

Bartending Natural

Stephanie Reading shows off her cocktail skills at Birdie G's in Santa Monica, California

After working as a server for several years in the Los Angeles area, Stephanie Reading had a fortuitous meeting that would make a major impact on her career trajectory. It was 2013 and she was out for drinks with co-workers, speaking to one of their friends about wanting to bartend but never getting the opportunity to do so. “Unbeknownst to me, he was a bar manager himself and looking for new staff,” she says. “Less than two weeks later, I was getting a crash course in classic cocktails and landed my first bartending job at Messhall Kitchen in Los Feliz.” Shortly after that, Reading trained under renowned James Beard-nominated bartender Julian Cox, which opened the door for her to tend bar at several Los Angeles hotspots before finally landing in her current position as bar manager of Birdie G's in Santa Monica, California. “I never imagined this would end up being my career path, but I've realized I have a real affinity for cocktail-making,” she says.

Before being hired at Birdie G's, Reading had never served in a management role. “I had a month to figure out how to build a complete bar program from the ground up,” she says, noting that



At Birdie G's in Santa Monica, California, Stephanie Reading has built an exciting bar program that utilizes locally-sourced ingredients and craft spirits.

she soon discovered that her ethos is very much in line with that of Birdie G's and its chef Jeremy Fox. “Just like the kitchen, our bar uses only fresh, organic, and locally sourced ingredients, with a focus on sustainability and zero waste,” Reading says. “We want our drinks to be fun, inventive, and approachable, while also complementing the amazing dishes our kitchen produces.”

Indeed, Reading's cocktail menu (drinks are \$15-\$19) is flush with fresh produce, house-made syrups, and craft spirits, as seen in her La Naranja China (\$19; recipe below) and her Sky's the Limit (\$16), which features Aviation American gin, Luxardo Maraschino liqueur, Dolin

Dry vermouth, The Bitter Truth Violet liqueur, and Scrappy's Lavender bitters.

“My goal is to create cocktails that persuade people to step out of their comfort zone and try something they normally wouldn't,” Reading says. “Knowing a guest has been pleasantly surprised or has discovered they might actually like a spirit they previously thought they didn't will always make me smile.” **mw**

Sally Kral

Stephanie Reading's Recipes



La Naranja China

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Pueblo Viejo Blanco Tequila;
- 1 ounce Del Maguey Vida mezcal;
- ¾ ounce The Bitter Truth Golden Falernum liqueur;
- ¼ ounce Ancho Reyes ancho chile liqueur;
- ¾ ounce fresh lime juice;
- ¼ ounce kumquat ginger syrup¹;
- 3 candied kumquats², cut in equal sized pieces, plus more for garnish.

RECIPE:

Combine candied kumquats, kumquat ginger syrup, and lime juice in the small side of a cocktail shaker and muddle. Add Tequila, mezcal, and liqueurs. Fill the large side of the shaker with large ice cubes. Shake the ingredients together short and soft and pour the contents into a double Old Fashioned glass.



Sky's The Limit

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 ounces Aviation American gin;
- ¼ ounce Luxardo Maraschino liqueur;
- ½ ounce Dolin Dry vermouth;
- ¼ ounce The Bitter Truth Violet liqueur;
- 1 dash Scrappy's Lavender bitters;
- Lemon peel;
- Lavender sprig.

RECIPE:

In a mixing glass filled with large Kold Draft ice cubes, build gin, liqueurs, vermouth, and bitters. Stir until properly diluted, then strain into a Nick and Nora glass. Express a lemon peel over the drink, then use the peel as garnish along with a lavender sprig.

¹ Combine equal parts by weight kumquat syrup (leftover from kumquat ginger syrup) and fresh ginger juice. Stir until fully combined.

² Combine equal parts by weight halved and deseeded kumquats and granulated cane sugar, plus 75% weight filtered water, in a saucepan (example: 1,000 grams kumquats to 1,000 grams sugar to 750 grams water). Cook on medium heat for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally until kumquats begin to turn a deeper orange color. Remove from heat and let cool. Strain and set liquid aside to make kumquat ginger syrup.