

# Happy Drinkers

At New York City's The Happiest Hour and Slowly Shirley, Jim Kearns aims to please

While working together on the opening of New York City restaurant The Standard Grill in 2009, bartender Jim Kearns and manager Jon Neidich hit it off immediately. “Over many a late-night Powers Irish whiskey and Miller High Life, we discovered we shared hospitality goals: to provide a great product in an unpretentious, unforced, fast, efficient, and, above all, friendly manner,” Kearns says. Though the duo didn’t make specific plans at that time, they stayed in touch. In the fall of 2014, they joined forces to open The Happiest Hour in Greenwich Village.

With training under late renowned mixologist Sasha Petraske and a background tending bar at some of New York City’s top cocktail spots, including Death & Co., Pegu Club, and The Nomad, Kearns brings a wealth of cocktail knowledge and skill to The Happiest Hour as beverage director. The menu (all drinks are \$14) is unique in its format, with half dedicated to classic builds and the other half falling under the “You pick ‘em, we pour ‘em” category, such as the Mango Mango, featuring lime juice, Petite Canne cane syrup, mango purée, and the guest’s choice of Santa Teresa Claro rum, Pueblo Viejo Blanco Tequila, or Del Maguey Vida mezcal. “Our signature cocktails are built for speed, with the base components batched ahead whenever possible,” Kearns



At The Happiest Hour in New York City, Jim Kearns showcases classic cocktails, as well as signature drinks based on the customer’s choice of spirit.

says. “This makes service much faster, and letting guests choose their spirit adds an interactive element to the experience.”

In the spring of 2015, Kearns and Neidich opened a second bar directly below The Happiest Hour called Slowly Shirley, which has a slightly different vibe. “Slowly Shirley is intended to be a cocktail and spirit lover’s haven,” Kearns explains. “The menu is a little longer than The Happiest Hour’s, and the drinks tend to be more complex, with more intricate, layered flavors.” Cocktails are \$16-\$25 and include unique recipes like the Tropical Julep (\$16), blending pineapple-infused Wild Turkey 101 rye whiskey, Cruzan Blackstrap rum, brown sugar syrup, and fresh mint. “My style is rooted in classic cocktails and bartending, because the classics provide the underpinning for pretty much all other

cocktails—although I’ve always enjoyed incorporating different styles, schools of thought, and techniques,” Kearns notes.

While menu curation has always been Kearns’ focus, as beverage director for Golden Age Hospitality—the group that owns The Happiest Hour and Slowly Shirley—his responsibilities extend to training, education, and guidance. He says, “A big part of my job is making sure that the quality and service standards we took years developing are upheld so that we continue to exceed guests’ expectations.”

Sally Kral

## Jim Kearns’ Recipes



### MANGO MANGO

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1½ ounces Santa Teresa Claro rum, Pueblo Viejo Blanco Tequila, or Del Maguey Vida mezcal;
- ¾ ounce lime juice;
- ¾ ounce Petite Canne cane syrup;
- 1 ounce mango purée;
- Pinch chipotle salt<sup>1</sup>.

**RECIPE:**

In a cocktail shaker, combine choice of spirit, lime juice, syrup, and purée. Shake with three ice cubes. Strain into a rocks glass and top with crushed ice. Sprinkle with chipotle salt.



### TROPICAL JULEP

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 2¼ ounces pineapple-infused Wild Turkey 101 rye whiskey<sup>2</sup>;
- ¼ ounce Cruzan Blackstrap rum;
- ¼ ounce brown sugar syrup;
- 7 mint sprigs.

**RECIPE:**

In a cocktail shaker, muddle brown sugar syrup, 2 mint leaves, and whiskey. Strain into a chilled Julep glass. Add a generous amount of crushed ice, then top with rum. Garnish lavishly with remaining mint.

<sup>1</sup>Combine 1 part chipotle powder with 2 parts kosher salt.

<sup>2</sup>Skin and cut the head off of a pineapple and cut it into approximately 1-inch cubes. In a container, combine pineapple cubes with 1 bottle of Wild Turkey 101 rye. Infuse at room temperature for 24 hours. Strain, pressing gently on the pineapple, and refrigerate.

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