

# Drinking Lessons

You can sip it, but can you shake it? A few top bartenders are spilling their secrets on the side

| By George W. Stone |  
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## The Passenger/The Columbia Room

THE PROF “We all have the same recipes, so why do some cocktails taste better than others?” asks Derek Brown, of The Passenger bar and its back space, The Columbia Room. It’s a hard question to shake. “As bartenders, we deal in nuances and subtleties. My classes are about revealing some of the secrets of great drinks. But I don’t tell everybody everything!” THE PROOF For a hot holiday hit, learn to make a simmering pot of spicy Scandinavian *glögg* and master other mulled wine drinks. Brown presides over an ongoing curriculum of classes that help aspiring mixologists sharpen their technique through “elective” courses on topics such as citrus zest, punches of the South and the pleasures of rye whiskey. The Columbia Room hosts guest teachers, so check online for updated future classes. *Dec. 1, 7-8:30PM, \$65. The Passenger/The Columbia Room, 1021 7th St., NW, passengerdc.com/columbia.*

## Bourbon Steak

THE PROF Hipper sipper Duane Sylvestre is a genius in the art of crafting subtly layered cocktails. His delicate drinks pack purées, bitters, spirits and more into powerful potions. His favorite drink to teach? “Not Tonight,” a majestic mix of mandarin vodka, velvet falernum syrup, chipotle tincture, orgeat syrup, whiskey barrel bitters and lime juice with an orange twist. “The name alone inspires a lot of questions,” he says. “Plus everyone smiles when I say it.” THE PROOF In his next class, Sylvestre will offer a speedy primer on the history of cocktails, basic bar techniques and current trends. The fun really begins when you grab a shaker and get to work on bourbon-based drinks. Hungry students are sustained with zesty bar snacks from chef David Varley and head home with a mixology gift bag. *Jan. 30, noon-2PM, \$95. Bourbon Steak, 2800 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, bourbonsteakdc.com.*

## Wisdom

THE PROF “The secret to teaching is being passionate about the topic,” says crafty cocktail master Erik Holzherr, the barman behind Capitol Hill’s Wisdom and H Street’s hip Fruit Bar. “When I find a small-batch alcohol product that I enjoy, I like to do my best to get the word out. Drinking is about pleasure and my job is to maximize that pleasure by creating informed consumers.” THE PROOF Holzherr loves getting deep into the basics of craft cocktail creation and

## BAR EXAM

Booze? Check. Bitters? Check. Ice? Check. Now what? Star bartender Derek Brown addresses life’s essential questions in a series of mixology classes at The Columbia Room.



turning out classics with surprising twists. He unlocks secrets for making a masterful martini (Dec. 1) with lectures on the drink’s colorful history, variety and creative technique. Then he takes the Manhattan (Dec. 8, Dec. 15) in style, teaching the essential tricks for turning out these bold bourbon concoctions. *Classes at Wisdom, 1432 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, cost \$15. Register at thegintender.wordpress.com.*

## PS 7’s

THE PROF Learning cocktail-making from Gina Chersevani is like learning how to paint from Salvador Dalí. DC’s daringly creative, slightly surreal mixtress is stirring up a monthly series for the new year. “The best thing about teaching is translating your thoughts and watching

students get their first ‘ah ha’ moment. I just love that!” she says. THE PROOF The brains of PS 7’s kitchen (Peter Smith, Andrew Markert and Zak Miller) and bar join forces on classes such as “Cookies and Milk” (Dec. 12)—a holiday cookie-making class paired with Chersevani’s secrets on creating tantalizing milk tipples. “Fire and Ice” (Jan. 22) is a culinary/cocktail tutorial on creating “fire” and “ice”—on a plate or in a glass. “Love Potion #9” (Feb. 5) offers aphrodisiac sippers and nibbles for an amorous Valentine’s Day. “Beer+Shot=Cocktails” (Mar. 12) teaches the fine art and balance of mixing beer and liquor into palatable potables for St. Patrick’s Day. *Classes cost \$65 and include cocktails and nibbles. PS 7’s, 777 I St., NW, ps7restaurant.com. ■*