

WINNERS OF THE NORTH MEETS SOUTH FOOD & DRINK JUBILEE

BY JENNIFER HEIGL AND PETER SZYMCAK

This past March, the North Meets South Food & Drink Jubilee brought together wineries, distilleries, and restaurants from around the globe to Portland's Benson Hotel. The three-day event included tastings, seminars, and two competitions.

The risotto "throwdown" featured top Northwest chefs, and some of the country's top mixologists competed against local favorites in a cocktail "shakedown."

Both competitions ended in exciting neck-and-neck finishes. Who took home the titles? Read on to find out...



MILWAUKEE MIXOLOGIST TAKES THE TEQUILA

PHOTO BY THOMAS FOLSON

Bartender Mathias Simonis of Distil, a cocktail bar in Milwaukee—that's right, not *-ie*, as in Milwaukie, Oregon, but *-ee* as in Wisconsin—took home the top prize at the North Meets South Food & Drink Jubilee cocktail competition. In front of hundreds of cheering attendees, the mixologist from Milwaukee won the title and a trip to Jalisco, Mexico, for a distillery tour sponsored by Herradura Tequila.

A trio of cocktail judges, including *Northwest Palate's* Cole Danehower, *Imbibe* magazine's Tracy Howard, and Sean Bigley from the M \acute{e} lange Beverage Group in Las Vegas, Nevada, taste-tested five drinks made by the competing bartenders.

"It was an extremely difficult choice," said Danehower, "because all of the drinks were so balanced and well-made. In the end, the beauty of Simonis's tall glass, rosemary sprig, and taste won out."

Hot on the heels of his win at the annual Las Vegas Nightclub & Bar "Shake It Up" competition, Simonis served the judges his "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go," a drink inspired by one of his favorite movies.

"The name came from *Zoolander*," the Wisconsin native explained. "[In the movie] there's a spoof drink of an orange-mocha Frappuccino, so it's a play on that. It started out as a chocolate-and-orange goodness, and I tweaked it a bit with the bitter cherry."

For Simonis, the visit to Portland was a chance to compete against local and national bartenders. He and Max Solano of Emeril's Restaurant in Las Vegas were the out-of-towners competing against Portland bartenders Jeanette Napier of Aloft Hotel, and Nathan Gerdes of H $_2$ O Bistro. Jonah Kobayashi of the Benson Hotel also competed and won the People's Choice Award for his drink, the Chupacabra—a blend of jalapeño, cilantro, lime, Hornitos tequila, and a splash of citrus liqueur.

But when all the scorecards were tallied, Simonis won by the razor-thin margin of one point. What elevated his drink to the top shelf was its complex flavor profile and silky texture (thanks to frothy egg white), while allowing the base spirit, Herradura Blanco Tequila, to shine through.

Simonis's approach to cocktails meshes well with the Northwest's culinary ethos. He honed his craft while bartending at a farm-to-table restaurant where fresh ingredients were plentiful. "It was a chef-owned restaurant, and the chef had a 70-acre farm, so most of the produce and herbs came right off the farm. Through the winter, we also had a five-foot trough behind the bar where we were growing fresh mint. We were really known for mojitos because of it," said Simonis. "It was the kind of place where the chef would show up with a bushel of quince and hand it to me and say, 'Here, do something with this!' So, I started really creating cocktails based off his dishes."

Now leading the bar at Distil, Simonis mixes the new with the time-honored. "We're a place focused on crafty cocktails, where we're doing fun things like foams and funky infusions, but we also have a separate list of classics done the way they were intended," said Simonis. —JENNIFER HEIGL

WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO

Courtesy of Mathias Simonis, Distil, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1 ½ ounce Herradura Blanco Tequila
- ¾ ounce Aperol
- ¾ Luxardo Maraschino Liqueur
- 1 ounce Bonne Maman Fig Preserves
- Dash of Fee Brothers Aztec Chocolate Bitters
- 1 ounce lime juice
- 1 egg white
- Sprig of rosemary

Add all liquid ingredients to a cocktail shaker and dry shake (without ice) vigorously for about 10 seconds. Add ice and shake for 30 to 45 seconds until egg white is frothy. Strain over fresh ice in a Collins glass. Garnish with a sprig of rosemary and serve.