

# Dining

The New York Times

## And Now for Our Special Tonight: The Bartender

As an owner and principal manager of Mayahuel, an East Village bar and restaurant specializing in tequila and mesquite, Philip Ward has his hands full. He's there all the time, doing everything from staff scheduling to emergency plumbing.

**FRANK BRUNI**

**THE TIPSYP DIARIES**

But not on a recent Thursday night. Then he was mixing and serving cocktails at Dram, a year-old bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

And not Wednesday night, either. Then he was shaking (and stirring and muddling) his stuff at 1534, a bar in NoLita that opened six months ago.

Like more and more of his peers these days, Mr. Ward has a way of popping up behind the bar in places other than the one in which he's mainly invested, and it's not about moonlighting for extra money. It's about the cross-pollinating dynamic of the cocktail scene right now, which is like some boozy analog to "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Guest stars are a major deal.

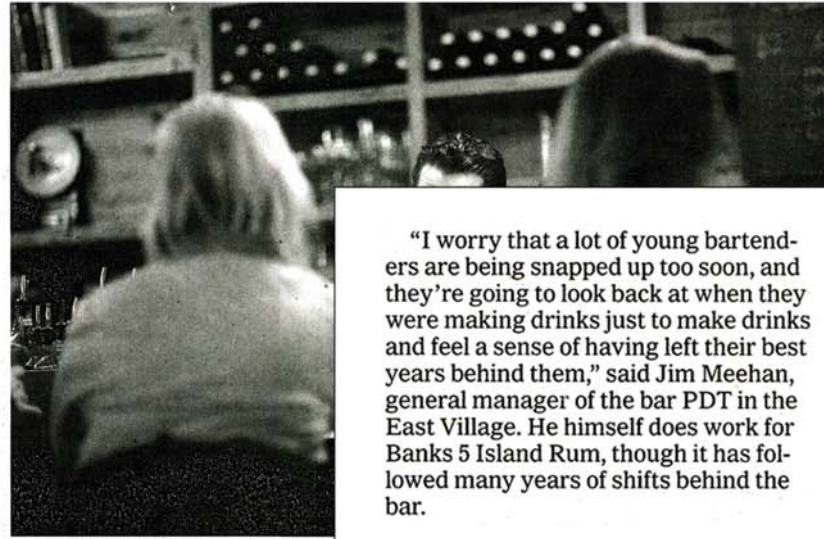
Dram and 1534, in particular, thrive on them, inviting bartenders from around the city and the country to come in for a shift, show what they've got, teach a little to the resident staff, learn a little from them and generate a few hours of buzz.

Many other bars, along with restaurants with ambitious bar programs, are doing likewise, but with slightly less regularity. For example, Compose, which opened in TriBeCa in December, has already played host to bartenders from New York establishments including Dram, 1534, the John Dory Oyster Bar, Death & Company and the Boom Boom Room.

"We're a pretty small community, and we all keep in touch," said Mr. Ward, explaining why this happens so frequently and feels so natural, at least to him. Actually, he said, it feels better than that — like a diversion, a vacation, a blast. While the host establishment gets a fresh infusion of energy and in some instances publicity, a guest bartender gets not only access to a new group of customers but also a break from familiar surroundings and chores. That's especially sweet for Mr. Ward, a bartender by background who now finds himself immersed in supervisory responsibilities at Mayahuel.

"At your own bar, you can't just be a bartender," he said. "You're looking over a customer's shoulder to see what the floor staff is doing and you're thinking about the leaky pipe and you're worried about the problems with the ice machine."

Chefs will visit other restaurants' kitchens and do what are called staves, educational stints that last anywhere from a few days to a few months. But



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Above, the guest bartender Philip Ward, mixing drinks (left) at Dram, a bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

they're not taking charge of the menu and advertising their own skills.

On occasion they'll go to a distant city and do a night of promotional cooking. But not without a whole lot of advance work, and not as frequently as prominent bartenders currently move around.

Bar owners and managers cite several reasons for the difference. They say that one bartender can adapt to another's inventory and workstation more easily than one chef can to another's larder and equipment. "We're all using many of the same spirits and fresh

juices," said Tom Chadwick, a principal owner of Dram. "In a restaurant the prep time is going to be much longer."

The world of serious cocktail making remains newer and smaller — and thus, its denizens say, less competitive and more collaborative — than the world of serious restaurants. There's a sense that everyone benefits by sharing expertise, nurturing better bartending and, presumably, creating a larger class of more committed customers as a result. "It's a rising-tide thing," Mr. Chadwick said.

Mr. Ward said, perhaps in jest: "Restaurants have been around forever —

maybe chefs have had more time to realize they don't like each other. Maybe they don't drink enough to get along."

Yet one more factor comes into play, and not all cocktail mavens are enthusiastic about it. In recent years, spirits makers have recruited and signed prominent, knowledgeable bartenders as "brand ambassadors," financing their travel to bars far and wide, where the drinks they make include the gin, bourbon or tequila they represent.

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Guest bartending is by no means confined to brand ambassadors. It can take the form of exchanges of the kind in which Death & Company, also in the East Village, has taken part. Bartenders there have traded places with those from the Violet Hour in Chicago and the Alembic in San Francisco.

The newest twist is bars that make the appearances of guest bartenders a part of their very identity. Fatty Johnson's, a pop-up restaurant that recently operated for a few months in Greenwich

### Cocktail Exchange

**1534** 20 Prince Street, between Elizabeth and Mott Streets, NoLita; (212) 966-5073, jacquesnyc.com/1534.

**THE BOOM BOOM ROOM** Standard Hotel, 848 Washington Street, at 13th Street, West Village; (212) 645-4646, standardhotels.com/new-york-city.

**COMPOSE** 77 Worth Street, near Church Street, TriBeCa; (212) 226-1444, composenyc.com.

**DEATH & COMPANY** 433 East Sixth Street, East Village; (212) 388-0882, deathandcompany.com.

**DRAM** 177 South Fourth Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn; (718) 486-3726, drambar.com.

**JOHN DORY OYSTER BAR** Ace Hotel, 1196 Broadway, at 29th Street; (212) 792-9000, thejohndory.com.

**MAYAHUEL** 304 East Sixth Street, East Village; (212) 253-5888, mayahuelny.com.

**POT** 113 St. Marks Place, at Eighth Street, East Village; (212) 614-0386, pdtnyc.com.

**YERBA BUENA** 23 Avenue A, between Houston and Second Streets, East Village, (212) 529-2919; also 1 Perry Street, West Village, (212) 620-0808, ybnyc.com.

Village, showcased one prominent mixologist after another. Dram has Mr. Ward every Thursday, and a changing cast of guest bartenders every other Wednesday.

And at 1534 since late February, Justin Noel, the beverage director, has organized what he calls the Roustabouts series, a mischievously titled attraction that spotlights a prominent outside mixologist — often a brand ambassador — every Wednesday. He said that it had been a clear boost to business.

Bars whose emissaries have participated in that series include the Squeaky Bean in Denver, Smuggler's Cove in San Francisco, Drink in Boston and Employees Only, Macao Trading Company and Yerba Buena in New York. Mr. Ward was at 1534 Wednesday night with Brian Miller, who used to stay put at Death & Company but now bops around, partly for the Tanqueray brand.

Sometimes guest bartenders are paid and sometimes not. Sometimes they keep tips and sometimes they donate them to charity. Sometimes they're asked to mix at least the classic drinks according to the host establishment's specifications and sometimes they're encouraged to go their own way.

But always, they're supposed to have a good time. "They're only here for a few hours — no setting up, no closing down, no going to staff meetings," Mr. Chadwick said. "They can just relax and do their thing."