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KEEPING COOL WITH KC'S OWN JASON WILES

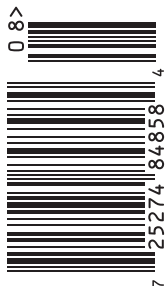
LOCALLY GROWN TALENT STAGES A HEARTLAND SEIGE ON HOLLYWOOD—AND BEYOND

OUR ANNUAL ARTS ISSUE EXPLORES A CITY ON THE BRINK

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH THE SCENE'S MOVERS AND SHAKERS

PLUS: AN ENTHUSIASTIC PIONEER BUILDS NEW LIFE ON THE WEST SIDE

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Believe it or not, Kansas City's cocktail scene not only has some New York roots, it's actually making waves in the Big Apple and beyond.

Manhattan is the undeniable cocktail capital of the world. Some may make an argument for San Francisco, New Orleans, or even Tokyo, but even then the conversation always comes back to New York. For modern-day cocktail geeks, spirits connoisseurs and revelers, New York City carries the torch.

In addition to the sheer mass of influential bars such as Milk & Honey, Flat Iron Lounge, Pegu Club and Mayahuel, one needs to look no further for proof of this supremacy than the recently held Manhattan Cocktail Classic, which practically took over the city for five days in May. The cool thing is, there was a Kansas City presence amid all this urban cocktail mayhem.

The "MCC," as it has been dubbed, can be described as part festival, part fête, part conference and part cocktail party. This year it included a blowout gala at the New York Public Library featuring three bands, more than 40 brands of spirits, some of the best bartenders from all around the world and plenty of cocktails

STORY BY **RYAN MAYBEE**

PHOTOS BY **BRANDON CUMMINS**



Brandon Cummins, a photographer and former bartender at Manifesto and 1924 Main, was flown to the Big Apple to serve as official photographer and videographer for the Manhattan Cocktail Classic. His experience and work with the Greater Kansas City Bartending Competition gave him the right mix of experience and networking to document the world's largest cocktail soirée. PREVIOUS SPREAD: Article author Ryan Maybee at the Hendrick's Gin Booth. ABOVE, FROM LEFT: Kansas City Bartenders Alliance members mix it up at Maker's Mark; Doug Frost judges carefully; David Wondrich pulls no punches; James Franco celebrates Cocktail Culture at the MCC's opening gala.

for the 2,500 guests in attendance. What's truly fascinating about this celebration is that while it is meant to showcase the New York scene, bartenders from as far away as Ireland, Australia, and, yes, even Kansas City are invited to work the event and flaunt their skills.

Kansas City's bar scene has made huge strides in the past couple of years, as several bars and bartenders have gained national attention for their skills and talent. This is no coincidence; in fact, it is largely thanks to the experts who are involved with organizing and promoting the MCC. Local sommelier Doug Frost co-founded the Manhattan competition along with 12 others considered to be luminaries in the field of anything booze- and cocktail-related. Frost is also a partner in and co-founder of the Greater Kansas City Bartending Competition (GKCBC), which in 2010 is entering its fourth year. *[Ed. note: Writer Ryan Maybee is also a GKCBC co-founder.]*

The goal of the Kansas City competition has been to showcase the skills of local bartenders who approach their profession as a craft and to reward them and their bars for their hard work and effort. And this initiative has attracted several of Frost's expert cohorts at the MCC: Dale Degroff, a.k.a. "King Cocktail," was a guest judge at the inaugural event in 2007. Last year, award-winning author and cocktail historian David Wondrich came to town to oversee the proceedings, and he subsequently wrote a piece about Kansas City in *Esquire* that mentioned two local bars. MCC co-founder Charlotte Voisey is the brand ambassador for Hendrick's Gin, and she has shown support for the GKCBC by promoting the brand as presenting sponsor for the last two years. And Aisha Sharpe, co-owner of Contemporary Cocktails, Inc. in New York and guest judge in 2008, has called GKCBC one of the best-run competitions she'd ever been a part of. It's an amazing synergy.

"The KC bartending competition raises the profile of the area's very best mixologists, and massive events like the MCC [then] offer a crazy breadth of information and ideas to [these same] aspiring or experienced bartenders," Frost says.



And the favors and support are reciprocated. I had the incredible opportunity to work the Hendrick's Gin bar at the MCC Gala this year, and I worked for Aperol during last year's preview of the event. In both instances I received a warm welcome into what can be perceived from the outside as an exclusive industry, and I felt like I was part of something much bigger than even New York. While there are elements of a competitive nature within the bartending community, there are no secrets; only the open sharing of ideas.

Using the festive and educational nature of the Manhattan Cocktail Classic as a template from which to draw, The Greater Kansas City Bartending Competition looks to expand beyond the competitive aspect and become a more dynamic event that gives attendees a true taste of what Kansas City bars have to offer. As of press time, the fourth annual event, to be held August 29 at The Uptown Theater, was being organized by a committee of local bartenders from the Kansas City Bartenders Alliance, including last year's top two finishers, Arturo Vera-Felicie and Beau Williams, as well as BR5 Labs' Brandon Cummins and Jason Burton of beverage industry PR firm Lab 5702.

At this year's big event, guests will be able to taste all of the finalists' cocktails, as well as sample locally owned products that

play a role in our own unique bar and cocktail scene. The competition itself will be more interactive and educational, and guests will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite bartender via text message. There will be live music and food provided by local restaurants. In short, the goal for this year's competition—and with the overall experience moving forward—is not only to determine the best bartender in Kansas City, but to also showcase all that the metro's bars, restaurants and local beverage industry companies have to offer. As judge David Wondrich said after last year's final competition, "Five years ago it would have been hard to find something like this in New York; now it's everywhere, including Kansas City." ■

get your drink on

The 2010 Greater Kansas City Bartending Competition

Sunday, August 29

The Uptown Theater

Doors open at 6 p.m.; tickets are \$15.

Visit gkcbbc.com for more information.