

# Catered Cocktails

Michael Rubel lends his skills to Chicago-based cocktail service Blue Blazer

In June, following the lead of several other major U.S. cities, Chicago legalized the sale of to-go cocktails to help restaurants and bars stay afloat while their regular service remained suspended due to Covid-19. While this has certainly been a boon to many operators, designing and packaging takeout cocktails posed its own set of challenges. This is where Blue Blazer, a new Chicago-based craft cocktail service, aims to fill a need.

Founded by hospitality attorneys Brian Troglia, Josh Kaplan, and Joe Kreeger, Blue Blazer offers a portfolio of white-label bottled cocktails for Chicago restaurants and bars to offer for takeout and delivery. To manage the production of these ready-to-drink cocktails, the trio tapped local beverage consultant and bar owner Michael Rubel. “My role as beverage partner is to create recipes and procure spirits, while also managing production protocol and account sales,” Rubel says.

Rubel’s experience running and consulting for bars throughout Chicago makes him well-suited to this new role; in addition to owning the Latin-inspired cocktail bar Estereo, he previously opened and ran The Violet Hour and created the beverage program for Big Star. “Over the years my cocktail style has become much simpler,” Rubel says. “At Estereo I specialize in



Michael Rubel creates recipes for Blue Blazer craft cocktail service in Chicago as a response to Covid-19.

unaged Latin American spirits like Pisco, cachaça, and mezcal and combine them with fresh fruits from local farmers. I’ve also long been obsessed with carbonation, not only as a technique, but ultimately as an ingredient that alters the flavor possibilities of a cocktail—Blue Blazer will be doing plenty of force-carbonated drinks.”

Some of the cocktails in Blue Blazer’s line are co-branded: Rubel’s Mezcal #1—a carbonated drink featuring Vago Espadín Joel Barriga and Mal Bién Espadín mezcals, house-made agua de Jamaica, fresh lime juice, and simple syrup—is under the Estereo brand. Others are Blue Blazer originals, such as Rubel’s Mai Tai, which blends Cañada Aguardiente de Caña and Uruapan Charanda rums, house-made orgeat syrup, fresh lime juice, simple syrup, and an orange Curaçao custom-made for Blue Blazer by Letherbee Distillers. At press time, the initial lineup of 7-8 bottled cocktails was slated to launch in late fall.

“I had thought about doing bottled cocktails commercially for a long time, so meeting up with Brian, Joe, and Josh was pretty fortuitous,” Rubel says. “It’s fun to be part of a start-up and build something from nothing.”

**mw**  
Sally Kral

PHOTO BY (TOP) TY WYFFELS; (BOTTOM LEFT) RILEY DREW; (BOTTOM RIGHT) MICHAEL RUBEL

## Michael Rubel’s Recipes



### MEZCAL #1

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 ounce Vago Espadín Joel Barriga mezcal;  
½ ounce Mal Bién Espadín mezcal;  
1¼ ounce agua de Jamaica<sup>1</sup>;  
½ ounce fresh lime juice;  
½ simple syrup;  
Carbonation.

#### RECIPE:

Add mezcals, agua de Jamaica, lime, and simple syrup to a cornelius keg or brite tank and force-carbonate for 72 hours. Serve in a Collins glass over ice.



### MAI TAI

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 ounce Cañada Aguardiente de Caña rum;  
½ ounce Uruapan Charanda rum;  
¼ ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao<sup>2</sup>;  
½ ounce orgeat syrup<sup>3</sup>;  
½ ounce fresh lime juice;  
¼ ounce simple syrup;  
Mint sprig.

#### RECIPE:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine rums, Curaçao, orgeat, lime, and simple syrup. Shake hard and strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice. Garnish with mint.

<sup>1</sup>Rinse and drain 3 cups whole hibiscus flowers. Combine flowers with 8 cups filtered water and 1 cup sugar in a pot over low to medium heat for 15 minutes, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Remove from heat and allow to steep for 2 hours. Strain and refrigerate.

<sup>2</sup>In the Blue Blazer recipe, a custom-made Curaçao from Letherbee Distillers is used. Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao as a suitable substitute.

<sup>3</sup>Toast 2 cups raw whole almonds over medium-high heat for 2 minutes per side to activate the oils on the skin. Crudely chop in a food processor—not to a powder but so that every almond is broken into a couple pieces. Add almonds, 1½ cups sugar, 1½ cups water, and ½ cup Ron Cartavio White rum to a saucepan and simmer over low heat, stirring regularly. Pull from heat before it starts to boil and let steep for 3 hours, then strain through a nut bag and refrigerate.