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The Interval: Drink in bar dedicated to the past and future

The Interval: Drink now in a bar where theme, library and decor embrace past, welcome the future

Jon Bonné Updated 12:18 pm, Friday, August 1, 2014

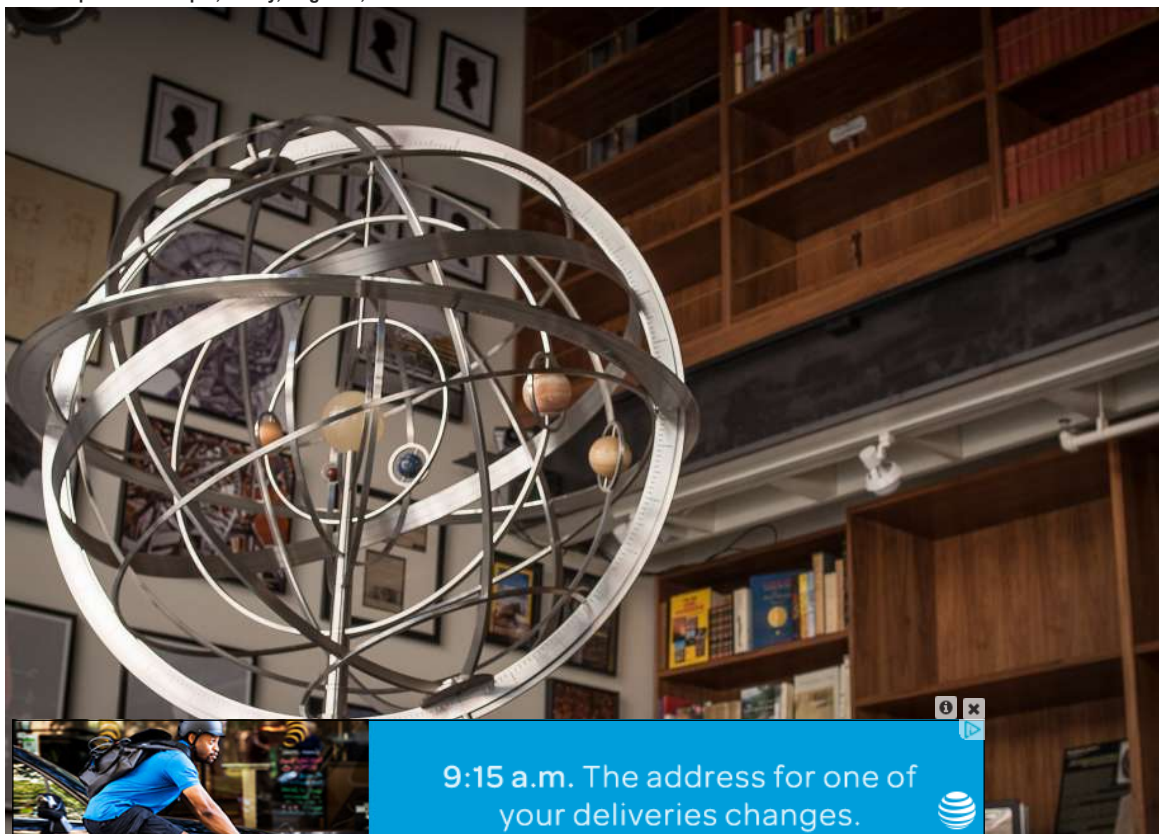


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Above: An orrery, a mechanical model of the solar system, graces the entrance of the Interval. Far left: Flasks above the bar contained bespoke gin for Kickstart contributors. Left: The Decanted Mother-In-Law ... [more](#)

The orrery placed squarely in the entrance of the Interval, the latest project from San Francisco's Long Now Foundation, is clear in its message: You are not in just any old bar.

Long Now, founded by futurist Stewart Brand and inventor Danny Hillis, is dedicated to considering humanity in the long view. The orrery, a mechanical model of the planets, was a partial prototype for Long Now's full-scale clock, conceived to run for 10,000 years.

Why did the orrery walk into a bar? The not-for-profit decided to turn its occasional cocktail hours into an everyday thing, creating venue, as Long Now Executive Director Alexander Rose puts it, "to harken back to the public houses, the coffee houses, the tea houses of the Enlightenment."

The Interval launched in June, aided by a Kickstarter round. Top donors were rewarded with flasks of gin, distilled by Alameda's St George Spirits using juniper off a Long Now property in Nevada. Those flasks hang from wooden slats above the bar, part of a smart steampunkish design from Oakland's Because We Can. Shelves from a growing book library line one wall.

Thus, a perfect happy hour: Sink into a copy of John McPhee's "Annals of the Former World." Gaze at an art installation from Brian Eno, a Long Now board member, which morphs its geometries behind the bar. Enjoy a palate-twister of a drink like the Decanted Mother-In-Law - bourbon, curacao and bitters, served in an apothecary bottle.

Behind such drinks is Jennifer Colliau, approached, she says, because of her ability to "unextinct cocktails." She followed Long Now's theme precisely, creating a series of meditations on specific moments in cocktail time.

All this is virtuous and thoughtful. But as it happens, the Interval is also a damn fine bar. Colliau's training at the Slanted Door (and crafting the Small Hand Foods line of syrups) gave her the chops to take these theoretical notions into wonderfully real territory. You can drink quite well without dwelling on details.

Those details, however, are entrancing. Each set of pages in Colliau's modular cocktail list offers variations on a theme, rooted in a particular time and place. A focus on the martini, which controversially posits the drink's origins in the 1700s, includes Julia Child's version (half vermouth, half gin) and perhaps the only dirty version a bartender would respectably make: one from New York's Saxon + Parole that incorporates Cerignola olive-infused vermouth and olive oil. Imagine if a martini chatted in Sicilian dialect.

Some results can be more historically fun than delicious; while a daiquiri page colorfully spins the backstory of Havana's La Florida the resulting daiquiris are a bit pro forma. Generally, though, the drinks are some of the most finessed in town.

That curatorial eye for detail extends to the Interval's daytime offerings, including coffee from Sightglass and a collection of pu-erh tea from Samovar, its extended aging process another means of considering the long view.

ADVERTISING

If you go

To order: Decanted Mother-In-Law (\$11), Brooklyn Heights (\$10), Bourbon Onion Bar Jar (\$9)

Where: The Interval at Long Now, Fort Mason Center, Building A, S.F. (415) 561-6582. www.theinterval.org.

When: Open 10 a.m.-midnight daily.

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