

Mixing It Up

Solage Calistoga's Lead Bartender, Michael Pazdon, reveals a recipe. BY GAYLE KECK

"MAKING A MIXED DRINK is a bit like tasting wine in reverse," says Solage Calistoga's Lead Bartender, Michael Jack Pazdon. "With wine, you're looking for elements of sweetness, mouthfeel, finish—and those are the things I'm looking for when I'm creating a cocktail."

Take a seat at the bar, and you'll be treated to an exceptional mixed drink worthy of Solbar's Michelin-starred dining experience, and the excellence of this 89-studio resort. The award-winning bartender not only plucks ingredients fresh from the Solage grounds, he also creates his own liqueurs, tinctures, flavored syrups, and bitters, which lend remarkable layering to his beverages.

When asked to give an inside look at the process for creating one of his signature concoctions, the Solbar Planter's Punch, Pazdon reveals that he uses tiny measuring cups, rather than traditional jiggers, to achieve the exacting measurements essential for a balanced drink. And, he advises using a metal shaker, which chills faster than glass.

The bartender's process: he first measures out half an ounce of house-made grenadine, then adds a



TOAST TO IT

Clockwise: The Solbar Planter's Punch even looks delicious; Pazdon at work; Solbar's sleek bar is so inviting, you'll want to stay for another round.



quarter-ounce of turbinado sugar syrup, an ounce of fresh lime juice, and four dashes of Angostura bitters. Pazdon then pours a quarter-ounce of house-made allspice dram into the shaker, followed by two boutique rums—a half-ounce of Smith and Cross Navy Strength Jamaican Rum and an ounce of Agua Libre Dark Rum from St. George Distillery. Next in, ice from the Kold Draft machine, which turns out cubes that are "extra-hard and extra-cold," Pazdon explains.

He shakes the drink to emulsify the ingredients before double-straining it and pouring it into a glass with ice. Then it's topped with a splash of soda and a dusting of grated nutmeg. The finishing touch is a sprig of Solage mint, which Pazdon holds in his palm and slaps with his other hand, to release the aromatic oils.

As he sets his masterpiece on the stone-topped bar, Pazdon emphasizes, "No matter what the drink is, we always ask, 'What's the best version of this that we can create, even if it's a Scotch on the rocks?'" ■ *Solage Calistoga, 755 Silverado Trail, Calistoga, California. Room rates from \$375 to \$895. For reservations, call 866/942-7442 or 707/226-0800; solagecalistoga.com.*

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