



RYAN TRAVERS: BARTENDING IN ITS PUREST FORM

By Doug Mace

The dimly lit bar contains zero televisions and zero distractions. Generic wooden tap handles hide the brews on draft, and you won't find too many recognizable bottles on the shelf or the wine rack. With an encyclopedic knowledge of beer, wine, and spirits Ryan Travers will take you on a trip around the world and bring bartending back down to earth.

Ryan is part owner and bartender at Of Love and Regret in Canton, located directly across from The 'Natty Boh Tower'. Affectionately referred to as OLAR, the bar and bottle shop have been operating for almost five years.

After successfully operating one of the best beer bars in the world while living in Maine, Ryan became friends with Brian Strumke, brewer and owner of Stillwater Artisanal Ales. The two immediately hit it off and began to plan for a Stillwater bar in their home town of Baltimore. "We wanted to represent the idea of a Stillwater bar while having its own autonomous idea. We run with that as something that's

different, more eclectic and offers the different side of the picture."

Travers explained the earlier days and the struggles of getting recognition in a town known more for 'Bohs' than any other beers, "When we first opened up I don't think the city was quite ready for this, but as the culture has grown in Baltimore it allowed us to grow too. I think a lot of what we do is still misunderstood."

That misunderstanding may come from the ever changing and eclectic menu which presents a unique challenge to many patrons. That challenge is almost described as a burden of love when Ryan says, "If they are ready for it we want to be the leaders and showcase how it can be done in the most fundamental sense."

And OLAR followed suite with the city's growth. The addition of a geeky wine list and spirits from some of the most remarkable producers around the world gave way to the eight page libation bible that is their current menu. One cocktail embodies the straightforwardness of using fresh and superior products.

The house cocktail is currently referred to as 'the artist formerly known as', but long time OLAR fans will tell you this is really called the 'dirty smirk'. The beauty is in its creativity and simplicity as it fea-

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tures just gin, elderflower liquor, lime and is shaken with an egg white. Garnished with zest and fresh cracked pepper the concoction is as easy to drink as it is on the eyes.

Travers analogy explained much of his commitment to the more obscure high quality spirits. "There's the artist and then there's the art curator." He continues, "We find all this and then try to put it together in the right format." The time, effort, and passion showcases how the love transfers straight from the distillery and into your glass.

Ryan put in plain words how he tries to stay true to the products that offer more than just a high price tag for a lesser quality. "Just like what we do here, [distillers and brewers] could gouge you and we could gouge you, but they're doing it for the right reasons. It's coming from the heart. If it was just about making money, we would have the bourbons and the big IPAs, but we want to do more than that."

Without your everyday beers Ryan often finds himself walking a tough line between providing entertainment versus education. "It's strictly reading the person. Some people want to know and some people don't." A simple answer; as simple as his feelings on the product and the job.

As we delved into the question more, an interesting suggestion as to why he refuses to refer to himself as a 'mixologist' came about.

"Even if we all have phenomenal knowledge at the end of the day you need to know when to fire the food, are the lights too high, is the music too low and that's being a bartender." Travers went on to explain a pre-prohibition book which is credited with one of the first uses of the word mixologist. "It said if you stand behind a bar you tend to that bar no matter what you think you are or what you come up with, at the end of the day you are a bar tender."

Ryan Travers' answer is to keep it simple and true to its roots. From the vineyard to the pristine clean glass, to the job itself; keep it simple. ■

What is Your Favorite Movie? "Whiplash"

What Job Would You Do if Not Bartending?

"Landscaping, I love being outside and working with my hands. The camaraderie is great."

One Person You Would Love to Serve?

"Alan Watts. He's one of the great social theorists who brought eastern philosophy to the west in the 60's. He brought ideas of self-awareness without the ties to religion. Also, Genghis Khan."

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