

New breed of bartender shaking things up minus the hooch

Make way for mocktail mania

By Tim Pawsey

IN CASE YOU HADN'T noticed, there's a new breed of bartender in town. A smart, savvy and youthful crowd is shaking things up in more ways than one—and many of them were front and centre at last week's first Giffard Mocktail West Coast Competition.

Giffard is the French maker of a superb line of crème de fruit liqueurs—including a stunning, macerated Ginger of the Indies liqueur that we've waxed on about a few times in this space. The company's broad range of pure flavours has attracted more than a few followers, including fans of Nons Drinks to Go—the remarkably inventive mocktail bar at Granville Island Public Market. Importers Sherif Ahmed and Christa Frosch's cheerful alcohol-free, neon addition to the market is the perfect place to stop by for some of the most original summer sips, smoothies or shakes (made with selections from Giffard's full range of some 40 alcohol free syrups).

Ever since someone served up a Muscat-marinated portobello mushroom in the name of dessert, the Hired Belly has learned to be cautious when accepting invitations to judge. However, our saccharine fears were unfounded, with not a single Shirley Temple in sight among this surprisingly sophisticated and uncloying lineup.

The most refreshing part of this contest was the degree to which contestants "worked" their ingredients to add depth and to counter overt flavours, often with infusions or different twists that heightened the originality.

For the snappiest, artful presentation—as well as the more savoury offering on the half roster that we judged—Chad Gaskell, from Victoria's Rosemeade, came up with "Pinkteas." It was a subtle combo of fresh-pressed rhubarb juice, citrus-infused iced Earl Grey tea, ginger beer, soda water and Giffard Sugar Cane Syrup—the mandatory ingredient. Served in a stylin', ultra slim, tall glass, garnished with rhubarb and sugar cane sticks, it's a perfect sipper, especially for those with



Mocktail contest runner-up Scott Duncan (Bacchus at the Wedgewood) with his "Fusion."

photo Tim Pawsey

marginally acidic inclinations.

At the end of the shake-fest, two bartenders came up trumps. Flying to France next May to compete in the Giffard International Cup will be first-place winner Derek Cranton (Blue Water Café) for his "Kingston Crown" of mango juice, lime, whole all spice, ginger beer and Giffard sugar cane; and runner-up Scott Duncan (Bacchus at the Wedgewood) for "Fusion," which uses reduced orange juice infused with star anise, cardamom and ginger, with rhubarb compote, soda water, white peach puree and Giffard sugar cane syrup. Complex, with the star anise delivering a gentle, spicy kick at the end.

★★★

From the "opening soon" file comes news that cutting-edge drinks counsellor Jay Jones (ex Nu, West) will team

as assistant manager with equally celebrated potablist, Chris Stearns, manager at Sean Heather's Salt Tasting Room, which should be serving its first flights in July. Interestingly, given Salt's wine-inclined format (with a cold-prep only kitchen), they won't be tossing any cocktail shakers opening day in Blood Alley. But this duo will find plenty to turn people's palates upside down in other ways.

Budget wine of the week

• Caldora Trebbiano d'Abruzzo 2004

Lively mineral and lemon-lime notes with plenty of texture and a clean finish. Perfect as a summer sipper or with a zesty salad and oysters. A real zinger—plenty more wine than the price suggests. A bargain and at \$9.99 you can afford to grab a couple of extras for the fridge.