

The Examiner

MEET YOUR MIXOLOGIST



ABOUT THE SERIES

In a saloon town such as San Francisco, the bartender plays a crucial role. Confessor, friend, sounding board — the man or woman behind the plank sees to it that our needs are met with elegance, grace and often wit. They see humanity at its best and most convivial, but also offer a nod and a welcome to the lonely. But what do they see when they look at us? What are the tricks of their trade? And what lessons have they learned along the way? In this Examiner weekly feature, we talk to some of our local bartenders to find out.

FEATURED RECIPE

LA DOLCE VITA

- 1½ oz. Rite Gin Sezechuan Black Pepper
- 1 oz. Aperol liqueur
- ½ oz. blood-orange puree
- 1 oz. fresh-squeezed lemon juice

Shake ingredients together with ice and strain into a martini glass. Add lime wheel for garnish.



Madera *It's hard to say if it was the Chocolate Fig Manhattan and its cocoa nib-infused bourbon, rimmed with bittersweet chocolate powder and mixed with a fig syrup blended with ginger, that made us fall so hard for Madera's esteemed bar manager, Lulu Almaguer, or her sweeter-than-sweet cheerful disposition. Either way, it's well worth the trip to Menlo Park to experience both. With its majestic cathedral ceilings, exposed beams and cozy fireplace, the lounge at Madera (tucked inside the Rosewood Sand Hill resort) is akin to lounging in a luxurious Lake Tahoe lodge (except no need to pack the snow gear and fight traffic for four hours). Wishes can come true! Almaguer is an absolute cocktail genius, experimenting with ayurvedic and euphoric herbs, and a potential love potion is even in the works for February. 2825 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, (650) 561-1540, www.maderasandhill.com*

How'd you get into this? Years and years ago, I was a cocktail server first, and the bartenders would step away and I would jump in. I love to cook; I was really into cooking at [that] point. I had been a waiter for years and was looking to segue into something different.

Where are you from? Originally, Minneapolis.

Not a hint of an accent in you. I've been here for about 22 years. It does rear its ugly head once in a while — you know? Then you know it comes once in a while — after cocktails, it comes.

So there's a reason to get you drunk. Yeah, then you'll find it for sure.

What brought you out to the Bay Area? I was really into food and wine; it was happening out here. This was back in 1984. I was in Minneapolis and trying

to break into restaurants. It was very hard back at that time to get a break — women weren't into fine dining. I literally had to apprentice for six months in a kitchen before I could hit the floor. They did not allow the ladies onto the floor, so I had to fight my way onto the floor. And then I realized, "What am I doing here?" There's a



Pioneering spirit: Madera bartender Lulu Almaguer says when she lived in Minneapolis in 1984 seeking a culinary career, women were not welcome in the kitchen.

WINE ROOM/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

whole world of culinary things! So I hopped a plane in the middle of the world's worst blizzard and moved out here.

If you could bring a cocktail to Minnesota as, say, a homecoming gift, what would it be? One is the Voodoo Sidecar because it reinvents falernum.

What is falernum? It was traditionally used in Tiki drinks in the '30s and '40s. It's a spiced rum. The predominant flavors are like hot spices: star anise, allspice, green cardamom and cinnamon. And then lime. I went about making my own and played

around with different spice mixtures.

If we were to take you to a bar right now, what would you order? We have it on our list and it's one of the oldest cocktails [it's really listed as one of the first American cocktails] — it'd be a Sazerac.

If you could serve a drink to anyone, who would it be? I'd have to give it to Ernest Hemingway. If you wanted somebody who had access to a lot of different cocktails at the time, I mean why not give it to him ... and let him write about it.

— Tiffany Maleshefski