

# Raising the Bar

**FOODSERVICE** *news*  
The Industry's National Newspaper



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## THE SEMI-ANNUAL BEVERAGE MENU MAKE-OVER CONTEST

One lucky restaurant will win 2 days of hands-on staff and management training by master mixologist and renowned flair bartender Gavin MacMillan, focusing on:

- accuracy • speed • flair • cocktail synergy
- time management behind the bar • review of current menu and full menu makeover

Here's what to do: Complete the ballot below (one entry per establishment). Mail or fax your ballot to the coordinates listed below. We'll take care of the rest. Gavin will visit your restaurant to help your staff 'Raise the Bar.'

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Establishment: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

5255 Yonge Street Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario M2N 6P4 Or by fax 416.512.8344

## Reintroducing Quality Cocktails

A fresh look at profits behind the bar

Seventy-five years ago, during the Great Depression, Americans cheered and raised a glass to the repeal of prohibition. Largely viewed as a huge flop — considering that as soon as Congress banned the sale and service of alcohol, consumption rose to record levels (though just how much it increased is tough to judge as “gangsters” didn’t find it prudent to report their sales to the government) — there are lessons to be learned from the “noble experiment,” which can be applied to the recession we face today.

During the Great Depression, with expendable income on the decline, people did not slow their drinking; rather, they started drinking more. With the sudden rise in demand for spirits, consumers turned to what was readily available — bathtub gins and whiskeys better suited to removing paint. To stay afloat, bartenders had to be creative. This led to the rise of the cocktail culture, when bartenders added seasonings and other beverages to mask the taste of inferior spirits.

Today, with the downturn in the economy, the pressure on bars to attract and retain guests is steadily increasing. Uncertain of the financial future, consumers are cutting out time spent at their favourite establishments. Like the early '30s, this is putting the imagination and technical knowledge of today's bartenders to the test.

But how do you re-introduce the concept of quality cocktails during a recession, when guests have been programmed to enjoy drink menus often designed around speed of service and profit margins?

The first step is to ease consumers into it.

A good friend of mine, Troy Dowhaniuk of Toronto's Six Degrees Nightclub, recently invited me to his establishment's fresh cocktail night. While I initially scoffed at the idea of providing fresh ingredients only one night of the week, I decided it was a great way to introduce the concept to guests rather than force them into a more costly, unfamiliar cocktail menu right off the bat.

While you may not want to dedicate one night specifically to fresh cocktails, work to create and feature a signature cocktail using fresh ingredients. Put a fresh spin on a popular or classic drink, such as the Sidecar, French 75, Manhattan or the Old Fashioned, which were born out of prohibition using inferior spirits that still warmed the soul. Today, with much better ingredients available, your bar can capitalize on the recession by becoming memorable in cocktails.

The second step is to “dare to be different.” Much like guests, many bartenders



have become accustomed to using syrup or powdered sweet and sour mixes and the thought of putting an egg in a cocktail is sure to elicit a shudder or two from some. While it's important we work to educate guests, bartenders may require just as much, if not more, training on what a quality cocktail entails.

Creating an avant-garde drink list doesn't necessarily require jumping into molecular mixology, bottling your own bitters or infusing spirits behind the bar. Rather, it involves a little effort and a few fresh, quality ingredients to get you — and your drinks — noticed.

The final step is to commit to consistency. This involves everyone involved in cocktail preparation.

By following these three steps, you will reap the rewards during the recession. However, it's important to keep in mind these things take time. In the eight decades we've been “freely” serving cocktails since the repeal of prohibition, many people have long forgotten what quality is. Keep raising your bar because if you don't, you may very well find the economy getting the best of you. A few good cocktails may be just what you need to take the edge off.



Nick Nemeth is a mixologist, bar chef and senior instructor with BartenderOne. He competes in mixology competitions across Canada and is raising eyebrows everywhere with his unique brand of cocktails. He has worked with Tony Abou-Ganim from the Bellagio in Las Vegas, and received accolades from Kevin Brauch, “The Thirsty Traveller,” at a recent competition for both creativity and understanding as a bar chef.