

French Classics, Latin Flair

Koky López pays homage to her Puerto Rican roots in Charleston, South Carolina

You could say hospitality is in Koky López's blood. Born and raised on the west coast of Puerto Rico, she grew up helping her parents with their catering business, where she mostly worked in the prep kitchen. But when her parents found themselves short a bartender for a quinceañera, the responsibility fell to López. "I loved it so much it stuck," she says. While in college, she decided to pursue mixology seriously, eventually becoming a professor of mixology in the culinary arts department at Instituto de Banca y Comercio in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico in 2009. Shortly after, in 2011, she opened a restaurant under the guidance of a renowned Puerto Rican restaurateur and chef. "That experience taught me so much about managing, ownership, and creating a healthy balance of work and life," she says. "The next year, I was named bartender of the year by the International Bartenders Association, which kept the fire going and cemented my place in this industry."

In 2014 López relocated to Florida, where she worked bartending and managing gigs at all types of venues throughout the state—in all she has worked at more than 30 concepts—before settling in Charleston, South Carolina in 2018. She



Koky López brings her Puerto Rican flair and vast mixology experience to traditional French cocktails at Brasserie la Banque in Charleston, South Carolina.

joined the team at Brasserie la Banque and its below-ground cocktail spot Bar Vauté last November as bartender and bar manager, responsible for creating the cocktail menus at both venues (drinks are \$10-\$16), managing inventory, and training staff, in addition to working five to six bartending shifts a week.

As a restaurant modeled after classic French brasseries, Brasserie la Banque's cocktail menu features traditional and familiar French drinks like the Sidecar, French 75, and Boulevardier, as well as original drinks inspired by classic builds, such as López's French Daiquiri (\$13), featuring Rhum J.M. Gold rum, John D. Taylor's Velvet Falernum liqueur, Chinola passion fruit liqueur, and lime juice, topped with an edible orchid flower, and her Gin Tonique (\$12), comprising Beyond Distilling Tropical gin and house-made rosé and marigold tonic, topped with edible marigolds. "My bartending style is colorful, playful, and loud—I love experimenting with fun garnishes and colors," López says. "I also love paying homage to my Puerto Rican roots by making tropical-inspired drinks and working with rum, passion fruit, dragon fruit, star fruit, and natural sweeteners."



Sally Kral

PHOTO BY (TOP) ANDREW CEBULKA

Koky López's Recipes



FRENCH DAIQUIRI

INGREDIENTS:
2 ounces Rhum J.M. Gold rum;
1 ounce John D. Taylor's Velvet Falernum liqueur;
1 ounce Chinola passion fruit liqueur;
½ ounce fresh lime juice;
Edible orchid flower.

RECIPE:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine rum, liqueurs, and juice. Shake and strain into a coupe glass. Garnish with an edible orchid flower.



GIN TONIQUE

INGREDIENTS:
2 ounces Beyond Distilling Tropical gin;
2 ounces rosé and marigold tonic¹;
2 edible marigolds.

RECIPE:

Place edible marigolds in an ice-filled wine glass or goblet. Add gin and tonic.

¹In a large pot combine 2 ounces liquid quinine extract, 6 ounces La Perdrix Costières de Nimès rosé, 4 ounces Carpano Bianco vermouth, 8 fresh marigolds, and 1 lemon, cut into quarters. Cover and heat on low for 2 hours, then add 6 ounces cold water. Strain, let cool, and place in an iSi carbonator for carbonation. Makes enough for about 8 cocktails.