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GOODNESS  
GRACIOUS?**

# SPIRITED AWAY

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE OF  
COCKTAILS, WHERE CELLULOSE AND  
XANTHAN GUM ECLIPSE TRIPLE SEC  
AND SCHNAPPS.

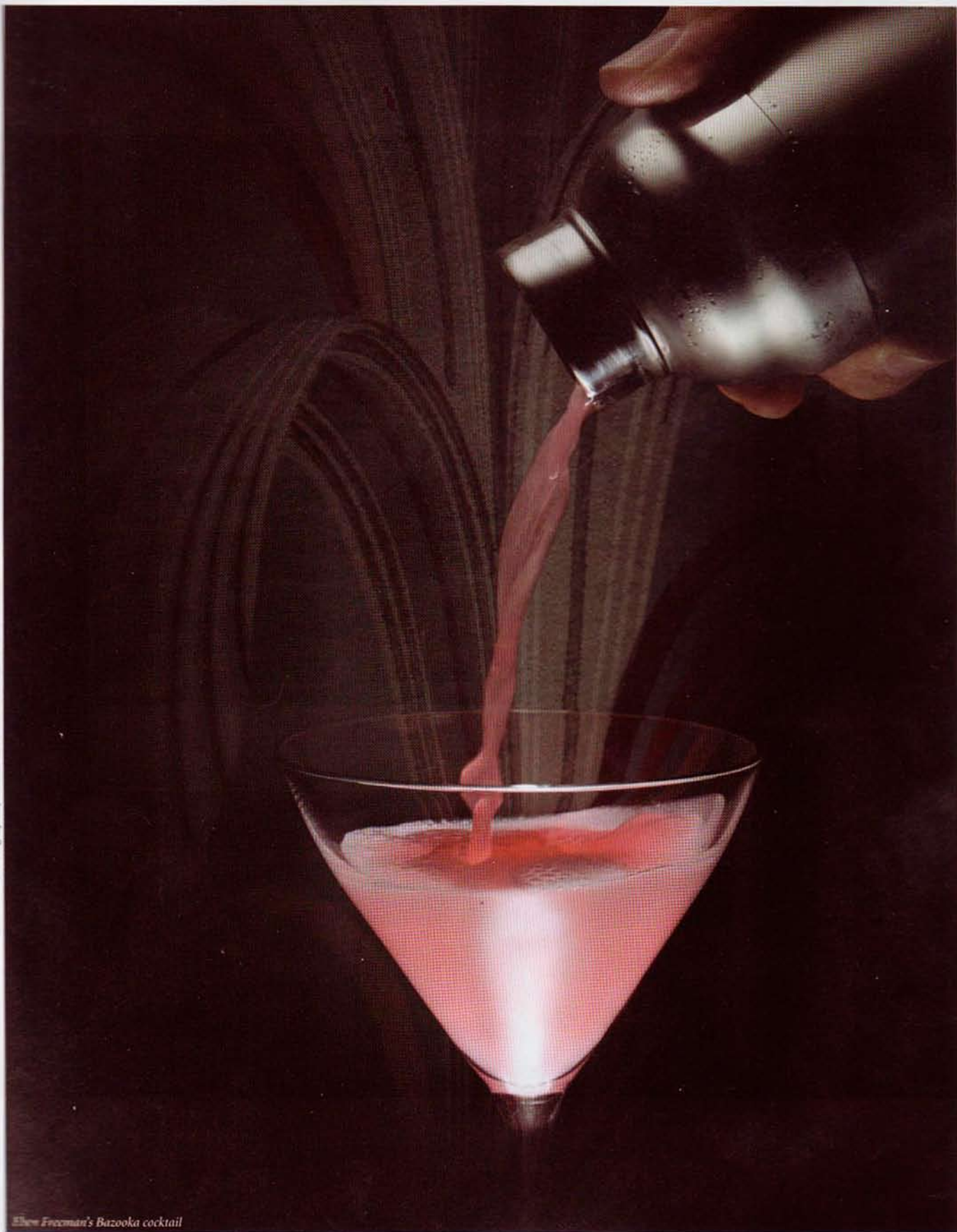
**N**ot many years ago, a cocktail was either shaken or stirred. Today, however, we are in the midst of a cocktail revolution as molecular mixology is gaining in popularity, changing the traditional textures, shapes and flavors of cocktails.

By now, “molecular gastronomy” should be a familiar term, and molecular mixology incorporates the methods used in molecular gastronomy and applies them to cocktails. Gelatins and other hydrocolloids (thickeners and stabilers like cellulose, agar and xanthan gum) are used to change textures, as are chemicals like liquid nitrogen and sodium bicarbonate tablets, and foaming canisters and other high-tech equipment are employed to make cocktails that, well, don’t necessarily look like cocktails.

Yet the term “molecular mixology” is controversial. “If you want to be literal, then molecular mixology should involve science and scientific ideas, and a lot of the things I do don’t at all and that’s why I call it progressive cocktails,” says Eben Freeman, the esteemed mixologist formerly of wd-50 and currently at Tailor, both in New York. “And it’s to set myself aside from the classics.” At Tailor, Freeman infuses unusual ingredients like pumpernickel bread in Scotch and Grape Nuts cereal in sochu. “A big part of it is tapping into the sense memory of people,” he says. “I want to create a drink experience that extends beyond the drink experience.”

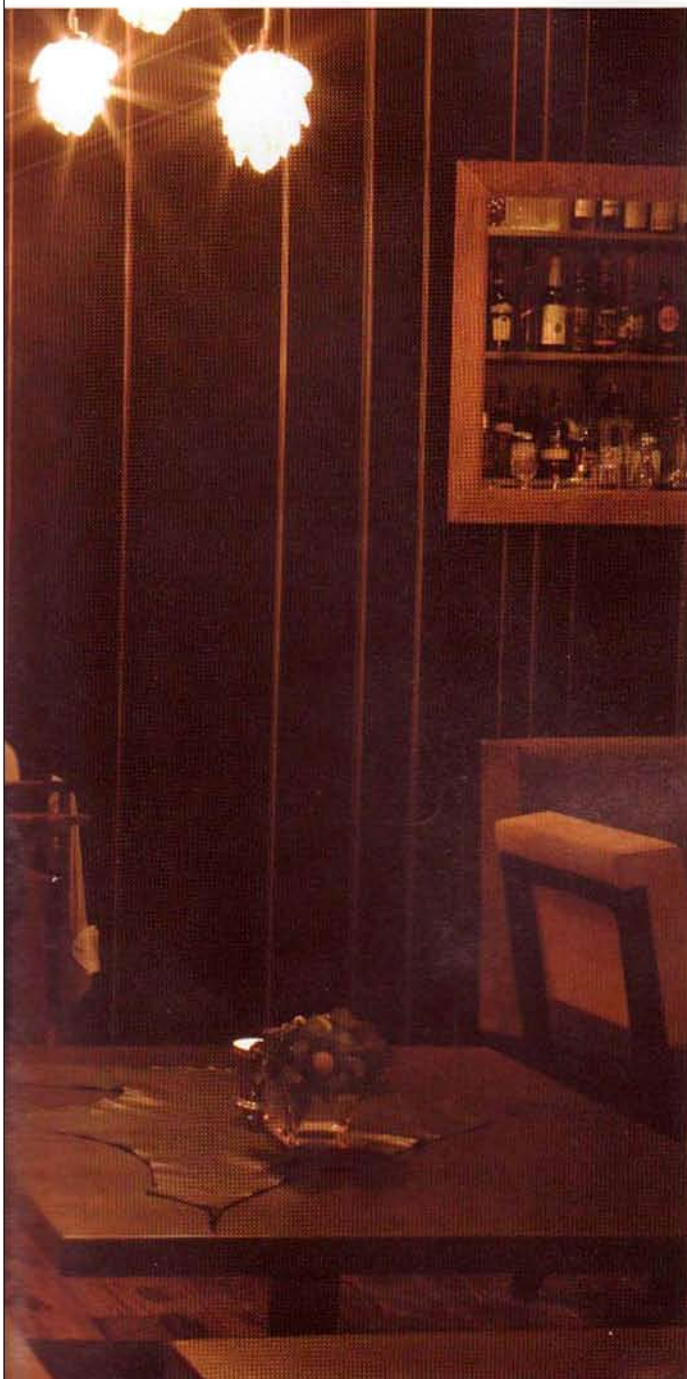
Kevin Miller, the executive chef at Ixia in Baltimore, recently teamed up with mixologist Tom Cusack to create a liquid nitrogen bar where martinis are instantly frozen by the addition of liquid nitrogen, which also emits a dramatic smoke. Miller has also experimented with glassless shots, which are shots dropped into a sodium alginate bath to form a shell around the shot. The shot is then eaten off a spoon so that it explodes in the customer’s mouth.

Photograph by MEHMET ALI DOKUMCU



*Shen Freeman's Bazooka cocktail*





Yet with such stunts comes the notion that molecular mixology is nothing more than an easy gimmick. "A lot of people dabble in molecular mixology and end up making it look silly because they don't understand how to use the applications or they just aren't good at mixing flavors," says Freeman, noting that an extensive technical know-how and a solid mixology background is important when it comes to creating these new cocktails. Inspired by the use of Coca-Cola in barbecue recipes, Freeman smokes Coca-Cola syrup in a shallow pan over cherry wood, then places it in a Cornelius keg before mixing it with bourbon to make the bar's famed Waylon cocktail.

Certainly, Taylor's cocktail program is at the forefront of the molecular mixology scene, although many other high concept restaurants like Moto in Chicago and Minibar in Washington, D.C., have been exploring new ways to imbibe.

"I think molecular mixology has a huge future. I imagine in the next two years or so, someone will come up with a huge breakthrough that forever changes what people think of as possible to create in a shaker. Something much, much better than foam," says Sasha Petraske, the owner of several classic cocktail lounges in New York, including Milk & Honey. "The question, however, is whether that new cocktail will be something that you will want to drink for the rest of your life, such as a martini or mojito."

Time will surely tell, but it's almost a sure bet that the next big step will come from Dave Arnold, the director of culinary technology at The French Culinary Institute in New York, and Johnny Iuzzini, the lauded executive pastry chef at Jean Georges in New York. The two are currently planning a haute cocktail bar in New York that will revolutionize how we conceive of cocktails.

"We're going to use every technique and every ingredient to make the best possible drinks," says Iuzzini. That means that the twosome are experimenting with methods to carbonate liquor, vacuum infusing spirits, clarifying juices, and using equipment like centrifuges and rotary evaporators. "But we don't want to alienate people who want a vodka cranberry," notes Iuzzini. "We're just going to make it the best vodka cranberry ever."

So while the future of cocktails looks bright (or gelatinous, foamy, or freeze-dried, depending on your view), Eben Freeman wisely notes that it's important for mixologists to know where to draw the line. "In the end it has to be something tasty and palatable and not just interesting for interesting's sake." **LAUREN SHOCKEY**