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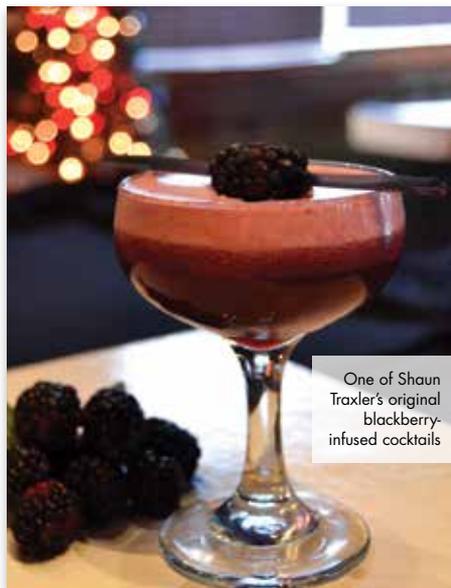
HOW LOCAL BARTENDERS ARE SHAKING UP OUR AREA COCKTAIL SCENE WITH THEIR CREATIVE DRINK SERVICES

While the key to crafting a great cocktail lies partially in the quality of the ingredients, it's the hand of the mixer who really sets the drink apart. Bartender, mixologist, tapster, whatever you might call them, there's more to these drink connoisseurs than meets the eye.

The craft of bartending is just that – a craft. As an expressive, culinary art form, just as a chef prepares a creative feast, a talented bartender can craft a mouthwatering masterpiece, perfectly suited for a patron's tastes.

With the gastronomic scene in Northwest Arkansas booming, the craft cocktail trend that accompanies it shouldn't be missed. Some of our area establishments are setting the bar high when it comes to cocktails, but more notably, it is some of our local bartenders who are taking things to the next level.

Moving drinks from the bar to your home or party, some of our local bartenders' work is giving people something to talk about. Our area boasts several very talented drink experts, some of who flawlessly service your events, create private cocktail happy hours, and spend their free time winning national bartending awards or touring whiskey distilleries.



One of Shaun Traxler's original blackberry-infused cocktails



Shaun Traxler

Photo by Wes Ryan Photography

Shaun Traxler, reigning champion of the NWA Mixology Competition, is one of said bartenders, or a "BarChef," as he likes to call himself. Traxler tends bar at the Dickson Street alley bar, Sideways, for his full-time gig, but it's not just behind the Sideways bar that he gets his creative juices flowing. In addition to being a local champion, Traxler has also been honored with national attention. Among numerous awards, he has brought home the title /in the My Best Cocktail competition for the Las Vegas Nightclub and Bar Convention, and won a Jack Daniels competition that awarded him a trip straight to the distillery itself.

Starting his culinary journey at age 13, Traxler's passion for mixing drinks stemmed from early cooking experiences and his love for food. Between Food Network marathons, Traxler started small by cooking for his family before he found himself in the field professionally, working long hours as a line chef. It didn't take long in this taxing position before he discovered that what he truly desired was to serve people from behind the bar.

Continuing his education, all the while tending bar, Traxler discovered his interest in science, which ultimately led

to the innovative style he exhibits in his drinks today. "Inspiration for a lot of my recipes surely comes from my meticulously maintained relationship with food," says Traxler. "Often, I'll find myself eating something really weird and my inner monologue screams, 'You should totally make this into a cocktail!' I had developed an intense love for all things scientific through college, and I started incorporating that knowledge into my cooking and my cocktails. I became aware of the ease in which I could translate the flavors from my culinary life into my mixology life."

Feeling confident in his ability to produce cocktail standards, it is with his unorthodox concoctions that he really has some fun. Working with homemade syrups, tinctures, juices, mixes and garnishes, the creative possibilities are endless for Traxler. Traxler mixes drinks (both classics and Traxler originals) at events of all sizes, and is also available for hire as an event, bar or restaurant consultant.

A bit more traditional but certainly just as talented, Brandon Davidson, the head barman and mustache behind the Retrotender, is also making an impression in the Northwest Arkansas cocktail scene.

As a classics man, Davidson tends to focus on traditional cocktail creations and uses them as a base to accent flavor and notes to create something new. "Drink innovation is wonderful," says Davidson, "but I also want to create drinks that are user-friendly, where anyone can recreate them, enjoy them and be their own 'liquid chef.' I like to note what food pairings make a meal memorable and create drinks that would compliment those flavors, and I also get inspiration from working with clients and the mood and tone that they are wanting to create through the bar service at their event."

Focusing on creating a memorable bar experience with standout service and entertaining hosts, Retrotender staffs events large and small, including weddings, corporate events, festivals and private parties, and also offers drink menu consultations, private mixology classes and bourbon tastings.

Retrotender is also partnering with Pink House Alchemy (local purveyor of innovative syrups, shrubs and bitters) to expand their services to raise the bar for event bartending and staffing in Northwest Arkansas. "Our goal in teaming up is to provide an educated staff that can deliver the highest quality in bar service," says Davidson. "We both love education, and we are working with the new culinary school to help develop the curriculum for their beverage programming as well as providing hands-on training to our staff. We are also moving forward on some fun, exclusive services, including a cocktail caravan that we will be rolling out for weddings, events and farmers markets."

Adding a woman's touch to the mix, Sue Shadlow is leaving her mark on the scene with her all-women-owned bartending and event service, Tie 1 on NWA. Like Traxler and Davidson, Shadlow also enjoys working with her own shrubs and syrups to put her creative touch on the classics, but it's the personality of the customer that really influences her drinks. "I like to talk to my clients and get a feel for who they are and try to capture their vibe in a drink," says Shadlow. "When someone says 'Just make me something,' the look on their face when they taste it is what makes me happy and lets me know I am where I am supposed to be."

While it's bartending that really allows Shadlow's talents to shine, Tie 1 on NWA offers services of all kinds and is available for hire for a variety of event needs.

Whether you are planning a wedding, hosting a party or just looking to sip that perfect drink, our area bartenders can provide you with the drink or service you are after. Shaken or stirred, dirty or neat, simple or elaborate, cheers to 2016 and to a well-done cocktail!



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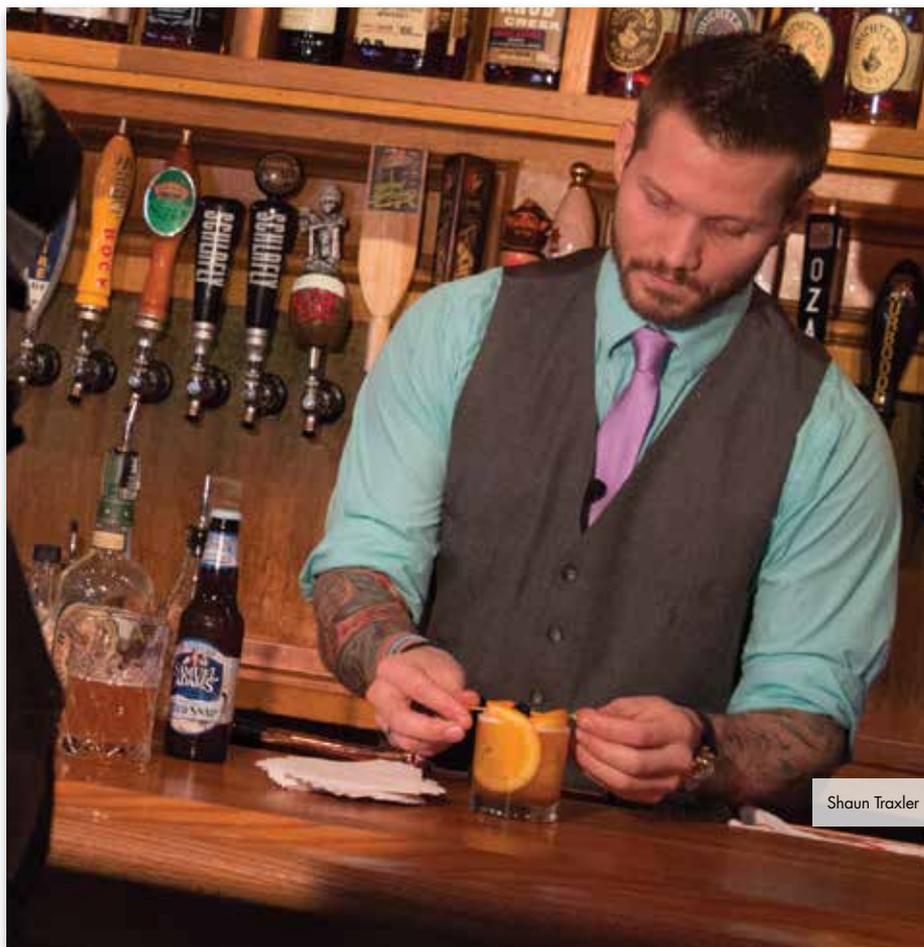
LITTLE JACK HORNER A SHAUN TRAXLER ORIGINAL RECIPE

- ▶ 2 oz cinnamon infused* gin (preferably Corsair barrel aged)
- ▶ 1.25 oz honey/clove syrup**
- ▶ 4 dashes Fee Brothers Plum Bitters
- ▶ 2 dashes Fee Brothers Barrel Aged Bitters
- ▶ Orange slice
- ▶ Whole nutmeg (for garnish)
- ▶ Fresh plum (for garnish)

Muddle the orange slice in a mixing glass with the bitters and syrup. Add the gin and ice and shake for 15-20 seconds. Strain over an extra-large ice cube in an Old Fashioned glass. Garnish with orange slice, fresh shaved nutmeg and half a plum.

*Add 2 cinnamon sticks to bottle of gin. Shake every 8-12 hours. Will be ready in as little as 2 days. Good indefinitely but cinnamon flavor will intensify over time.

**Bring 2 cups sugar, 2 cups water and 3 whole cloves to a boil, stirring frequently. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool completely. Add 1/2 cup honey and stir. Syrup is usable immediately, but refrigerate for 24 hours for best flavor. Syrup will keep in refrigerator for 10 days.



Shaun Traxler



Brandon Davidson, the Retrotender, and his original Courage and Spice cocktail



COURAGE AND SPICE A BRANDON DAVIDSON ORIGINAL RECIPE

- ▶ 1.5 oz bourbon
- ▶ .5 oz lime juice (freshly squeezed)
- ▶ .5 oz orange juice (freshly squeezed)
- ▶ .25 oz ginger syrup
- ▶ 2 dashes of old fashioned aromatic bitters

Combine ingredients in cocktail shaker and shake vigorously for 8 seconds. Strain over fresh ice and garnish with candied ginger.

Photo by Miles Witt Boyer

Sue Shadlow's original Beaver Bulleit cocktail



Photo by Kerri McMahon

BEAVER BULLEIT A SUE SHADLOW ORIGINAL RECIPE

- ▶ 1.25 oz Bulleit rye whiskey
- ▶ 4 oz blood orange or grapefruit juice (freshly squeezed)
- ▶ 1 tsp agave
- ▶ 2-3 dashes of aromatic bitters
- ▶ Fresh mint

In a shaker filled with ice, combine all ingredients and shake until well combined. Strain into a cocktail glass and garnish with fresh mint. ■

Sue Shadlow, Tie 1 On



Photo by Kerri McMahon

To learn more about the services offered by the bartenders mentioned in this article, visit their websites for more information: Shaun Traxler at www.shauntraxler.com Brandon Davidson at www.retotender.com Sue Shadlow at www.tie1onnwa.com

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