



Potions with **PIZZAZZ**



A Simple Touch of Creative Science Generates Buzz for Any Bar

By Kelly A. Magyarics

Cafe Atlantico's Jill Zimorski recommends the use of airs as an easy way to incorporate molecular mixology into cocktails. Shown here is her Salt Air Margarita.

When molecular mixology hit the scene a few years ago, isomalt and soy lecithin gained a place on some shelves right next to gin and bitters, and emulsifiers and Cryovac machines joined cocktail shakers and Hawthorne strainers as bars became indistinguishable from laboratories. This subset of bartending — an offshoot of molecular gastronomy — gives cocktailians the chance to flex their muscles and highlight more complex textures and flavors in drinks, providing both



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Signature Cocktail Creations

The Cotton Candy Martini, created by Herb Westphalen, puts a flavorful, colorful and fun twist on the classic drink.

sugar without a granular texture.

But airs aren't actually new, notes Josh Durr of Molecular Bartending, a cocktail consulting company based in Louisville, Ky. The science of bartending actually has been around for a long time, he explains, citing the elementary example of how ice melting is in fact a change of state at the molecular level. As classic and culinary cocktails gain momentum, Durr notices a convergence in techniques. Thus, more bartenders are relying on the old-school method of using egg whites (traditionally used in flips) instead of soy lecithin foams to recreate a similar effect without any tools beyond a cocktail tin and a few minutes of vigorous shaking. Either way, these foamy formulas up the visual appeal of cocktails with a deceptively small amount of effort.

Another easily introducible method of molecular mixology, according to Durr, is infusion through fat washing. Here, bartenders add some kind of fat to a bottle of spirits and freeze it for a day or two. After skimming off the solids, the infused flavor remains. References to fat washing date back to the 1940s; today, Jim Meehan's bacon-infused bourbon, used in an Old Fashioned twist at New York's PDT, and Justin Guthrie's peanut butter rum, used in a warmer-upper at Washington, D.C.'s W Hotel, are two eclectic and well-received modern examples.

While textural applications like foams, gelatins, powders, dusts and spheres add to a cocktail's aesthetics, get guests in the door and perhaps get them to order out of curiosity, flavor and quality will keep them there. “Substance — not hype — should be the focus for any es-

a wow factor for guests and a high level of showmanship for operators.

Admittedly, some of these tippie techniques can be intricately esoteric, requiring expensive or difficult to obtain ingredients and equipment, as well as a great deal of experimentation. But several others exist that are simple to introduce. Though the trend has leveled off a bit, an impressive number of bartenders still are using scientific innovation to drive traffic and sales. We asked some proponents of molecular mixology for tips on employing easily impressive elements into any bar environment.

If your boss happens to be José Andrés, inspired by molecular gastronomy master Ferran Adrià, you'll no doubt take what's happening in the kitchen and find a way to incorporate it behind the bar. But sommelier and mixologist Jill Zimorski of Washington, D.C.'s Café Atlantico is quick to point out that both she and Andrés eschew the terms molecular gastronomy

and molecular mixology. “[Andrés] prefers techno-emotional or avant-garde cooking. We like to play with flavors, textures and presentations. And it's not like I am splitting atoms behind the bar, just a little shaking and stirring.”

Though she has dabbled in complex techniques like spherification — where tiny orbs lazily bob in a flute of Champagne like oil in a lava lamp, bursting with strawberry or orange pomegranate flavors as a guest takes a sip — Zimorski believes an easier way to incorporate a bit of molecular flair to a drinks program is through the use of airs. Effortlessly made by adding a half-teaspoon of soy lecithin (available at health food stores) to a quart of any liquid and mixing with an immersion blender, the applications are endless. “We use a celery air on our Bloody Mary and a salt and lime air on our Margarita,” she says. Both concoctions sell for \$11. Airs can stand in for drink rimmers, playfully toying with the element of salt or

establishment to drive cocktail sales. Feature these cocktails on a list highlighted with the drink's uniqueness," suggests Herb Westphalen of New York City-based Signature Cocktail Creations. His Cotton Candy Martini originally sold for \$10 at Philip Marie Restaurant in New York City. Blue and pink cotton candy garnishes add color and flavor to a classic (and typically clear) drink.



Though commercial cotton candy makers sell for upwards of \$600, lower-end ones are available for less than \$100 — a fun and whimsical garnish option for bars.

To acclimate guests to this style of mixology, Zimorski suggests operators first start with twists such as foams or a cotton candy garnish on familiar drinks like the Mojito or Margarita. "We earn trust by doing that, and then people are more willing to try some of the more esoteric creations that I dream up," she explains. At Café Atlantico, descriptions of cocktails incorporating molecular mixology are designated with quotation marks to indicate the play on the classic drink presentation.

When molecular mixology techniques are in use behind the bar, bartenders and servers also need to learn how the drinks are made and be ready to educate patrons about a drink's flavor and texture profiles in descriptive, consistent language. If guests haven't already seen the cocktail mixed up or passing by their table on a tray, they need to see a clear picture of it to understand it and want to order it.

Whether complex techniques or simple slights of hand are in use, a fine line exists between a well-made drink and one where guests are made to wait. Though patrons may be forgiving if a unique drink takes a few minutes to arrive, Durr believes they are more aware of timing these days. Great bars must be able to produce consistent drinks in a quick manner, which Westphalen says may mean foregoing tools like the more complicated Cryovac and carbonator. "Admirers point out that these advances bring the flavor and textures of cocktails to a new, more complex level. Detractors seem to think it's too much hype. I believe there is a bit of both," he explains.

Ongoing kitchen and bar collaboration is inevitable and innovative, says Westphalen. "As long as chefs are developing new methods in the kitchen, mixologists will borrow, adapt and improve them behind the bar."

For operators looking to pepper their drink lists with some science, Durr recommends making sure you have first mastered Bartending 101 by using fresh ingredients and mixing drinks properly before tackling the next level. Then, take a good look at the existing program to decide what aspects of molecular mixology will realistically work for your location, with your budget and for your clientele. In other words, says Durr, "Don't create crème brûlée at a hamburger joint." **NCB**

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