



The Moment

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Raising the Bar | Cocktails Come Home

By Jill Santopietro



Rye on the Road's mobile bar unit, inspired by the bar at Rye on Geary Street in San Francisco.

The mise en place ingredients recessed into the wood are a signature design element. Photo courtesy of Greg Lindgren Rye on the Road's mobile bar unit, inspired by the bar at Rye on Geary Street in San Francisco.

As the great cocktail revival continues to sweep the nation, bartenders in the thick of it are discovering a new niche: the cocktail caterer. And here we do not mean the guy in the polyester monkey suit pouring Captain and Cokes at your cousin's wedding. We mean professional mixologists who take their ice and shakers very, very seriously.

In the Bay Area, Greg Lindgren and Jon Gasparini of Rye bar founded Rye on the Road catering service. About a year ago, Scott Beattie left Cyrus restaurant in Healdsburg, Calif., and has been mixing his seasonal cocktails up and down the coast ever since.

Angie Jackson, aka "the traveling elixir fixer," is busy imbibing Chicago folks with her catering company, Ultimate Elixirs. And in New York, Chad Solomon, who tended bar at Milk & Honey, now shakes cocktails off-site for Cuff & Buttons, alongside Christy Pope and Sasha Petraske. Dave Kaplan, the owner of Death + Company in Manhattan, loves the pace of mixing drinks at Death + Company's large catered events.

Chad Solomon admits that catering “is a logistical nightmare, especially for the level of cocktails that we are executing. Most bars are designed by bartenders with everything perfectly in place. When you leave that bubble and take it on the road, it becomes a different animal.” So in addition to working with clients to create a custom cocktail menu, a few caterers, like Rye on the Road, will even come equipped with their own portable bars.

A few insider tips:

1. Heat from hands melts the ice in a drink more quickly. Use smaller cups and guests will likely drink up before their cocktail can get too watered down. (From Dave Kaplan of Death + Company.)
2. It’s a good idea to keep the drinks menu fairly tight — two to five different cocktails, depending on the size of the event.
3. Be prepared to have two pounds of ice per person on hand. (From Angie Jackson of Ultimate Elixirs.)
4. A small amount of dry ice will help to keep your regular ice colder longer. (From Dave Kaplan of Death + Company.)
5. Also see Pete Wells’s article in this week’s Dining In/Dining Out.

According to Solomon, the most popular party cocktails these days are lighter, citrus-based drinks and anything with mint in it. “You put mint in something and people are generally very receptive to it,” he said. The most requested cocktail on Angie Jackson’s list is her Cool as a Cucumber Elixir, made from gin, white cranberry juice, lemon juice, cucumber slices and dill. Do try this at home.

Cool as a Cucumber Elixir

2 ounces gin
2 ounces Ocean Spray white cranberry juice
3/4 to 1 ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 cucumber, sliced into thin wheels
Ice
Fresh dill sprigs.

Combine the gin, white cranberry and lemon juices with 2 cucumber wheels in a mixing glass. Shake with ice for 10 seconds. Strain into cocktail glass and garnish with an additional cucumber wheel and a fresh dill sprig. Makes 1 cocktail. Adapted from Angie Jackson of Ultimate Elixirs in Chicago.

Note: This cocktail may also be served pitcher-style for informal gatherings. It gains more of a cucumber flavor the longer cucumbers are allowed to soak in the mixture.