

Kahlúa's Re-Awakening

THIS LEGENDARY BRAND GAINS NEW RELEVANCE—AND
SCORES A NEW AUDIENCE ON THE MIXOLOGY SCENE

by Meredith May / photos by John Curley

The Arabica coffee beans that make up a portion of the ingredients that go into Kahlúa are grown among citrus groves in the forests of Veracruz, Mexico. First introduced in 1936, this rum-based coffee liqueur (the rum also hails from Veracruz) has a firm place in cocktail history; the Black Russian and the White Russian landed it on drink lists in the '70s and '80s. But today, thanks to the era of coffee-*mania*, Kahlúa is due for a revival on many levels.

Kahlúa gets its coffee flavor from Arabica beans, grown in Veracruz, Mexico. The beans are roasted and custom cold-brewed on the spot. It takes seven years from beans to bottle.



To initiate this new position for the brand, THE TASTING PANEL organized a bartending competition in Sacramento, CA, at cutting-edge Mexican restaurant Zócalo. We invited mix-masters from all over Northern California to submit Kahlúa cocktail recipes—the response was overwhelming.

Kahlúa Has an Audience

THE TASTING PANEL MAGAZINE, sponsor of the competition, conferred with Global Brand Educator Simon Ford of Pernod Ricard USA to choose six finalists to compete at the event. Meanwhile, a community of mixologists, restaurateurs and trade professionals gathered for a standing-room-only audience.

“Kahlúa can be a base or it can be a mix,” Ford pointed out. “It was an ingredient in the first cocktail I ever made.”

With judging based on creativity and originality, our decision on the performing finalists also focused on how the contestants brought the delectable nuances of Kahlúa to the fore.

The Competition

Contestants each had six minutes: Our six finalists mixed, poured, steeped and shook to create spectacular Kahlúa-based cocktails. Each contestant was judged on mixology skills (which included ingredients, creativity and tools), presentation (the look, the name and the garnish) and taste (use of ingredients, balance and flavor).



Travis Kavanaugh of Sacramento's Shady Lady was crowned the winner of THE TASTING PANEL'S Kahlúa Bartending Competition. He won a trip to New York City to attend the Pernod Ricard BarSmarts education program.



The Judges! Left to right: Meridith May, Publisher/Executive Editor of THE TASTING PANEL; David Nepove, Director of Mixology for SWS of California; Simon Ford of Pernod Ricard USA; and Daniel Humphries, coffee educator.

Winning Cocktail

ONCE (as in the number "11" in Spanish)

by Travis Kavanaugh of Shady Lady in Sacramento

- 1 oz. Kahlúa
- ¼ oz. rye whiskey
- ¼ oz. Cherry Heering
- ¼ oz. pineapple juice
- 1/6 oz. maple syrup
- Dash of Angostura bitters
- Dash of orange bitters
- Egg whites
- Garnish with three coffee beans

Second Place

THE VERACRUZ

by Chris Dooley of Ella Dining Room in Sacramento

- 1 oz. Kahlúa
- ½ oz. espresso
- ¼ oz. Bulleit bourbon
- ½ oz. Fernet Branca
- Garnish with mint leaves and an orange twist.
- Serve in a V-shaped glass chilled with rocks in a bucket.



Chris Dooley creates the Veracruz.



Simon Ford, Pernod Ricard's Global Brand Educator, hosted the evening with Kahlúa at Zócalo in Sacramento.

Meet Noe Hernandez



Noe Hernandez is the General Manager of Zócalo in Sacramento.

A native of Hidalgo, Mexico, Noe Hernandez started at Zócalo as a server and soon worked his way to manager. Our host for the evening, Hernandez oversees the restaurant, with cuisine representing all the regions of Mexico, from Oaxaca to Jalisco to Yucatan. The spacious dining room pays tribute to one artist's work: Ernesto Cruz from Guadalajara.

"My focus is on service," insists Hernandez. "We create relationships with our customers and therefore, a loyalty factor ensues. We want to create an atmosphere that's like vacationing in Mexico. And tonight, with Kahlúa, we've once more converted the restaurant to make them feel like they are dining off the coast of Veracruz."

The Art of Cupping



Coffee expert Daniel Humphries leads a seminar on the art of cupping, the professional tasting of coffee, as part of Pernod Ricard's BarSmarts educational program.

It's been less than a decade since Daniel Humphries first learned about the intricacies of coffee, from the art of latte to espresso extraction techniques. But the former Seattle bartender and barista decided to take his skills to New York City, which, he claims, had the worst-tasting coffee he had ever experienced.

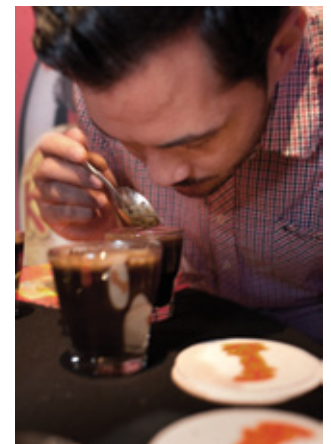
"It didn't seem to matter if the food was the highest quality," he informed THE TASTING PANEL. "The coffee was just not up standards, much less surpassing standards, which you would expect from such a food-centric city. It's the number-one consumer beverage in the country, and industry professionals need to learn its properties as much as they do wine or spirits."

Once Humphries made a few changes—and consequently made a name for himself in the coffee biz—the 33-year-old consultant returned to Seattle and became involved in

sensory evaluation with his favorite subject. "I began working with coffee farmers throughout Central America and taught them how to understand (and evaluate) their product. Educating their noses and palates would help improve their practices and, ultimately, their reputation."

As a prelude to the Kahlúa bartending competition, Humphries led a sensory evaluation of coffee for the trade, which helped put the subject of the night into perspective. Cupping—the coffee industry term for professional tasting—involves evaluating aroma, balance, sweetness and acidity of the ground and roasted beans. Coffee is a fruit, smaller than a grape, but larger than a cranberry. Its seeds, or beans, are the product that is roasted.

"Cupping offers an entrée into quality control," Humphries explains. Through a blind tasting of four distinctly different roasted beans, tested and tasted by our crowd of about 50 trade representatives (all non-coffee experts), THE TASTING PANEL can report that the Arabica beans used for Kahlúa were chosen as the most fragrant and best tasting. The four coffees were each individually brewed by steeping the grounds in 230-degree water and waiting four minutes until sipping. ■■



Dave Seva of The Shady Lady in Sacramento took part in the sensory perception program with BarSmarts and Kahlúa.