

La Dolce Vita

Jessica King brings a piece of Italy to Knoxville, Tennessee

In 2011, after more than a decade slinging drinks at various venues throughout Knoxville, Tennessee, Jessica King was given the opportunity to create the bar program for a new boutique hotel opening in downtown Knoxville. “Peter Kern Library at the Oliver Hotel was the first concept I developed from scratch, and in doing so I came to realize that the bar industry was not only something I enjoyed, but also something I was actually good at doing,” she says. “It was then that I discovered that this was a legitimate career path for my life.”

After three fulfilling years at Peter Kern Library, King decided she was ready to run her own venue. She joined her now-fiancé, Aaron Thompson, in operating Sapphire in the heart of downtown Knoxville. “We learned how to work as a partnership and how to delegate responsibilities in order to maximize the potential of our business,” she says. The duo’s success at Sapphire led them to open Brother Wolf, Knoxville’s first Italian aperitivo cocktail bar, and Osteria Stella, its northern Italian sister restaurant, in July 2021. “Both concepts were inspired by *la dolce vita*, the Italian knack for savoring some of the greatest aspects of life, including amazing food and drink,” King notes. “Aaron and I have spent extensive time roaming around Italy decoding how people



Jessica King embraces the Italian sentiment of *la dolce vita*—the sweet life—in her most recent projects, Brother Wolf and Osteria Stella.

leave behind their workday and immerse themselves in the company of friends, both old and new. Our desire was to share this lifestyle and mentality with our home city.”

Brother Wolf’s beverage program is focused on classic Italian aperitivo-style drinks (\$9-\$12) and highlights mostly Italian labels, naturally. King’s Il Professore (\$11), for instance, comprises Montenegro, Fernet-Branca, and Cynar amaros, lemon juice, honey syrup, and house-made fig and rose bitters, while her Sgroppino (\$11) mixes Malfy Con Limone gin, Bianca Vigna Extra Brut Prosecco, and a scoop of lemon sorbet (or sorbetto di limone). King notes that in repre-

senting a region of the world so far removed from Knoxville, she and Thompson sometimes worry that they’ve missed some details. “So when an Italian person drinks and dines in our spaces and tells us that they felt at home, it’s our proudest moment,” she says. “We live for providing people with experiences that are singular, whether those experiences are brand new or reminiscent of a memory from their favorite place. When we’re able to accomplish this goal, the sense of pride and serenity is the reward for the work of putting it all together.”

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Jessica King’s Recipes



IL PROFESSORE

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Montenegro amaro;
- ¾ ounce Fernet-Branca amaro;
- ¾ ounce Cynar amaro;
- ¾ ounce lemon juice;
- ½ ounce honey syrup;
- 2 dashes of Dashfire Mission Fig-Fennel bitters¹;
- Lemon wheel.

RECIPE:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine amari, juice, syrup, and bitters. Shake well and strain into a chilled rocks glass. Garnish with a lemon wheel.



SGROPPINO

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Malfy Con Limone gin;
- 3 ounces Bianca Vigna Extra Brut Prosecco;
- 1 small scoop lemon sorbet;
- Lemon peel, plus zest.

RECIPE:

Place sorbet in a chilled coupe glass. Pour gin and Prosecco over the top and garnish with lemon zest and a lemon peel.

¹King uses house-made fig and rose bitters, but this brand is a suitable substitute.