



Time Out 28th September 2006

Host with the most - Room Manchester

There's so much more to cocktails than sluicing in gin and swilling round tonic. Emily Pykett gets shaken and stirred at Manchester's Room Restaurant.

The art of mixing drinks in the 21st century seems light years away from the '80s celluloid cliché of Tom Cruise tending beachside bars in *Cocktail*. Thanks to associations with style icons like super-spy James Bond - think 007 ordering vodka martini in a dinner jacket or savouring mojitos in a linen suit and Panama hat - the glamour lives on. Yet few realise the technical know-how and instinctive understanding of marrying colour and taste that goes into creating the perfect cocktail.

Oliver Wright, bar manager at Room Restaurant in Manchester, takes a playful approach to tantalising tastebuds. "People can become very pretentious about drinks; some bartenders call themselves drinks artistes. I think it's more important to have fun experimenting with flavours and pleasing the customer," he says.

Connoisseurs are not restricted to the 25 cocktails offered on the Room menu. "I get people asking me to create cocktails for them all the time. There are over 100 classic cocktails and we need to know the majority of those so we can twist the original and come up with something special."

Signature Room drinks the Roomberry and Faithless are two updates on well-known originals. The Roomberry gives a fruity twist to the classic Champagne cocktail, while Faithless throws sage and red grapes into the mix of aromatic herbs unusually associated with gin and tonic.

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o tie in with the Manchester food and drink festival, Room Restaurant has come up with the Halloween Margherita, a sumptuous blend of pumpkin, mango, tequila and Cointreau. "We used pumpkins to give it that seasonal feel and link to the Halloween theme, because the festival is being held in October," explains Wright. Mixing the right flavours is known as 'muddling', using a special tool that liquefies fruit into pulp. (If you're trying these recipes at home, you'll have to settle for the blender, but it won't have the same effect).

Mostly it's women who make a beeline for cocktails, but more men are trying them too, says Wright. "Our regulars are learning to appreciate cocktails here. If they order a vodka and cranberry juice, we'll say 'why not try a Cosmopolitan?'"