

Leap Of Faith

Nick Bennett hits his stride at Porchlight in New York City

From humble beginnings slinging beer and shots at his uncle's Sag Harbor bar, Nick Bennett has worked his way up the New York bartending ladder. "The first time I really considered myself a career bartender was when I worked at Amor y Amargo in the East Village," he says. "A bar focused entirely on bitters and amaro that still had to offer approachable drinks was jarring, but it was a challenge that my colleagues were so adept at, and I was determined to get to their level."

A few years later, Bennett was serving as bar captain at Booker and Dax, the now-closed experimental cocktail concept from renowned mixologist Dave Arnold. It was there he learned that Danny Meyer, founder and CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group (USHG), was opening his first stand-alone bar, Porchlight. At an open call for staff, Bennett hit it off with the USHG team and was offered the position of head bartender. "I had to make one of the hardest decisions of my professional life: Do I stay at a bar I love or do I move on to something unknown with a lot of potential?" Bennett recalls. "I gave my notice that day."

Porchlight's extensive range of cocktails (\$15) offers something for everyone—or at least that's Bennett's



By offering a range of cocktails at New York City bar Porchlight, Nick Bennett looks to provide something for everyone.

intention. "I want someone to look at our menu and not feel intimidated by a drink that features a mountain of ingredients or techniques," he says. "But I also want them to be able to find something new and interesting if they look a little harder." His Gun Metal Blue cocktail comprises Del Maguey Vida mezcal, The Genuine Blue Curaçao, Combiér Crème de Pêche de Vigne liqueur, fresh lime juice, and house-made bitter cinnamon syrup, while his Damn Fine Rusty Nail blends Monkey Shoulder blended malt Scotch, Drambuie liqueur, Becherovka herbal liqueur, house-made "Black Hand" aromatic bitters, and Bittermens Hopped Grapefruit bitters.

Bennett continues to be inspired by his time with Dave Arnold, pointing to a Gin and Tonic made with custom tonic syrup as inspiration. "This idea that a cocktail that's taken for granted can be improved and elevated stuck with me," he says. "It's why we have a Long Island Iced Tea on draft at Porchlight, and why I like working with recipes like the Rusty Nail—these drinks are often dismissed as unredeemable, so why not have fun with them?"

Sally Kral

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Nick Bennett's Recipes



GUN METAL BLUE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½ ounces Del Maguey Vida mezcal;
- ½ ounce The Genuine Blue Curaçao liqueur;
- ¼ ounce Combiér Crème de Pêche de Vigne liqueur;
- ¾ ounce fresh lime juice;
- ¼ ounce bitter cinnamon syrup¹;
- Orange peel.

RECIPE:

Combine mezcal, Curaçao, liqueur, lime juice, and syrup in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake until the liquid is cold, then strain into a coupe glass. Flame the orange peel over the drink before dropping it in as garnish.



DAMN FINE RUSTY NAIL

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½ ounces Monkey Shoulder blended malt Scotch;
- ½ ounce Drambuie liqueur;
- ¼ ounce Becherovka herbal liqueur;
- 2 dashes Scrapy's Cardamom bitters²;
- 2 dashes Bittermens Hopped Grapefruit bitters;
- Lemon peel.

RECIPE:

Build Scotch, liqueurs, and bitters in a mixing glass and give it a quick stir—ten seconds tops. Strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice. Express the lemon peel over the drink, then discard.

¹Break apart 4 cinnamon sticks and place in a pan over low heat until they become aromatic. Add 4 cups granulated sugar, 2 cups water, and 2 ounces (by weight) gentian root and heat until the sugar has dissolved and the syrup is at a low simmer. Remove from heat and strain immediately with a very fine strainer. Will keep for 2 weeks refrigerated.

²Porchlight uses house-made aromatic bitters created by bartender Bryan Teoh. The recipe is not disclosed, but Scrapy's Cardamom bitters is a good substitute.