



Bartender Simon Ford knows how to sling spirits. Hailing originally from London, Ford, like many of his compatriots, spent his early years making the rounds before his bar responsibilities mandated it. “I was a college dropout. I really had no choice,” he explained over coffee during his visit to the recent Portland (Oregon) Cocktail Week. “I was studying economics, and did one year of that, and I really didn’t like it. I decided to travel to Eastern Europe, the Berlin Wall and such, and when I came back, there really wasn’t much to do. So I got a job at a wine shop.”

“It wasn’t much, twenty hours a week. I moved up from assistant manager to manager and so on. It was fine wines and overseas spirits, and I remember buying my first bottle of cachaça and making caipirinhas because it came with a muddler. Distributors gave us bottles and taught us about the spirits we were selling, and information that we would learn so we could recommend based on our own tastes. But I wasn’t really into cocktails until then.”

Winning awards while securing his Wine and Spirits Education Certificate, Ford was ultimately offered the position as International Ambassador for Seagram’s, where he helped to bring Plymouth Gin to the masses. “It was back in the 80s, and they were spending a lot of time and money focusing on bartenders,” he says. “I met all these great people who are considered legends in the industry like Dick Bradsell, Tony Conigliaro. I got to see the cocktail culture development happening.”

When the company folded, he went into business, opening the wildly popular Koba in Brighton. Named one of the top ten cocktail bars in the UK, Ford established a name for himself behind the bar, allowing for more credibility to brand representative roles. Recently named Global Spirits & Cocktail

Brand Expert for Pernod Ricard USA, he's making his way around the once globe again, teaching bar professionals how to create cocktails with perfect mix of creativity and craftsmanship.

What's the bar tool every home mixer should have?

Simon Ford: Ooh...that's a hard one. It's probably a juicer. I think the key to cocktails is the juice. If you can't squeeze the juice from a lemon...err, but you can do that with your hand! But you need a knife. Let's go with knife, at the moment! The barspoon is a definitive tool as well."

When in London, where should we be drinking?

My favorite bar is The Zetter Townhouse, Tony's new spot. Think about how relaxed you are now, but imagine being served amazing cocktails at the same time. The setting looks like a real traveler's living room. He's collected pieces from all over the globe. It's so good. And I feel like the cocktails he's doing there are close to perfection. I really like going to a place called Danger of Death. I think London still does names better than the US.

Bartender or Mixologist?

You know what, I don't mind either. I know it's a big deal right now because bartenders hate the term 'mixologist' for the most part. It implies a focus on the drinks whereas 'bartender' implies the whole experience and your role as a server, an entertainer, a purveyor.

What's the one good cocktail someone can order regardless of whether it's a dive bar or a hotel bar or nightclub?

That's an easy one for me, a Negroni. Because even if they don't now how to make the drink, it's likely they have the Campari, gin, and vermouth, and you can tell them to pour it equal measure. It's a really hard one to screw up.