



David Santoro of Lift Bar Grill View mixes 'Dezire' cocktails at the Iron Mixology Challenge at Tapastree Restaurant.

PHOTO BY PETER BATTISTONI/VANCOUVER SUN

■ IN GOOD SPIRITS

Bogart barman shaken and stirred at taking first place

Chambar mixologist is second in bid to enter international contest

BY JOANNE SASVARI

There are worse ways to spend a Sunday afternoon than sipping cocktails — lots and lots of cocktails.

All this imbibing was, of course, for a good reason: the city's first Giffard Iron Mixology Challenge.

Last weekend, 23 of the city's top bartenders gathered at Tapastree Restaurant for the competition, joined by nine judges (including this writer) and Bruno Giffard, owner of the French company that has for 122 years made some of the finest liqueurs in the world.

For three hours, they shook and stirred and mixed things up for the chance to compete in the 2008 Giffard International Competition in Angers, France.

More importantly, perhaps, they demonstrated how far the art of mixology has come in Vancouver from the days when all a bartender had to do was mix rum with Coke and keep the riff-raff from taking over the joint.

"I was here two years ago, and it is amazing how it has changed," Giffard said.

Earlier this year, Vancouver made it onto the mixology world map when Chris Brown, of Beyond Restaurant and Lounge, won the competition in Angers. Now the rest of the city's barmen want to match shakers against the world's best.

At Tapastree, competing two at a

time, the bartenders had five minutes to create their drinks. The only stipulation was that they had to use Giffard's latest product, Pamplemousse Rose, a delicate pink grapefruit liqueur.

They were judged on presentation, taste and "combination," the creativity of the ingredients that went into the drink.

Some interesting trends emerged during the competition:

■ Culinary techniques are huge, with seasonal fruits and herbs, in-house garnishes and elements of molecular gastronomy such as foams, powders and gelatin "caviar."

■ While vodka is still popular, other liquors have muscled into the market, such as gin, bourbon, sake, cachaca and, most importantly, champagne.

■ Updated retro drinks (like egg-white flips and sours) are all the rage.

Finally, 23 cocktails later, Giffard announced the two winners who will attend the Angers competition next May.

First place was Brian Grant from Bogart Chophouse & Bar, for "Old Dog, New Tricks," a play on the traditional Salty Dog (see recipe).

And in second place was Josh Pape from Chambar Belgian Restaurant, whose "Toute Fin" was made with crushed cashews, sherry, egg white, gin and a dusting of Campari powder on top.

"This is huge. This is the first contest I've entered. I'm shocked. I'm amazed. I love their product," an excited Grant

said afterward.

"I think it's really important that we're starting to elevate the cocktail program here. You want to challenge people's palates. It's more than a way to make a drink," Pape said.

"Also," he added, "a trip to France ...

"Is sweet," Grant finished.

Special to The Sun

RECIPE

Here is the winning recipe from Vancouver's first Giffard Iron Mixology Challenge, by Brian Grant of Bogart Chophouse & Bar. To see the rest or to learn more about Giffard products, visit the Nons Drinks website, www.nons-drinks.com.

■ OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS

1¼ oz. vodka

¾ oz. Giffard Pamplemousse Rose (pink grapefruit liqueur)

1 scoop champagne and pink grapefruit sorbetto (or any citrus sorbet)

⅓ oz. Giffard Muroise (berry liqueur)

Rim a third of a martini glass with pink Australian rock salt. Shake vodka, liqueurs and sorbetto in a cocktail shaker with ice. Strain into glass and garnish with a slice of candied grapefruit. Serves 1.