



LOW MILEAGE KITCHEN | PAGE 3

For the locavore

You don't have to look far to find unique food gifts. Consider made-in-Chicago honey, spirits or spice mixes, or turn on the oven and bake your own treats.

BOOKS FOR COOKS | PAGE 7

Baker's pair

Two new books from Gourmet and Bon Appetit will please nostalgic fans of the magazines (sweet tooth, especially).

Shopping Smart | Page 6

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2010 | EDITOR: JANET RAUSA FULLER | N

HOLIDAY MIXERS

Chicago bartenders infuse homemade gifts with their liquor-tinged touch

BY SEANAN FORBES

If there's one gift list to get on this season, it's a Chicago bartender's. Bartenders are show-people.

The bar's their stage; each glass, a small production number. Come the holidays, they take the showmanship from the bar to the kitchen, producing homemade presents that would seduce a supermodel onto a weeklong carb binge.

Peter Vestinos, head of West Coast sales and marketing for Death's Door Spirits, grew up in a food-loving household. His father was in charge of dinners and breakfasts; his mother made pastries and desserts.

"I really liked making cookies with my mother," Vestinos says.

Years later, when he was behind the bar at Sepia, 123 N. Jefferson, Vestinos wanted to make a hot buttered rum —

and there was cookie-making with mom. "I always say, if you can make a cookie dough, then you can make hot rum," Vestinos laughs.

Jarring the butter isn't just an indulgence. "Making it ahead of time allows you to make a very good, complex hot buttered rum batter," he says.

Vestinos' buttered rum "dough" packed into mason jars, has become a coveted item. "It's one of those gifts that people appreciate, because you make it personally. On their end, they can make a drink very quickly with it," Vestinos says.

He gives the mason jar alongside a bottle of dark rum, and the dough alone would make an attractive and welcome gift.

It's a shareable present. That's another typical bartender trait: conviviality.

SEE MIXERS, PAGE 3A, PULLOUT



The Drawing Room's Tim Lacey is bottling his homemade vanilla extract to give as holiday gifts. | SCOTT STEWART-SUN-TIMES

BARTENDERS WHO MAKE SPIRITS BRIGHT

MIXERS | Chicago mixologists put their drink expertise to good use when crafting homemade gifts

Timothy Lacey of the Drawing Room, 937 N. Rush, and Angel's Share Mixology, makes hot buttered rum-infused rum — the flavor of the spiced butter permeates the liquor.

Earlier this year, Lacey's wife went on a binge of making tomato-vanilla jam. There was vanilla left over. And, Lacey says, "We planted some mint in our backyard this summer, and it went wild." So Lacey and his wife had a go at making mint extract and vanilla extract. The mint didn't work out; the vanilla is rich, pure and being bottled for gifts.

Sepia's Joshua Pearson lubricates each holiday with a gin punch. The Christmas one has gin, fig preserves, rooibos tea, lemon, maple syrup and baking spices. It takes two days to make.

"If I do a brunch around Christmas," Pearson says, "I usually do a Bloody Mary." It's a smoky Mary, made with mezcal, horseradish, garlic, stout and celery bitters. The cocktail's great, but getting a bottle of Pearson's homemade Bloody Mary mix would delight any home bartender.

Don't think Pearson traffics only in liquids. His butter cookies have Grand Marnier in the batter and the glaze: double the orange, with just a bit of a kick.

In the family of Lynn House, chief mixologist of Blackbird, 619 W. Randolph, "holidays are huge," she says. She comes from a tradition of "Grandma cooking for four days in the kitchen."

Now, House is teaching her granddaughters the tradition of making kitchen gifts. The older girl, 4-year-old Leilani, helps in the kitchen and the garden.

For gift-giving, House makes butters, chutneys and sauces. "It's all about comfort," she says.

She loves canning. "It takes what I do during the most vibrant part of the year and translates it to the other parts of the year," she says. Her apple butter migrates across seasons, over toast and into the cocktail glass.

Todd Appel, proprietor of Piranha Brothers Consulting and Events, is another one for capturing seasons. He layers goat's milk cheese with sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Queen olives are stuffed with blue cheese that's been mixed with olive oil. Olives are caramelized in the oven.

Appel sees the olives as a versatile gift. "You can use those with roasted meats... put them on pizza. I use them on hot dogs," he says. More sharing, but "the gift," Appel says, "is the time."

Tim's something Chicago's top bartenders are lacking, especially during the busy holidays, but they're happy to spend it packing their knowledge into gifts.

You'd have to be carded before cutting into Bridget Albert's Christmas cake. The director of mixology at Southern Wines and Spirits makes it from scratch, but says there's a great pineapple cake recipe, use that. Just add Albert's boozy topping.

Albert loves the holidays. She



A key ingredient in Blackbird mixologist Lynn House's London Calling cocktail: her own apple butter. | RICH HEIN-SUN-TIMES

APPLE BUTTER

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

"My family is from the South, so I use the whole apple: skins, seeds, core and all," says Lynn House. Just cut the apples into even pieces for cooking.

6 Honeycrisp apples

2 cups dark brown sugar

1/2 cup balsamic vinegar

2 teaspoons ground ginger

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground cloves

Combine all ingredients in a

stockpot and simmer for 4 hours. Keep lid on for first hour; remove it for rest of cooking time. If mixture gets too sticky, add some water.

Cool and refrigerate. The next day, bring it back to heat. Once warm, taste and adjust seasoning. Simmer again for 4 to 6 hours, until apples are completely broken down.

Cool, puree and double-strain.

LONDON CALLING

MAKES 1 DRINK

1 1/2 ounces Plymouth Gin

Combine cocktail ingredients in

shaker except apple butter, and

shake until well-chilled. Strain into

champagne flute. Top with

cucumber soda and garnish with a cucumber wheel.

Note: For candied ginger syrup, steep crystallized ginger in hot water and let soak until ginger is soft, then blend until ginger is pureed. Add water as needed to make syrup.

Note: To make House's cucumber soda, puree 1 seedless cuke and 3/4 cup water, double-strain, put into siphon gun and charge. (Without a siphon, juice cucumbers and add a little club soda for bubbles.)

Lynn House, Blackbird

VANILLA EXTRACT

MAKES 1 QUART

1 quart (100-proof) vodka

Split and scrape seeds from vanilla beans. Place pods and seeds into a

jar with 3 weeks. Shake daily. Let sit for 3 weeks. Strain. Use strainer or small, tight-woven sieve bottle and a bottle brush to clean the strainer.

Tim Lacey, the Drawing Room

cooks and bakes. At parties, she's expected to bartend. Over the years, she's learned to do that without "working my parties" that is, when you have more than 50 people over for Christmas.

Her advice for hosts and hostesses: Batch out drinks (mix ingredients to batch out) so you can focus on the food.

She plays with cocktail pairings: mix them out, play with crossovers; then go in with the cocktails as well.

And if you want the perfect cocktail, then Schiller will give you a jar of

"One of my favorite homemade

gifts: I create cocktail recipes," she says. "I'll name them for something that happened this year." It's inexpensive and easy, and Albert says, "People love it."

The best bartenders aren't just aware of the trends; they're making them. Benjamin Schiller, senior mixologist at the Boka Restaurant Group, creates new cocktail programs for more than a few restaurants. His adaptability and creativity show up in his gift-giving and creativity show up in his gift-giving.

If you're into cocktails, then Schiller will give you a jar of

his gift-giving.

He's got a lot of great gifts, but

barrel-aged Manhattan or a bottle of bitters. Some of the bitters are complicated; others are remarkably simple. Schiller's complex bitters "embody a season"; they're a flashback in a bottle.

While it's natural to give close thought to something that all require me to come from family or blood —

from families joined by blood —

it's demanding. Making walnut and bacon kougelhopf is a daylong project.

"That's what's special about it,"

Johnston says, referring to the cake pan and its giver. "He didn't have to do that for us," your friends will think when they open a box and find to do that, but they can taste the love.

When Everest's restaurant and wine director, David Johnston, and his wife, Leah, moved to Chicago, chef Jean Joho gave them an antique

kougelhopf mold. Alongside it, there was a recipe.

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"That's what's special about it,"

Joho says. "It's a tradition in our family and it's a tradition in our culture.

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Sean Fortune is a free-lance writer based in New York and London.

BUTTERED RUM 'DOUGH'

MAKES 2 1/2 CUPS

(ABOUT 35 SERVINGS)

This will keep for several months in the refrigerator. Peter Vestinos packs the dough into Ball and mason jars, ties with a ribbon and gives recipes with it.

1/2 pound unsweetened butter,

1 pound light brown sugar

2 tablespoons ground cinnamon

2 tablespoons ground nutmeg

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon ground cloves

Pinch salt

In mixer, blend all ingredients. (All above spices are optional, depending on taste.) Pack into Ball mason jar or other

lidded container and refrigerate.

HOT BUTTERED RUM

MAKES 1 DRINK

1 heaping tablespoon buttered rum

1 ounce dark rum (Vestinos likes El Dorado 5-year; for a richer Cruzan or Goslings)

5 to 6 ounces hot water

Brining dough ball to room temperature.

Place ball in (Irish) coffee mug to dissolve dough. Top with star anise or nutmeg stick.

Note: Add a touch of alcohol to taste: "sharp" will make the cocktail taste "warm."

For 1 ounce per serving, Peter Vestinos, Death's Door Spirits

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