

THE MICHAEL MINA CONCEPTS AT **FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BALTIMORE** BRING CLASSIC AND ORIGINAL COCKTAILS, A STRONG AMERICAN WINE LIST AND AN AMBITIOUS SAKÉ PROGRAM TO CHARM CITY

Harbor Sights, Liquid Delights

by Kelly A. Magyarics



Above: Tiffany Soto is Beverage Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Baltimore.

Saffron-infused cocktail The Company is based on Beefeater Gin.



The launch of the Four Seasons in Baltimore's Harbor East is the first East Coast location of the hotel chain in nearly a decade. Its three dining concepts—an American tavern, a modern take on Japanese Izakaya-style dining and a European coffeehouse—also mark the second collaboration between Four Seasons and Michael Mina since Bourbon Steak opened at the Four Seasons Washington, D.C. in 2008.

At signature restaurant **Wit & Wisdom**, Executive Chef Clayton Miller serves Mid-Atlantic-inspired cuisine such as wood-fired rockfish and stuffed calamari, and Maryland blue crab deviled eggs with shallot cracklins'. Beverage Manager Tiffany Soto heads up the onsite drinks programs. Her list of eleven cocktails at Wit & Wisdom boasts original libations such as The Company, with saffron-infused Beefeater Gin, honey, lemon and orange bitters, and the Sticky Wicket, with Jim Beam, Fernet Branca, smoked maple syrup and soda. The wine program has a decided American focus; 21 wines by the glass are joined by 45 half bottles and 188 bottles.

But it's next door at **PABU** where Soto really gets to promote her passion. She cultivates a voracious interest in saké that started a few years ago as a teaching assistant in Las Vegas. There, curious Japanese students were eager to learn more about the traditional rice wine, but Soto was admittedly not prepared to teach them. She feverishly began her studies, even traveling to Japan to immerse her in its culture and traditions, and as she puts it, her "interest multiplied exponentially."

Soto is now a Certified Saké Sommelier, and her enthusiasm for educating guests about a beverage category teeming with misconceptions is both refreshing and infectious. "Many Americans believe that the hot battery acid they dropped in a beer the first time they had sushi was saké, and that that's all saké will ever be," she says. "They either haven't had access to premium or super-premium sakes, or likely no one ever explained there was a difference at all."

To that end, at PABU Soto offers 12 sakes by the glass and 91 by the bottle, all served from a collection of vintage cups. Saké even finds its way onto the cocktail like in drinks like the Lemongrass Sour, with Grand Marnier and mint. Four whisky cocktails use highly allocated brown spirits from Suntory; guests can also participate in a Japanese whisky ceremony, complete with ice spheres and pairing essences.

Soto promotes the saké program through social media, classes and tableside education. Baltimore has recently become the second-highest city for saké purchases in the East Coast after New York, but Soto has a lofty challenge for fellow B'more venues: "While it's nice to be the only restaurant that offers an amazing list, I'd be much happier if we had some competition out there. I'm hoping to set a bar that others will want to compete with." ■■