

PUNCH

A San Francisco Bar Meant to Last 10,000 Years

Welcome to "About a Bar," a column that explores America's newest and most notable bars and cocktail programs. Today, San Francisco's most cerebral cocktail bar, The Interval.

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Stepping into The Interval can feel akin to time travel. Whether the journey is backward or forward, however, remains to be seen.

The bar is housed in San Francisco's Fort Mason, a wind-swept former military campus with numerous event spaces, an excellent vegetarian restaurant, panoramic views of the Bay and a decided lack of a cocktail scene. The nascent Interval is changing that, and as the brainchild of the Long Now Foundation

—a nonprofit dedicated to long-term thinking—it’s doing it more thoughtfully than the average bar. The Interval acts as a “museum” for many of the Long Now’s working projects (including prototypes and designs of their 10,000 year clock), and a modern day salon meant to evoke conversation.

The idea of time span is present in all the space’s design details, which toe a line of tension between permanent and ephemeral. Multi-floor bookcases line the walls housing thousands of tomes that are organized in a Manual for Civilization—or those books deemed necessary to society, as we know it. A communal table is built on an intricate network of gears that evoke clockwork. Suspended from a series of rafter rows are custom-made, orb-shaped bottles filled with bespoke whiskies and gins made by Alameda distillery St. George Spirits, which foundation patrons can purchase and—as in traditional barkeep service—have them brought down to enjoy at any time. A pair of robots, one dedicated to writing on The Interval’s chalkboard, the other outfitted with 15 distillates that spits out custom gin blends, are forthcoming.

But The Interval isn’t just the sidecar to a cabinet of curiosities. It’s a serious cocktail bar, and one whose drinks reflect the stretch of time with its own mind-bending set of intentions that are meant to inspire thought and conversation about not only our collective drinking culture and history, but also the stories behind certain drinks, or—at the very least—the drink in hand.

Unlike other bars in San Francisco or across the country chasing the idea of what comes next in the immediate sense, The Interval is pursuing something more permanent amidst the ephemeral act of consuming a cocktail after work, which is why classic drinks take precedence. And because drinking here is conceptualized as a wheel in whole landscape of clockwork, it’s allowed the freedom to evolve naturally over the course of time.

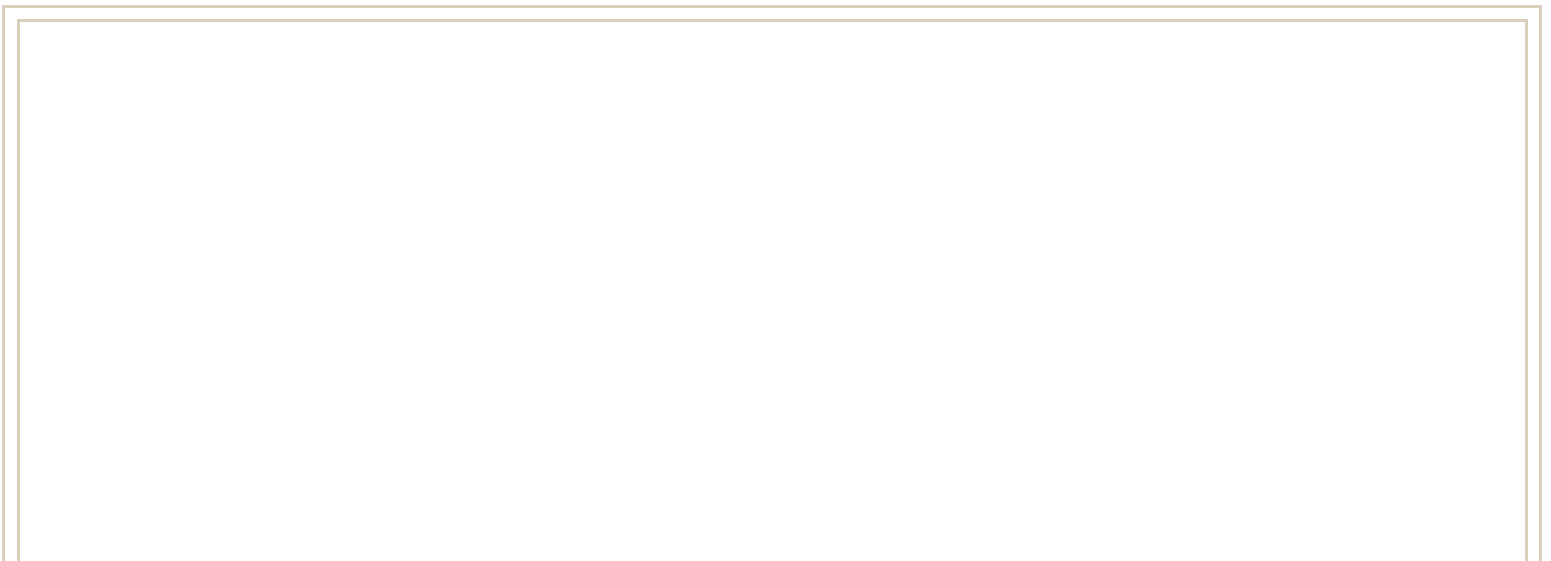
The menu, created by bartender Jennifer Colliau, is printed in a custom-designed handwritten font (though Colliau was inclined to handwrite the whole thing herself), and is divided into six sections—Welcome, Drinking Around the World, Martini Menu, The Daiquiris of Floridita, Brooklyn Variations and Temperate & Teetotaling—each of which is full of anecdotal annotations, stories and mini-histories that are evocative rather than authoritarian. Drinkers are provided with enough lore that each cocktail feels rooted within its own narrative journey.

The idea of time—whether on a continuum or in nod to a specific moment—is present at each turn of the menu. The Daiquiris of Floridita represent a timestamp in history—specifically during Prohibition—when wealthy Americans would abscond to Bar La Florida in Cuba and drink the then brand-new cocktail called the Daiquiri. The Martini Menu, in contrast, presents a chronological timeline—from the 18th-century J.P.A Martini, the first-recorded iteration to the Martinez to a modern riff on the Dirty Martini by New York bartender Naren Young.

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“The menu is very personal,” says Colliau a nine-year veteran of the Slanted Door Group, and the creator of Small Hands Foods, a much-lauded source for cocktail gums and syrups. Small Hand Foods is based on the premise of reproducing recipes from another era for a modern palate—things like pineapple gum, orgeat and grenadine—so it makes sense that a woman obsessed with creating a history-steeped bartending arsenal would build a menu focused on the evolution and perfection of time-tested drinks, rather than concoct a stage for ten-ingredient stunt cocktails.

“The whole idea of this bar gives me license to tell all of these stories,” Colliau says. And, of course, those stories will change over time.





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