciutto and a ball of mozzarella. Another she enjoyed crafting was inspired

by aguachile, a Mexican seafood dish.

But, when her creativity seems to have reached its limit, Tantisalidchai pushes herself further with a set of Dealer's Dice. Generally used by guests who have tried her numerous other concoctions, a roll of these offers an extra challenge. "One die is specifically spirits—so it'll be tequila, vodka, agave, whiskey—and then another will be bitter, floral, sweet, tart, and another will be smoky, citrusy, etc.," Tantisalidchai explains. "So what I do is hand the dice to the guests and I have them roll them and whatever combination they get is what I have to make for them. ... It helps keep me on my toes."

Of her work in general, she says, "I try to think outside of the box a little bit and create something that people will remember—and, not only that, but demand more of. I'm excited to be able to do that for Orange County."

Trevor Jensen

THE CANNERY



FAVORITE
DRINK TO MAKE:
OLD-FASHIONED



For nearly two decades, Trevor Jensen has been serving up drinks from behind the bar at The Cannery—but he got his start elsewhere in Newport. “I was working at Starbucks and would serve the general manager of [Baja] Sharkeez coffee every day before he went to work,” Jensen recalls. “I went in one day and asked him for a job and he hired me on the spot. The rest is history.”

Jensen was 21 years old when he started at Shakeez, where he remained for five years before moving on to The Cannery. “I tell a lot of people, I’m probably more comfortable behind the bar at The Cannery than I am when I’m not there,” he notes. “... Coming over here and learning about classic cocktails and ... balance—all the stuff that goes into it—it’s just what I found I love doing. ... My advice is ‘less is more.’ You don’t want to confuse the guest. Each ingredient should play a part and be recognized.”

Every year, The Cannery hosts a banquet for Mr. Irrelevant, the final pick from the NFL Draft. In 2022, that pick was Brock Purdy, who recently led the San Francisco 49ers to the Super Bowl. “They give it a shot and usually don’t make it, so for him to do that ... and actually [having met] him was pretty cool,” Jensen says.

But, beyond the celebrities, the bar manager says he values the friendships he has developed with many of the regulars at the restaurant, who even bring him gifts for his children during the holiday season. “I have thought about writing a book about my life behind the bar,” he adds. “The good, the bad and the ugly.”

Trevor Jensen, bar manager at The Cannery, crafting a cocktail; his advice: “less is more” when it comes to ingredients

Corey Levine

FARMHOUSE AT ROGER'S GARDENS



With plenty of friends in the industry, Corey Levine was originally seeking a server position, but accepted one as a barback instead. “[I] ended up falling in love with the hustle, urgency and anticipation of the job,” he explains. “That then led me to becoming a bartender, developing a passion and orchestrating cocktails for a menu.”

He has since worked his way up to bar director at Farmhouse at Roger’s Gardens, and says he has always had an appreciation for classic cocktails, like the bijou, the Martinez and the daiquiri, which shape the drinks he creates at the farm-to-table restaurant. Some of his favorites to craft include the Sand in My Boots, a simple concoction with tequila, yuzu, peach, lemon and a salt-and-pepper rim, and the G.E.D., which blends gin and Curaçao with bianco vermouth and Gran Classico Bitter. Levine also collaborates on the Swig for Selflessness cocktails that Farmhouse has offered since 2019 to benefit local charities, already raising funds for MemorialCare, Make-A-Wish Orange County & the Inland Empire, Orange County United Way and more this year alone.

“It takes a certain type of artistry to build a well-balanced cocktail,” Levine says. “Sometimes, the idea and the ingredients make sense in your mind, but don’t exactly translate. ... I think I really enjoy the [process of] refinement. ... It’s obviously great when it makes sense right away, but there is always room for improvement—always trying to perfect the imperfect.”

Left: Corey Levine, bar director at Farmhouse at Roger’s Gardens, uses his artistry to build a well-balanced cocktail. Some of his drinks include Untitled (top right) and Sand in My Boots (bottom right).



THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF FARMHOUSE AT ROGER'S GARDENS

**FAVORITE
DRINKS TO MAKE:**
G.E.D., UNTITLED
AND SAND IN
MY BOOTS

Riley Huddleston

LIDO HOUSE HOTEL



DRINK PHOTOS: OUTSHINE PR

As chef-partner of Lido House hotel, overseeing The Mayor’s Table Pacific Pub & Kitchen and Topside rooftop bar, Riley Huddleston already wears many hats. But mixology is something that he turns to when seeking to practice his innovation. “Cocktails are an ever-evolving art, a balancing act between new ingredients and techniques and tried-and-true recipes,” he says. “Crafting a new cocktail is an outlet that fuels my creativity.”

Since he was 23 years old, Huddleston has been helping develop beverage programs to complement his culinary side. In addition to crafting signature cocktails for menus at Timber Cove Resort on the Sonoma coast as well as at I|O Godfrey and The Aviary, both in Chicago, he once tried to create the perfect gin and tonic. “During our research, we made 32 versions of the classic drink before settling on the one that would make ... the menu,” he notes. “We tried all different gins, ices, tonics and botanicals. The secret ingredient ended up being fresh kiwi juice.”

Classic drinks, like the gin and tonic, among others, are some of his favorite to craft. “I love making timeless cocktails,” he says. “... They’re complex yet perfectly balanced and relatively easy to make at home.”

Huddleston says that all of his work is interconnected. Here in Newport, he launched the rotating Kitchen Cocktails at Lido House a few years ago—elevated beverages served in unique vessels that incorporate ingredients to complement the cuisine. “Our mission at Lido House is to create an experience ... like nothing else. That ethos transcends into everything we do here,” he says. “Our cocktail program mirrors the ethos of the kitchen and is crafted with the same artistry and attention to detail as the restaurant’s most illustrious dishes.”

Riley Huddleston, chef-partner of Lido House hotel, helps to develop beverage programs to complement the culinary side. Some of his drinks include Summer Lovin’ (top left) and these brunch cocktails (bottom left).

COURTESY OF LIDO HOUSE



**FAVORITE
DRINKS TO MAKE:**
LAST WORD,
OLD-FASHIONED
AND BOULEVARDIER

Brandon Nelson

UNDER CDM




**FAVORITE
DRINKS TO MAKE:
BIKINI SALESMAN
AND ANYTHING
CLASSIC**

While you can sidle up to the bar in the main dining room at CdM Restaurant, the intimate downstairs speakeasy, Under CdM, is the place to be if you're looking for cocktails with a story. Brandon Nelson, who serves as bar curator for this hidden gem, says that there is a lot we can learn from the rich history of mixology. "My favorite cocktails to drink are anything with a story or a funny name," he notes. "I've always liked history, so having cocktails [that] people in the past had ... [offers] a cool insight into why things are the way they are today."

Nelson may command the posh space now, but his career was all built upon humble beginnings and a love for the ocean. "I started working in bars as soon as I could, because I wanted to work nights so I could surf during the day," he recalls. "The first bar I ever worked at was a seedy punk bar called Fern's Cocktails in Long Beach." As such, he has seen just about everything from behind the bar-top—from barback mishaps, like dropping 12 liters of honey on the floor or creating simple syrup using salt instead of sugar, to getting his now-girlfriend's phone number on a receipt.

One classic recipe he likes to craft—a whiskey sour—is given a twist at Under CdM with yuzu liqueur. Nelson also enjoys making the bar's Bikini Salesman drink, a refreshing option with Golden Eagle vodka and Chateau aloe liqueur plus pineapple gum syrup, coconut water, kiwi, ginger and lime. "I like the freedom of expression involved in creating a cocktail, using fresh ingredients and, ultimately, making people happy," he adds. **NBM**

Brandon Nelson (left), bar curator for Under CdM, a speakeasy at CdM Restaurant; some of his cocktails, including Bikini Salesman (top right) and a whiskey sour (bottom right)



THIS PAGE: COURTESY OF CDM RESTAURANT