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New SF bar Interval at The Long Now to focus on 'time' when it comes to drinking

By Rhys Alvarado @Rhyseepieces



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San Francisco's center for long-term thinking is getting ready to expand its thought process.

In June, The Long Now Foundation is expected to open Interval, where the past will meet the future. The bar is located at the bottom floor of the foundation's Fort Mason location.

The folks behind The Long Now are firm believers in the idea that society is moving way too

fast for its own good, and they want to foster long-term thinking for the next 10,000 years.

In the meantime, they will run a bar where you will be able to order from a gin robot that will offer many different distillates of juniper, coriander, orris root and other botanicals to create a special concoction all your own.

Bulbs of booze will hang overhead, illuminated by thin beams of sunlight. The bulbs will be available for purchase. In the event that you don't finish the contents in one sitting, the bulb will be stored in the rafters above for your next visit.

The tradition of bottle service dates back to World War II Japan. Some soldiers would return to the bar and their bottles after battle, said Alexander Rose, executive director of the foundation.

In some cases of soldiers who had died in battle, Rose said, their grandchildren would inherit the half-full bottles.

Interval will be managed by Jennifer Colliau, who has coupled drinking's past while looking ahead. She's also behind the syrups of Small Hand Foods. And while Colliau has a rich sense of cocktail traditions and history, she brings a scientific sensibility to the process of crafting drinks.

Colliau is the type who picks up old French and German cookbooks just for their orgeat recipes, and she can geek out about how to prevent citrus from oxidizing when kegging cocktails.

Look for Colliau at Interval beginning June 9. She recently sat down with The San Francisco Examiner to talk about the new bar.

Tell me about your menu. Each menu page has its own theme. Some of them are moments in time. The first section is the "Welcome" drinks. I'm attempting to combat that modern cocktail bar thing where people are like, "God it takes forever to get a drink." So these are drinks that are made ahead of time. We're batching drinks. Drinks on draft. We'll be bottling and carbonating gin-and-tonics that you can get in a pail with crushed ice. It's super fast. I have a section called "Drinking around the world." I'll be making a ponche de granada that you can find in Mexico, traditionally served in clay cups with pecans. Another drink is called "Hot Caustic." I had to put it on the menu because of the name. It's kinda gnarly, but it's vodka and black coffee — and that is it. Traditionally it's made with a Swedish kroner placed at the bottom of the cup, you pour coffee until you can't see the kroner anymore, then vodka until you can see it again. I love the story, I love the name. But here, we'll just be using standard cocktail measurements.

What else can you tell me about cocktail history in the drinks that you'll be serving?

We're also doing a martini menu, kind of a nod to the martini menus of the '90s and 2000s. But we'll be serving martinis the way people liked them throughout history. The first known martini was by JPA Martini, who moved to France in the late 1700s. He preferred drinking a mixture of genever, white wine with cinnamon. Genever is the precursor to gin. Vermouth is a spiced fortified white wine. So you can see where the martini evolved from that. Julia

Child, who preferred her martini with more vermouth than gin -- an inverted martini that's better as an aperitif. The Winston Churchill Martini, who didn't want vermouth in his martini. His whole thing was to stir three ounces of gin and bow toward France. It's gin straight up. There's so many variations and stories to choose from.

What do think about modern-day bartending? We're in a crazy cocktail phase right now. Bartending is becoming a legitimate trade again. When I started bartending, I wouldn't have taken a job as a barback. People who are applying here are understanding that there is a progression of knowledge that takes place. It's really exciting. You can't be a serious bar these days without doing fresh juice, a couple kinds of ice and having more than two kinds of bitters.

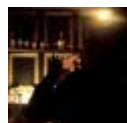
What do you think about the future of cocktails? There's so much great stuff out there. And the dissemination of information in today's age is just unreal. People just have to decide what information is good, and what isn't. One thing I'm worried about is that young bartenders feel that they are expected to know how to do this stuff. They'll make their own grenadine, and it's terrible. And they get the job because they said they could make it. But they haven't spent enough time developing their palates. No one can palate rye whiskey straight at 15. If you want this to be your profession, you have to treat it like it's your job. It takes time.

Do you feel like your career has led up to this point? Totally. My degree is in art. I can look at the bar and look at our audience. If you want someone to pay for what you're making you need to consider who that person is. I look at this as, it's bartending and it's conceptual art. I can look at this place within The Long Now's framework and see its concept and what we're trying to deliver to our audience.

And what is it that you're trying to get across? The Long Now wants people to talk about long-term thinking. Everything in this bar is about that. The cocktails have a sense of history and a timespan associated with them. Some drinks take a long time to make them and some don't. We have this library. There's lots to talk about. We're trying to create a place for conversation.

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@rhvseesnieces

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Bio:

Rhys Alvarado is a cocktail enthusiast and sucker for soul and sweet reggae music. A food and drink blogger since 2009, Rhys has sipped his way from Hawaii to Santa Barbara and up the coast to San Francisco, where he's found a glorious wave of craft concoctions and expert drink-makers.

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