

Cocktails With a Story: Off the Menu at the Bar

My off-menu selection, so you can see the mechanism. The question, at the second order and only if the conversation is flowing: “May I make you something off the menu? Tell me which way you lean: citrus, dry, sweet?” Citrus: a gin base with lime, a touch of basil from the garden and a sparkling-wine top — fresh, aromatic, with a twist. Dry: an Old Fashioned with our own house touch, described while it’s being made. Sweet: a rum base with vanilla and a hint of coffee. And always, BEFORE touching the shaker: “I’ll make it for you for [X].”

The spirit with a story: “If you like rum, I have one off the menu that we keep in just a few bottles — [where it’s from, what makes it different, in twenty seconds] — at [X] a glass. It deserves to be sipped slowly.” No solemnity, no tasting sermon: a confidence between connoisseurs.

And the close that multiplies everything: if they liked it, it gets christened — “well, now it has a name: the [their surname]. When you come back, ask for it by that name.” A cocktail with their name on it is the cheapest loyalty builder ever invented: you’ve just given them a reason to come back AND a story they’ll tell at home — with your bar as the star. Remember the non-negotiable limit of lesson 24: the experience is never sold to someone who shouldn’t keep drinking. No sale is worth more than that judgment.