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BACK TO BASICS

Eugene bars cater to classic tastes.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

I don't
drink
much.
Between
being a student

and a parent, I can't bring home the bacon or fry it up in a pan if I'm soused half the week. But when my editor told me to taste and write about popular cocktails, with the emphasis on *tasting* the cocktails, I said "Hell yeah!"

My first thought was to find out what Jeffrey Morgenthaler serves a lot. He's the hunky guy behind the bar at **Red Agave**, and I completely trust his opinions about alcohol. Morgenthaler says drinkers are returning to the classics like Manhattans, Sidecars and Martinis — the kinds of drinks you can get at almost any bar in the world. "I think people are getting a little overwhelmed by all the exotic ingredients," he said. "I've been selling a lot of nice, simple drinks lately."

Manhattans are one of my favorite drinks, always have been, always will be. The bite of the bourbon is uniquely complemented by the sweetness of the vermouth and the dash of fresh cherry. It piques the appetite but leaves the palate clean. I wanted to sample Red Agave's Manhattan, which they make with Punt e Mes, an Italian vermouth made with quinine, in place of the traditional sweet vermouth. Morgenthaler said it was fantastic, and he was right. As a mixologist who creates his own elixirs, Morgenthaler's added other popular drinks to the Red Agave menu, including the Bad Apple, the quirky cousin of a Red Apple, made with blended fresh green apples, lemon juice, sugar and Absolut Citron Vodka. Garnished with a slice of fresh green apple, it's yummy.

Over at **Sorilah**, orders for Cosmopolitans and Lemon Drops rang through the room like church bells on the hour. Feeling urbane out on the town, I had to have a Cosmo. With fresh lime, powdered sugar, vodka, cranberry juice and triple sec, it's tart, sweet and lusciously pink in the glass. Next I tossed back a perfectly puckery Rum Collins (rum, lime juice, orange juice, powdered sugar and a squirt of Collins mix) and found

them both exquisite. My drinking companions opted for the classic Margarita, another ever-popular drink according to bartender Andrea Kaady, and were not disappointed.

Chanterelle's bartender, Dave Lawrence, echoed Morgenthaler's sentiments about the classics. Lemon Drops and Margaritas are what their customers crave. "There's been a resurgence of classic cocktails," he said. Through access to the Internet and a trend toward "retro style," 50-year-old cocktail recipes are finding

their way into modern culture. Plus, Lawrence notes, flavored liquors like citron or vanilla vodkas can splash fresh life into a stale recipe. "There's variations on those classic cocktails and it's almost like a rebirth of those drinks when you can add something new to it," he said.

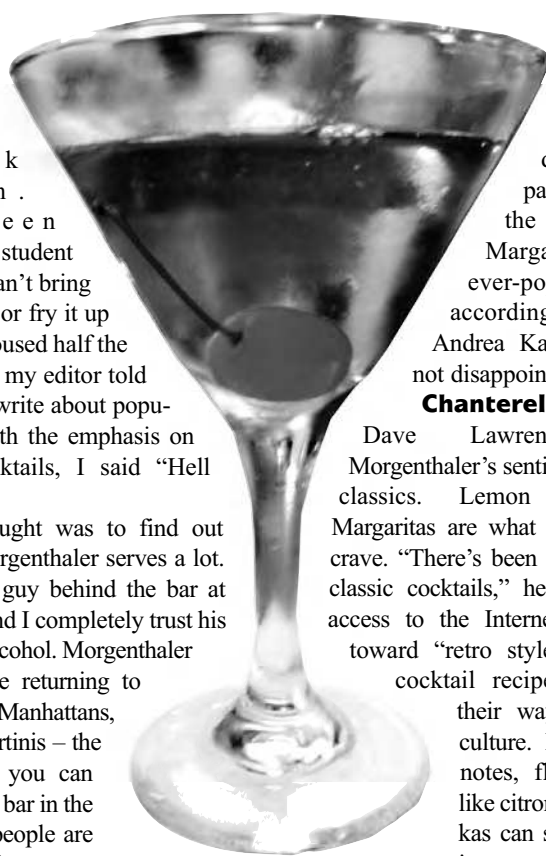
Rum and Cokes, Cosmos, Lemon Drops and Margaritas are "standard fare," according to **The Horsehead's** daytime bartender J. R. Ogden. He says, "We don't have a lot of the exotic liquors so what we sell is pretty basic." And, he added, he sells mostly beer.

Ring of Fire's **Lava Lounge** seems to defy the trend away from exotic ingredients. Brandon Davis says their fruit-

infused liquors, which they began selling about seven years ago, are still their most popular bar item. "We turn them into cocktails called Kamikazes and we also have a Chili Margarita, which are by far our most popular drinks," he said.

The Lounge has its own specialty drink menu with so many delicious options most people forget about Martinis and down a "Thai Me Up" with Thai iced tea and Stoli Vanilla Vodka or a "Dragon Fly" with Crater Lake Vodka instead. Davis said he's seen no slow-down of interest in their exotic potions.

Whether you want to toast with a time-tested classic or a redefined trendy cocktail, you'll find it in Eugene's bar scene. ☺



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