



Tales of the Cocktail: A Spirited and Culinary Extravaganza in New Orleans

by Pamela Irving

NEW ORLEANS - When I received the invitation to attend *Tales of the Cocktail* (www.talesofthecocktail.com) in New Orleans from July 7-12, 2009, I wondered if there were enough tales about cocktails to warrant five days of events and an annual celebration now in its seventh year. I should never have doubted the ability of New Orleans to put on a party for 16,000 attendees that is extravagant yet tasteful and have the best talent in the industry onsite for both seasoned and novice cocktailers to educate their palate, explore new trends, and of course, sample new cocktails.

Tales of the Cocktail is a series of events that have become a tradition in New Orleans. If you are looking for a fun and festive morning, the festival is a must. Albert selected blueberries for our luncheon at the Palace Cafe - not for dining but for mixing. We mixed our own cocktails at lunch using fresh blueberry syrup, Pama (pomegranate) liqueur and other ingredients. It was a delightful accompaniment to the extraordinary meal of local, organic cuisine handpicked from the market-melon gazpacho, New Orleans soft crab and other delicacies.

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Another trend to watch in cocktails is botanicals - herbs and florals that sing to the palate. Vendors and distillers are targeting women like **Loft Organic's Lavender Vodka** - the perfect nightcap. Allison Evanow, owner of **Square One Vodka** made from certified organic ingredients says, "Women are leading the buying trend and we are responding to that market." Evanow uses organic ingredients, in her new **Square One Botanical** - whose main ingredient is organic rye grown by farmers in Montana. Other cocktail trends to watch: teas as infusion, fresh hand-squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, more bitter and sour tastes versus sweet, and more handmade spirits, like **Tito's Handmade Vodka** from Texas.

If all this has you thirsting for more, you don't have to go all the way to New Orleans to imbibe in the next great cocktail event. A new festival will be held in Victoria BC November 7-8, 2009 - Art of the Cocktail (www.artofthecocktail.ca). Kathy Kay, festival director says, "We don't settle for mediocre food or wine any more so why settle for mediocre cocktails? Like food and wine, you need to taste and experiment and look at the ingredients that are going into the drink. It's about small perfectly made spirit forward cocktails that add an element of sophistication. There's something so grown up and elegant about having a perfect cocktail paired with wonderful hors d'oeuvres and great conversation before dinner."

I did feel very grown up at the Spirited Dinner at the **W Hotel** on Poitras Street where we enjoyed an intimate dinner with **Playboy Magazine** wine and spirits columnist Dan Dunn and other special guests. Other highlights of Tales and New Orleans included: The *7 Deadly Sins* event with each sin profiling a different spirit, late night parties reminiscent of Mardi Gras in terms of costumery, floor shows and of course, cocktails, a tour to Brad Pitt's *Make it Right* project where he is building zero-carbon homes for the poorest people who lost their homes in Katrina; and alligator, catfish and Cajun music at Mulate's restaurant. Bon temps!

New Orleans and Tales of the Cocktail are a high-octane mix - with a strong bourbon underbelly, jazzy notes mid-palate and Cajun spices that last long into the night, leaving your soul refreshed and respirited with the memory of it lingering long on your tongue.

Pamela Irving of Living Communications is a premier lifestyle journalist. If you have a story to tell, are an editor who wants one told, or are in need of media relations contact Irving at livingcomms@telus.net