

The seersucker, \$9,  
Thomas Leggett,  
The Roosevelt, Va.  
RECIPE, p. 108.

# Some like it hot

Burnt garnishes add  
delicate depth to cocktails

by Marissa Hermanson

Before the ice, find the heat. Caulerized citrus, scorched sugar and blow-torched booze are igniting bartenders to go for the burn behind the bar.

Bar manager Mary Kelly of Del Campo, in Washington, D.C., makes sure the grilling and smoking that happens in the kitchen is reflected in the drinks. "We wanted to honor the grilled and smoked thing that makes Del Campo special," she says.

Kelly chars figs for a few seconds on the *plancha* for the caipirinha Del Campo (\$12, recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). "Get the figs nice and black on the outside," she advises. "It locks

all the flavors in when it sears."

The cauterized fig is muddled with lime and combined with cane syrup that's smoked in-house. It's then shaken with cachaça and poured into a rocks glass.

"The caipirinha is great on its own. It's a drink that balances citrus and sweet really well," says Kelly. "The burning and smoking adds a whole new flavor profile."

Thomas "T" Leggett, bar manager at Richmond, Va.'s The Roosevelt, uses the restaurant's well-seasoned grill to char lemons for the seersucker (\$9, recipe, p. 108).

After watching Lee Gregory, the restaurant's chef/co-owner, grill lemons to serve with fish,

**"It's quite  
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— Norm Owen

Leggett got the idea to freeze grilled lemon halves for cocktails. The iced, charred citrus chills the beverage without diluting it.

Leggett chars lemon halves on a hot grill for about a minute, brings them back to room temperature, and then freezes them. To make the seersucker, he combines bourbon, sweet tea syrup, lemon juice and bitters, shakes, then pours them into a glass with the frozen lemon half.

"Eventually, the charred lemon adds flavor to the drink when it comes out of its frozen state," he says. "You take a little of the love from the grill, and once the drink warms up enough, the grill and the seasoned flavor come out in the drink."

At Salt Wine Bar in Toronto, Norm Owen and Paul Kapridov wield a blowtorch behind the bar. "It's quite a powerful flame that shoots out," Owen says.

Their charred cedar Manhattan, developed by former bartender Nick Kennedy, relies on charred cedar bitters for its burnt flavor (\$14, recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). They make the bitters by singeing thin food-grade cedar planks, then soaking them in a bourbon-filled Mason jar.

To make the Manhattan, Owen burns cedar shavings in a frying pan with the blowtorch and then extinguishes the flames with a glass. After the glass fills with smoke, he cleans the carbon off and adds equal parts red and white vermouth to a glass rimmed with charred bitters.

"It takes the Manhattan out of the realm of sweet, giving it a bitter backbone and a smoky smell. It's like a nice campfire in a glass," says Owen.

Owen and Kapridov also use the blowtorch to brûlée the top of the Calvados sour. They spray a fine mist of equal parts vodka, rum and bitters, then set it alight, leaving a caramel hue on top of the drink, along with a nose of rum and bitters (\$14, recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). "Everybody loves a good show," says Owen, "especially at the bar."

Marissa Hermanson has a hard time making any baked goods without burning them.



Fried Turbo

## Thomas Leggett heats things up behind the bar

by Marissa Hermanson

Blazing hot grills and roaring flames aren't just for chefs, as Thomas "T" Leggett, bar manager of Richmond, Va.'s The Roosevelt, knows first-hand. Leggett has charred everything from citrus to pineapple and even watermelon, creating sweet and smoky syrups and blackened fruit garnishes to produce crowd-pleasing cocktails for those who sidle up to his bar.

### **How did you get the idea to char and freeze lemons for a cocktail?**

Lee [Gregory, chef at The Roosevelt] would grill lemons for roasted fish. Then I read about how you can freeze fruit for drinks, and it came together. I knew it would be a nice visual element, and the char would work well in the drink.

### **How do you char the lemons?**

You take lemons at room temperature, cut them in half and put them on the grill at super-high heat for at least a minute. The longer the lemon sits there, the more you're losing moisture and drying everything up. It's the same idea behind a steak. You want to get a good sear on it and get some good char marks. That's where the flavor is.

### **How does the char contribute flavor?**

With the char marks, you're getting caramelization from sugars in the fruit. And you're getting a little smokiness and bitterness that adds complexity to a drink. The lemons are then taken off the grill, laid out, brought back up to room temperature. Then we pop them into the freezer.

### **What do you mix the lemon with to create the seersucker?**

Bourbon. I make a sweet tea syrup—simple syrup with black tea steeped in. A little bit of lemon juice and Angostura bitters. It's a riff on an old fashioned, but almost a whiskey sour.

### **How does the charring technique make this drink special?**

It affects it subtly. There's a little frothy texture and as the drink warms up, and you sip it, you get the grilled flavor coming off of it. The drink evolves the longer it sits there and warms up.

### **How do guests react to the large frozen lemon in their drink?**

It's funny—you give the drink to people and you see them look at it and start poking it. I've looked out into the restaurant and seen dudes picking it up out of the glass and looking at it like, 'Do I eat this?'

### **What other fruits have you charred?**

Watermelon and pineapple. The grill is at a super-high heat. I blend them down to get a pineapple syrup or watermelon juice that has a smoky quality.

### **What spirits best complement charred fruit?**

I haven't done too many charred fruits with clear spirits. Aged brown spirits work, since they've been aged with wood.

### **Other than fruit, what scorched ingredients mix well in cocktails?**

I like using burnt sugar, although it is kind of a hassle and dangerous.

### **How do you make scorched sugar?**

You take the sugar beyond caramelizing, to the point where it changes from a nice brown caramel hue to burnt. You then add water and turn it into a syrup. It's cool because it gets burnt, which adds a bitterness and smokiness that ends up mitigating the sweetness.

### **What do you make with scorched sugar?**

I make a whiskey sour. The burnt sugar adds another layer of complexity that changes it just subtly.