

# Going Hyper-Local

At Loa, Alan Walter drills down on hometown terroir

Though Alan Walter has been working in the hospitality industry for nearly a quarter of a century, it wasn't until he was managing the bar at the now-closed New Orleans restaurant Iris roughly a decade ago that his real passion for bartending was sparked. With a wide array of fresh ingredients in the restaurant's kitchen at his disposal, Walter flexed his creative muscles to develop a one-of-a-kind cocktail menu. "This is when I felt bartending bring back to life my boyhood interests in plants and experimenting with flavor," he says. "It's also when I decided to give my bartending career real attention."

While at Iris, Walter and his bespoke cocktails earned a local following and caught the attention of hotel proprietor and real estate developer Sean Cummings, owner of the International House boutique hotel. The two became friends and, soon enough, colleagues; Cummings invited Walter to take on the role of creative director at International House's bar, Loa, in 2012.

At Loa, Walter's cocktails (\$11-\$16) continue to center on fresh produce, with an emphasis on hyper-local flavors, and each drink is served in a vintage cocktail glass from his personal collection. "Our menu is designed to give people the lay of the land



At New Orleans bar Loa, drinks are all about fresh produce, with a focus on hyper-local flavors; bar manager Alan Walter even forages for some ingredients.

with cocktails that offer an authentic taste of place," he says. "Out-of-town guests can explore a plethora of ingredients that exude flavors and stories of New Orleans, and I like to think this approach also inspires our locals to revive a sense of excitement about where they live." To insert this authentic New Orleans terroir in his drinks, Walter forages for certain ingredients that can't be found in markets, which he then uses to make his own syrups and other tinctures.

"My recipes have always included shaking with fresh herbs to produce visceral aromatics," Walter adds. "I also favor herbal spirits, the floral notes in liqueurs, and I especially love the clean, dry, essential character of eaux de vie." His Delilah (\$13) features gin, elderflower liqueur, pineapple balsamic shrub, and fresh basil, while his Bona Dea (\$15) comprises pequin pepper-infused eau de vie, cilantro liqueur, pressed green tomato juice, celery seed syrup, and mineral water (full recipes below).

"My favorite thing about what I do is helping people experience certain flavors or the true essence of an ingredient for the first time," Walter says. "I love that in the end my efforts help make people happy."



Sally Kral

PHOTO BY (TOP) MATTHEW NOEL

## Alan Walter's Recipes



### DELILAH

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 2 ounces Beefeater gin;
- ½ ounce St-Germain liqueur;
- ½ ounce pineapple balsamic shrub<sup>1</sup>;
- 1 bunch basil leaves, plus more for garnish;
- Pineapple wedge.

**RECIPE:**

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine gin, liqueur, shrub, and basil. Shake and strain into a cocktail glass over fresh ice. Garnish with remaining basil and a pineapple wedge.



### BONA DEA

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1 ounce pequin pepper-infused Cobrafire Eau de Vie de Raisin<sup>2</sup>;
- ½ ounce G.E. Massenez Garden Party Cilantro liqueur;
- 1 ounce pressed green tomato juice;
- 1 ounce celery seed syrup<sup>3</sup>;
- 3-4 ounces Topo Chico mineral water;
- Sprig cilantro;
- Candied green tomato.

**RECIPE:**

Pour eau de vie, liqueur, tomato juice, and syrup into a Collins-style glass over large ice cubes and swizzle to chill. Top with Topo Chico and stir. Garnish with cilantro and candied green tomato.

<sup>1</sup>Heat 20 ounces fresh pineapple juice with 1 cup sugar until juice is reduced by 25%. Add 3 ounces balsamic vinegar and simmer mixture for 15 minutes.

<sup>2</sup>For every 5 ounces of Cobrafire add 2 thinly sliced pequin peppers. Let steep for one week, then finely strain.

<sup>3</sup>Heat 5 ounces water and 10 ounces sugar until dissolved. Remove from heat and add 1 tablespoon celery seed. Let cool, then strain.