

C the Crunkleton

PALATE
FLAVOR CULTURE OF THE SOUTH

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Chapel Hill Cocktail Institutions

BY: CHARLOTTE VOISEY

toast of the town



BARTENDER
GARY CRUNKLETON

PHOTOS BY BERNA BROTHER

CHAPEL HILL COCKTAIL INSTITUTIONS

Peccadillo and The Crunkleton are as spirited as their names.

// BY CHARLOTTE VOISEY

GARY CRUNKLETON IS ONE OF THE bar industry's greatest characters. Simply put, Southern hospitality is enriched by Mr. Crunkleton's involvement. Gary opened his namesake bar, The Crunkleton, in 2008 in the heart of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. After my first visit there to host a gin seminar in 2009, I quickly realized that The Crunkleton was the vibrant backbone of the local beverage scene and a very special place indeed. The impressive beauty of the endless shelves stocked with carefully selected bottles is far and away the best spirits selection in the state and one of the best in the South. "We have lots of spirits that most people in our state didn't know existed," says Gary, who is especially proud of his liquor selection given that North Carolina remains a "control state," which hinders access to many of the rare and special bottles on offer at the bar. "It's sort of like a liquor store where you can taste first rather than buying without having a chance to sample," explains Gary.

With such a progressive offering, Gary and his staff work hard to excite regular guests on a whole new world of imbibing. "The first order of business was to get

the staff acclimated, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable about the spirits we offered. The wall of liquor we have behind the bar is impressive, but the fact that the staff here knows what to do with every one of those bottles makes me proud. Once they were on board and believed in my vision, it was easier to guide guests in various directions. We offered classic cocktails that were easily transitional for our guests—The Aviation, The Last Word, The Old Fashioned. When we opened, we were the only bar doing this in the state."

Then Gary set about founding his lecture series, in which I had the pleasure of participating. "With many of our guests not familiar with what we were offering, I thought it best to create opportunities to learn more about our spirits and their cultural significance within our society here and abroad. I knew there would be interest! The lecture series became the stage, and I brought in experts to give informative seminars melding spirits with society. I did an event with a Civil War expert, 'The Common Civil War Soldier and the Daily Role of Whiskey'—it was a tremendous success. We have done others with the popularity of jazz music, the importance of gin in modern society, moonshine and the birth of stock car racing with Junior Johnson, bourbon and barbecue in the South, and Dale DeGroff led us through the evolution of the martini and its impact on society."

Gary Crunkleton travels and attends cocktail conferences around the country, keeping on top of the latest trends and in close contact with his many peers and mentors. "I've added the barrel-aged cocktails inspired by Jeffrey Morgenthaler [of Clyde Common in Portland, Oregon] a few

76

THELOCALPALATE.COM / FEBRUARY/MARCH 2014

75

years ago. At first, I thought they were a novelty, but I wanted to try since Jeff was doing it. It turns out the drinks created from the barrel-aging are better than the real-time versions. It seems as though I could do an entire bar of barrel-aged drinks and be profitable." With such a big hospitality heart and determined business mind, anything seems possible for Gary.

As impressive and wonderful as The Crunkleton is, Chapel Hill is not a one-bar town. In 2011, after time living in New York City and working at the world-famous cocktail bar Employees Only, Timothy Neill opened Peccadillo, a quick walk down Franklin Street from The Crunkleton.

"People drink lots of whiskey here in Chapel Hill," explains Timothy, whose goal was to open a sexy bar with an extremely carefully curated collection of spirits, wine, and beer with a simple cocktail list emphasizing aperitifs. Starting simply with Manhattans and Negronis and weaning the locals from straight whiskey every once in a while, Tim is happiest serving a classic gin martini at Peccadillo. His appreciation for classic cocktail culture comes from his experience at Employees Only: "Being a part of something where there was such attention to detail and focus pushed me to be a better bartender. It reformed some of my ideas regarding standards of service and what creates a successful bar. I was able to learn from some visionary people and gained knowledge—I cannot say thank you enough to the owners of Employees Only."

Between these two Chapel Hill institutions and the affable men who run them, it is quite easy to get happily wet in the company of superb friends, stellar hosts, and sensational spirits.



TIMOTHY NEILL POURING
UP A CLASSIC (GIN) MARTINI

*Cocktails From
Chapel Hill Bartenders
Timothy Neill and
Gary Crunkleton*

CLASSIC (GIN) MARTINI

FROM PECCADILLO

1 ounce Noilly Prat Dry Vermouth
3 ounces gin (Beefeater or Hendrick's)
1 Castelvetro olive

Combine dry vermouth with gin in a mixing glass. Add ice. Stir. Strain and pour into a chilled martini glass with one olive (it's not a salad).

JOSH & SARAH

FROM PECCADILLO

3 or 4 slices ginger
2 ounces Becherovka
(herbal bitters)
¼ ounce lime juice
Tonic water
Lime wheel for garnish

Macerate ginger in the bottom of a Collins glass. Add Becherovka and lime juice. Add ice and top up with tonic. Garnish with a lime wheel.

THE BUMBLE BEE'S KNEES

FROM THE CRUNKLETON

2 ounces bourbon
1 ounce Krupnikas (spiced honey liqueur)
1 ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 ounce fresh whole milk
½ ounce honey
1 egg white
2-3 dashes aromatic bitters
Dried juniper berries for garnish

Mix first 6 ingredients into a mixing glass and shake without ice (dry shake) for about 30 seconds. Add cubed ice and resume shaking for 60 seconds. Pour into a chilled glass, garnish with three dried juniperberries, then top with a couple dashes of bitters.

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BARREL AGED ROCK & RYE

FROM THE CRUNKLETON

3 ounces barrel-aged rye whiskey
with horehound candy*
3 dashes of Peychaud's Bitters
3 ounces steaming water
Dollop of maple syrup meringue
(recipe below)
Rock candy on a stick for garnish
Star anise for garnish

Pour barrel-aged rye whiskey and bitters into a mixing glass. Add steaming water and ignite the mixture, warming the contents thoroughly (drink is served warm) with two handled tankards pouring back and forth from each glass. Pour into a cocktail glass and top with a dollop of maple syrup meringue. Add rock candy and a piece of star anise. *The horehound candy is dropped into the barrel to rest with the rye whiskey when the barrels are filled for aging.

MAPLE SYRUP MERINGUE

1 egg white
1-2 teaspoons maple syrup

Shake egg white with maple syrup in a Boston shaker until thick.