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“Citadelle Gin was present at The Manhattan Cocktail Classic’s”

With Its Cocktail Classic, Manhattan Seeks a Fair Shake

Events Isn't as Well Known as Tales of the Cocktail, a 12-Year-Old Summer Festival in New Orleans

By almost any measure, New York is a cocktail enthusiast's paradise. The city can take credit for popularizing such drinks as the Cosmopolitan and the Manhattan. And it continues to set the bar with drinking spots devoted to everything from hard-to-find Irish whiskeys to molecular mixology.

But that hasn't necessarily translated into top-shelf bragging rights for the Manhattan Cocktail Classic, a 5-year-old, five-day festival that celebrates the city's boozy culture. This year, it staged events citywide, from hipster bars in Brooklyn to a Midtown Manhattan cigar emporium.

By most accounts, the Cocktail Classic, which concludes Tuesday, isn't as well known in the industry as Tales of the Cocktail, a 12-year-old summer festival in New Orleans, which some liken to the Super Bowl of the mixology world. That event boasts an annual attendance of some 20,000, a number of big industry sponsors and a glitzy awards ceremony honoring global stars of the spirits world.

According to organizers of the New York festival, roughly 8,000 patrons signed up this year to choose from a menu of 50-plus events, ranging from a punch-filled pig roast (aptly called "Swig 'n' Swine") to a seminar on using house-made tonic water to create the perfect gin and tonic.

At the festival's \$195-a-ticket opening-night gala, held Friday at the New York Public Library's main 42nd Street branch, the bookish setting was transformed into a surreal scene reminiscent of a Federico Fellini movie, complete with red lighting and acrobatic pole dancers. In one corner of the library, patrons sipped a futuristic cocktail served out of what looked like a glass billiard ball. And those were just a handful of the nearly 25,000 drinks served.

"Normally, you just can't come up to the New York Public Library and have a martini," said Noah Rothbaum, a spirits authority and festival regular who arrived at the semiformal event in his vintage thrift-store red smoking jacket.

Make that a few martinis. Or Pisco Sours. Or just about any concoction that blends booze, juice, soda or other mixers—with a decided emphasis on the booze. "We're not in the mineral water business," joked Guillaume Lamy, a brand representative for Citadelle, a French-made gin that was featured at the gala.

"We don't program for...those people at all," she said, referring to the non-spirits professionals. As for the Manhattan Cocktail Classic, Ms. Duval said "there are significant sponsors" that aren't part of the festival's roster, but she said she's just as content to target craft distillers who sign on for as little as \$500.

She is also clear that as much as she respects what Tales does, she likes to keep her festival focused on the public—especially, sophisticated and fun-loving New Yorkers. "This is predominantly a local event," she said.