

spicy spirits

Peppers and brisket are two of the ingredients showing up in today's savory cocktails

By Jackie Burrell

jburrell@bayareanewsgroup.com

In a sea of sweet and fruity martinis, the Andalusia stood in stark contrast. The cocktail — its cucumber-infused vodka turned crimson by the spicy, roasted red pepper syrup — glowed like a beacon. And the glass rim, scarlet with

smoked paprika and sea salt, only upped the ante.

Small wonder then that a drink named for the region of Spain that gave birth to gazpacho took top prize at the Best Martini Contest of the East Bay last month in Lafayette. Mixologist Jay Crabb's concoction was naughty, spicy and savory, and the latest in what may be a new cocktail trend — savory spirits.

These cocktails don't just push the flavor envelope, they shred it, infuse it with habaneros and serve it straight up,

See **SPICY**, Page 2

BARBECUE & SPIRIT PAIRINGS

We may think of barbecue and beer as a natural pairing, but smoked, grilled meats pair particularly well with bourbon and whiskey, mixologist Josh Perry says, because the meat's smoky notes complement the smokiness of barrel-aged spirits. "Our aged Brisket Manhattan goes well with steak and heavier-style dishes," he says. "But at the end of the day, it's what the guest likes."

That said, the Pican bartender's libation recommendations include these pairing suggestions based on barbecue style:

Memphis-style: A smokier, heavier drink goes best with the smoky, spicy flavors of pork, grilled low and slow and accompanied by a tangy, sweet, tomato-based sauce.

Carolina: Sip something lighter and more acidic, such as sangria or beer, with Carolina-style barbecue and its vinegar-based sauces.

Kansas City and Texas: You'll want a slightly sweeter drink to accompany smoked brisket or ribs. Sweeter flavors pair well with the thick, sweet barbecue sauces beloved by Kansas City devotees, and with the less sweet versions favored by Texan fans.



A martini with hot red pepper syrup and smoked paprika, garnished with onion, lemon, basil and a red pepper, is the winner of the Best Martini Contest of the East Bay.

Spicy

rimmed with smoked sea salt and incendiary spices — and a side of barbecue. They're the anti-Cosmo.

These days, gazpacho's in the martinis at the Walnut Creek Yacht Club, where Crabb tends bar. There's brisket in the bourbon at Pican and pancetta in the "Breakfast for Kermit" cocktail at San Francisco's Credo.

Some might call it extreme. Anna Rossi, bar manager at Credo and creator of the Kermit, calls it playful fun.

"This is part of the cocktail renaissance," she says. "There's a burgeoning of these kinds of ideas in specific geographic areas, and it's true across the food spectrum. We're playing in ways they haven't before, thinking more and more outside the box. Oh, that's not supposed to go in a cocktail? Why not?"

That sense of adventure extends into restaurants where chefs and mixologists collaborate.

"A lot of times with these cocktails, food is the inspiration," Crabb says. "Every few months, something new happens in the cocktail world. Right now, it's savory drinks. You're seeing a lot of that in restaurants — the kitchen is working so closely with the bar now."

Dry rubs and cayenne flavor the Bloody Marys at San Francisco's Epic Roasthouse, and add Cajun flair to the cocktails at San Jose's Roux Louisiana Kitchen. At Pican, the New Orleans-style restaurant in Oakland's Uptown, the bar has gone whole hog with barbecued cocktails.

Pican mixologist Josh Perry recently teamed up with Kingsford, the Oakland-based charcoal company, to create a series of 'cued cocktails that include Bloody Marys made with grilled-lemon juice and rimmed with house-smoked salt, and Manhattans that feature slow-smoked cherries and bourbon infused with brisket drippings, using a technique

Ultimate Barbecued Brisket Manhattan

Serves 1

Cherries (see note below)
2 ounces barbecued brisket-infused Four Roses Bourbon (see recipe)
½ ounce Carpano Antica vermouth
3 dashes Bittermens Mole Bitters

1. Build a charcoal fire for indirect cooking, with coals on one side of the grill only.

2. Place cherries on a sheet pan in a single layer. (These will be a garnish, so you only need a few per glass, but you can smoke up to 3 cups at a time.) Cook over indirect heat, lid covered, for at least 45 minutes, keeping grill temperature at 225 degrees. Let cherries cool.

3. Combine 2 ounces brisket-infused bourbon, vermouth and bitters in a shaker with ice. Shake well and strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with smoked cherries.

Brisket-Infused Four Roses Bourbon

1½ to 3 ounces barbecued beef brisket drippings
750 milliliters Four Roses Bourbon

1. Pour bourbon into a nonporous container. Using cheesecloth or a coffee filter, strain the brisket fat into the bourbon. Let rest 4 to 6 hours at room temperature.

2. Freeze mixture until fat solidified. Remove fat with a slotted spoon, then pour bourbon through the filter to remove any sediment.

— Josh Perry,
*Pican mixologist,
 Kingsford charcoal recipe*

known as fat washing.

"I've used it with bacon," Perry says. "You cook the bacon down, collect the fat and pour that into a bottle of your bourbon, whiskey or vodka. Let it sit several hours, then throw it in the freezer. The fat will freeze but the spirits are liquid. It's like an infusion."

Of course, some people always will prefer beer with their brisket, but Pican's patrons are definitely intrigued by the new sips.

Barbecued Bloody Mary

Serves 4

2 cups coarse salt
6 lemons
2 jalapeños
8 ounces Four Roses Bourbon

Barbecued Bloody Mary mix:

12 ounces tomato juice

2 ounces smoked lemon juice
1 teaspoon crushed chipotles
1 ounce molasses
2 ounces beef stock
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1. Build a charcoal fire for indirect cooking, situating the coals on one side of the grill and leaving the other side void.

2. Thinly spread coarse salt on a disposable aluminum pan or aluminum foil. Place on the grill, over the non-charcoal side of the grill, cover and let roast at least 1 hour. Cool to room temperature; store in a sealed container. The smoked salt will be used to rim the glasses.

3. Cut lemons in half along the equator and place halves on a disposable aluminum pan or aluminum foil. Place on the non-charcoal side of the grill and cook, covered, for at least 30 minutes, making sure to keep the grill temperature at 225 degrees. Let cool.

4. Squeeze cooled lemons to produce 2 ounces of juice for the Barbecued Bloody Marys. Reserve remaining smoked lemons to cut for garnish and use for rimming.

5. While lemons are cooling, cut jalapeños into thick slices and place on the grill, turning once, until both sides are flame kissed, 1 to 2 minutes on each side.

6. Combine Barbecued Bloody Mary Mix ingredients and mix well. Store in refrigerator until ready to use.

7. To serve, run a sliced smoked lemon wedge around the lip of each Collins or high ball glass. Dip and twist glass in smoked salt to rim the glass. For each cocktail, combine 4 ounces of Barbecued Bloody Mary mix and 2 ounces of Four Roses Bourbon in each glass. Garnish with a smoked lemon wedge and thick jalapeño slice.

— Josh Perry, *Pican mixologist, Kingsford charcoal recipe*

"People haven't really thought of it being in a cocktail," Perry says. "It's definitely a surprise, but they're very interested in trying it."

It's that sense of surprise that Rossi finds so enticing, whether it's from smoked salt on a glass rim or pancetta in the martini glass.

"It's a lot about playing with things that are unexpected in cocktails," the Credo bar manager says. "We've all had martinis and Manhattans. It's about lifting out some of the flavors already in the spirits we use."

Her Breakfast for Kermit cocktail blends Maker's Mark bourbon, maple syrup, fresh orange and pancetta — with a sly nod to Sesame Street, where Miss Piggy's beau dwells. It's not a barbecue cocktail per se, but it's a meaty concoction, especially when served in a glass rimmed with smoked paprika

and smoked salt.

There's more to the process of designing a cocktail than playing with trendy flavors, of course. Balance is key. Go overboard with either the meatiness or smoke factor and the results are just nasty.

"There were definitely times I erred and it tasted like you were licking an ashtray," Perry says. "It's all about finding the right balance working with barbecue and smoked flavors."

And just because paprika looks flashy doesn't mean it should rim everything — nor that every cocktail should get the rim treatment, Crabb says. Still, a rimmed glass is awfully fun.

"Last year, when we did the (martini) competition," Crabb says, "we did a cocktail with crushed green peppercorns on the rim."



MARK DUFRÈNE/STAFF

The recipe for this award winning Andalusia Martini is at right.

Cajun Lemonade

Serves 1

1½ ounces vodka
½ ounce Pimm's No. 1
1 ounce lemon juice
½ ounce simple syrup
3 dashes Tabasco
1 ounce Sprite
Lemon wheel, to garnish

Combine the vodka, Pimm's, lemon juice, simple syrup and Tabasco in an ice-filled shaker. Shake and strain into an ice-filled Collins or high ball glass, and top with Sprite. Garnish with lemon wheel and serve.

— Josh Perry, *Pican*

Breakfast for Kermit

Serves 1

1½ inch piece freshly fried pancetta
1 slice orange, cut ¼-inch thick
3 dashes Angostura bitters
1¾ ounce Maker's Mark bourbon
½ ounce maple syrup
Squeeze of lime
Smoked paprika and smoked salt for the rim

Muddle the pancetta, orange slice and bitters in a cocktail shaker or mixing glass. Add bourbon, maple syrup and squeeze of lime. Shake, strain and serve in a martini glass rimmed with smoked paprika and smoked salt. Allow a dime-size piece of pancetta to settle at the base of the glass.

— Anna Rossi,
bar manager, Credo

Andalusia Martini

Serves 1

2 ounces Effen cucumber vodka
¾ ounce Hartley & Gibson Amontillado sherry
1 ounce roasted red pepper syrup (see recipe)
1 ounce fresh lemon juice
Spice mix for glass rim (see recipe)

Lemon wedge
Garnish: Red and yellow cherry tomatoes, cucumber wheel, cocktail onion

1. Shake the vodka, sherry, red pepper syrup and lemon juice with ice in a cocktail shaker for 15 seconds.

2. Place some spice mix on a large plate. Moisten the glass rim with a lemon wedge, then dip into the spice mix.

3. Strain the cocktail into the prepared glass. Garnish with a red and a yellow cherry tomato, cucumber wheel and cocktail onion on a skewer.

Roasted Red Pepper Syrup

1 cup diced, roasted red peppers
2 cups sugar
2 cups water
1 bay leaf
½ teaspoon black peppercorns

3 sprigs fresh thyme
 Bring ingredients to a boil, lower heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Let cool 20 minutes. Puree mixture in a blender, then strain syrup into a glass bottle. Store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Rim Spice Mix

4 ounces toasted, sliced almonds
1 teaspoon black peppercorns
1 tablespoon Spanish Pimenton or smoked paprika

1 teaspoon coarse sea salt
 Using a spice grinder, pulse almonds and peppercorns a few times. Add pimenton and salt. Pulse to desired texture. The almonds should be ground fine, but not powdery; you want them to retain some texture.

— Jay Crabb, *Walnut Creek Yacht Club*

