

# People Person

At Vestry in New York City, Hugo Peña shows off his passion for hospitality

**H**ugo Peña entered the New York City food and beverage industry at the age of 18 and never looked back. “I started as an assistant server and bar back at Empellón Taqueria in the West Village, and was immediately engaged in the work,” he recalls. “Watching the bartenders mixing drinks while also providing great service to guests fascinated and inspired me to become a bartender one day.” That opportunity came once Peña turned 21 and was promoted to bartender. After five years at Empellón Taqueria, he moved on to the venue’s Midtown Manhattan location in 2017 and quickly rose through the ranks to lead bartender, a role that allowed him to create his own cocktails and further hone his craft.

Peña’s next big bartending break came in 2019 when he was approached by Gabriel Figueroa, who was overseeing the bar program at the soon-to-open restaurant Vestry in SoHo from renowned chef Shaun Hergatt. “He asked me to build the bar program with him, but then the pandemic put our plans on pause,” Peña says. “Thankfully I got a call from Gabriel in August 2020, and we were back on. Knowing I would be working with Chef Hergatt made it easy to say yes—I admire him a lot, and



*Hugo Peña, bartender at Michelin-starred Vestry in Manhattan, focuses his efforts behind the bar on providing quality service to guests.*

I knew working with him would help me to grow as a bartender and person.”

Since opening in October 2020, Vestry—located in The Dominick hotel—has already earned a Michelin star for its artfully prepared dishes. “Chef likes to work with fruits, vegetables, and everything seasonal—we use his menu as inspiration for the bar program, so we change our cocktails with the seasons, which gives us a fresh start several times a year,” says Peña, who serves as Vestry’s lead bartender. The cocktail menu (all drinks are \$17) features classics, aperitifs and digestifs, and house originals. This past winter, seasonal originals included Peña’s Cranberry Seelbach, a mix of Bourbon, dry Curaçao, sparkling Albariño, house-made cranberry syrup, cranberry bitters, and Angostura bitters (full recipe below), and his Smoke & Fire, blending Tequila, mezcal, ancho chile liqueur, lime juice, simple syrup, and the Japanese condiment yuzu koshō (full recipe below). “More than creating cocktails, I enjoy giving the best service to every guest and that really defines my style of bartending,” Peña notes. “At the end of the day, making guests feel at home and giving them a new experience just by serving them a cocktail makes me happy.”



Sally Kral

## Hugo Peña’s Recipes



### CRANBERRY SEELBACH

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1 ounce Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon;
- ½ ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao;
- 3 ounces Carboniste Gomes Vineyard Extra Brut sparkling Albariño;
- ¼ ounce cranberry syrup<sup>1</sup>;
- 3 dashes A.B. Smeby Bittering Co. Cranberry bitters;
- 3 dashes Angostura bitters;
- Orange peel;
- Fresh cranberry.

**RECIPE:**

In an ice-filled mixing glass, combine Bourbon, dry curaçao, syrup, and both bitters. Stir for 20 seconds, then strain into a flute glass and top with sparkling wine. Garnish with a skewered orange peel and fresh cranberry.



### SMOKE & FIRE

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1½ ounces Bribón Reposado Tequila;
- ½ ounce Union Uno Joven mezcal;
- ¼ ounce Ancho Reyes chile liqueur;
- ¾ ounce fresh lime juice;
- ½ ounce simple syrup;
- ¼ ounce yuzu koshō;
- 1 egg white.

**RECIPE:**

In a cocktail shaker, combine Tequila, mezcal, liqueur, juice, syrup, yuzu koshō, and egg white. Dry shake for 30 seconds. Add ice and shake for another 20 seconds, then double strain into a ceramic cup.

<sup>1</sup>In a pot combine 500 grams fresh cranberries, 200 grams granulated sugar, 400 grams water, 4 grams ground cinnamon, 4 grams ground nutmeg, and 4 grams ground cloves. Bring to a simmer until boiling for 5 minutes, then remove from heat, cover, and chill. Once the mixture is cold, smash the cranberries and strain.