

IN SEARCH OF AN IRISH COCKTAIL

With St. Patty's Day around the corner, Mr. Kennedy seeks to expand his libatious horizons

BY WILLIAM KENNEDY

A guy named Kennedy walks into a bar two weeks before St. Patrick's Day. That sounds like the start of a bad joke, and sometimes it is. Kennedy: a quintessentially Irish name. St. Patty's Day: America's most Irish of holidays. Commemorating the Patron Saint of Ireland, St. Patty's has lost its religious meaning, particularly in the U.S., becoming instead an excuse to eat a lot, drink more and toast all things Eire.

Back to the bar — and me. Mr. Kennedy exploring the Ireland-booze connection. We all know Guinness and Jameson, we've all had black and tans (a mixture of the Irish beers Harp and Guinness) or pounded a few Irish car bombs (a shot of Jameson dropped in a pint of Guinness — drink it before it explodes!). But what else is there? Does Ireland have a signature cocktail, like Scotland's Rob Roy?

Kiyallah Heatherstone, owner and bar manager of Rye in downtown Eugene, says besides the sugary hot coffee and whiskey drink called Irish coffee, not really. Some bartenders disagree, but Heatherstone thinks Irish whiskey's flavor profile is particularly hard to mix.

Heatherstone notes that one of the world's most famous cocktail bars exists in Dublin, but it has nothing traditionally *Irish* on the menu. Known as Café en Seine, the Dublin bar's online menu lists multinational drinks like Havana Mojitos and Singapore Slings among others.

To drink Irish is to drink whiskey, Heatherstone says, suggesting I try a flight of Rye's Irish whiskeys: Knappogue Castle, Redbreast and Jameson — all aged 12 years.

Irish whiskey is distinct from Scotch because it's made from a fermented mash of cereal, giving it a grainy aroma, and it can be aged in any wooden barrel. Scotch is usually made from rye or barley and must be aged 3 years in oak barrels, giving it a smoky or peaty flavor.

Of the three whiskeys in Heatherstone's flight, Knappogue, a single malt, is the lightest — mild and citrusy with a creamy texture and hints of vanilla. Redbreast, also single malt, is sweet and grassy — whiskey for a bourbon drinker. And only Jameson, the darkest of the three, comes close to my usual whiskey experience: also malty, but with a sinus-filling aroma of grass and wood. It makes sense that Jameson is one of the oldest and most famous of Irish whiskeys. (Ironically, though still made in Ireland, Jameson is a brand of French distiller Pernod Ricard.)

Just because there aren't many traditional Irish cocktails, it doesn't mean mixed drinks with Irish whiskey don't exist. At Rye, Heatherstone serves what he calls a Kylemore Abbey.

The Kylemore is 2 ounces Tullamore Dew, a blended Irish whiskey; three-fourth ounces Punt e Mes, a bitter Italian vermouth; one-fourth ounce Benedictine, a liqueur made from herbs, roots and sugar, and served straight with no garnish, creating a syrupy cousin to the Manhattan — which feels appropriate, given that Manhattan was where many Irish immigrants landed in America.

So, what have we learned? (Cue introspective Ken Burns-esque fiddle music.) If you aren't one for whiskey or beer, St. Patty's may not be your drinking holiday. But with a little ingenuity, delicious blended drinks can be made from un-mixable Irish whiskey, drinks that one day might become part of your St. Patrick's Day tradition. ■



KYLEMORE ABBEY

TRASK BEDORTHA

