

# In Good Company

Shannon Ponche flexes her creative muscles at Leyenda in Brooklyn

St. Louis native Shannon Ponche jumped behind the bar as soon as she was able. “I had just turned 21, and at the time there was only one cocktail bar in town,” she says. “After one visit, I applied for a job.” The bar, Taste, is owned by Niche Food Group, and Ponche learned the mixology trade under renowned bartender Ted Kilgore, who went on to grow St. Louis’s cocktail bar scene with the opening of Planter’s House in 2013.

After cutting her teeth at Taste, Ponche made the move to New York City and has continued to surround herself with the cream of the crop in the business—fitting in seamlessly as a top-notch bartender in her own right. “It was an easy decision to keep learning and bartending,” she says. While working at pioneering Tequila and mezcal cocktail bar Mayahuel, Ponche took home the top prize at the 2013 Speed Rack bartending competition. It was at this event that she caught the eye of mixologist Julie Reiner of Clover Club and Flatiron Lounge and Reiner’s longtime protégée, Ivy Mix—who co-founded Speed Rack with mixologist Lynnette Marrero.

Reiner and Mix hired Ponche at Clover Club soon after, and when they opened the pan-Latin bar and restaurant Leyenda in Brooklyn in 2015, they brought Ponche on board. This year



*Shannon Ponche began bartending at 21 and hasn’t looked back, joining forces with pioneering mixologists to further her career.*

she was appointed head bartender. With her preference for Mexican and other international ingredients—“Micheladas, Sherry, and mezcal are my loves,” she notes—Ponche feels right at home in her new role.

Cocktails at Leyenda (\$12-\$14 for single-serve; \$40 for punch bowls) focus on Latin American spirits and ingredients, often mixing fruit flavors with savory components like peppers, nuts, chiles, and spices. Ponche’s Witching Hour (\$13) comprises Por Siempre sotol, Von Humboldt’s Natur Wasser tamarind liqueur, Dolin Blanc vermouth, Orgeat Works T’Orgeat toasted almond syrup, Bittermens Orchard Street Celery shrub, and lemon juice.

“I tend to favor savory cocktails,” Ponche says. Her Rizzo cocktail (\$13) features Illegal Joven mezcal, agave syrup, lime juice, and a house-made sangrita—a traditional Mexican drink that Ponche makes with mango purée, yellow bell pepper and lime juices, chiles, salt, pepper, and water. “Sangrita is my favorite cocktail ingredient to make,” she notes. “I love that there are no rules with it.”

Ponche adds that Leyenda is a great neighborhood hangout. “We put a lot of thought into our drink and food menus without taking ourselves too seriously,” she says.

**mw**

Sally Kral

PHOTOS BY (TOP) SHANNON STURGIS; (BOTTOM RIGHT) EMMA JANZEN

## Shannon Ponche’s Recipes



### WITCHING HOUR

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1½ ounces Por Siempre sotol;
- ¾ ounce Von Humboldt’s Natur Wasser tamarind liqueur;
- ¼ ounce Dolin Blanc vermouth;
- ¼ ounce Orgeat Works T’Orgeat toasted almond syrup;
- ¼ ounce lemon juice;
- 3 drops Bittermens celery shrub;
- Celery leaf.

**RECIPE:**

In an ice-filled mixing glass, combine sotol, liqueur, vermouth, syrup, lemon juice, and shrub. Stir and strain into a rocks glass over one large ice cube. Garnish with celery leaf.



### RIZZO

**INGREDIENTS:**

- 1½ ounces Illegal Joven mezcal;
- ¾ ounce lime juice;
- ½ ounce agave syrup;
- 1 ounce sangrita<sup>1</sup>;
- Salt, sugar, and pequin chile mixture, for rim<sup>2</sup>;
- Lime wheel.

**RECIPE:**

Rim a highball glass with spice mixture. In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine mezcal, lime juice, agave, and sangrita. Shake and strain into highball glass over fresh ice. Garnish with lime wheel.

<sup>1</sup>Combine 1 container The Perfect Purée of Napa Valley mango, 9 ounces yellow bell pepper juice, 2 ounces lime juice, 4 ounces water, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon ground pasilla chile, 1 teaspoon ground chile de arbol, and ½ teaspoon ground white pepper in a container and store in the fridge.

<sup>2</sup>Mix together 2 parts salt, 1 part sugar, and 1 part ground pequin chile pepper.