

BRIDGET ALBERT
HEADS TO OHIO FOR A
LESSON IN PHILOSOPHY
BEHIND THE BAR



Cin City

photos by Malinda Hartong



Pilar Zeglin, head bartender at Cincinnati's Summit Restaurant, knows how to communicate to staff and customers.

Cincinnati has great cocktails. You heard me right. Cincinnati! **Pilar Zeglin** leads the way. She is the head bartender at the **Summit Restaurant** at the Midwest Culinary Institute at Cincinnati State. Pilar has passion for our craft that is contagious, and her message of great tasting cocktails has spread throughout the state of Ohio. It's all thanks to her dedication to cocktail education and bartending. Don't be short sighted and look only towards the "big cities" for leaders of hospitality and mixology. Those service industry people are right in your own back yard.

Bridget Albert: Is the customer really always right?

Pilar: Wow! That is loaded question. We are always taught that the customer is always right, but that assumes that he/she is educated about the decision they are making. Maybe it is more like the customer should have it their way! I feel that it is our job to give them new perspectives and let them make an informed decision based on our direct involvement and what we can share with them.

BA: What abilities does a talented bartender have?

Pilar: They should be personable, have the ability to bring out the best in the people they are surrounded by—including the staff and team members. They should be creative and be able to make great drinks out of egg nog and ketchup. And most of all, they should practice profound humility!

BA: Would you rather have to train a passionate green bartender with no skills or a passionate veteran bartender with bad habits?

Pilar: Any person with passion has the ability to increase that passion. It is the bartender with no passion that is a difficult one to train. I have to also bow down to the veteran whose longevity has kept this profession intact and whose habits come more from neglecting to understand our changing culture rather than from balking at change. They feel comfort with what has worked for them so far. After all, they are still here!

BA: Name one bartender you would like to meet—living or dead—and why?

Pilar: Anthony Bourdain! He is more than a chef; he enjoys cocktails. Though not a bartender, he does give resounding credit to us bartenders that do a great job, and I think he would be fun to hang out with. Most of the really great bartenders are alive and well and available to meet. That is what makes them great. I could never name one over another—they have all made their own contribution to our industry, and I am grateful for every last one of them, dead or alive.

BA: What is your favorite cocktail you make at the Summit that you enjoy turning a guest on to, and why?

Pilar: The Perfect Summit Manhattan. Time and time again, I get compliments on this cocktail from many people. The majority who try the cocktail enjoy it, and always take time to tell me or the server. It's a pleaser.

BA: How can a beverage manager be inspiring to a bar staff?

Pilar: They can give some freedom to be creative. After



Pilar's Signature Cocktail

The Perfect Summit Manhattan

- ▶ 2½ oz. Woodford Reserve
- ▶ ½ oz. Chambers Muscat (or other Australian fortified Muscat)
- ▶ ½ oz. Vya Dry Vermouth
- ▶ ¼ oz. orange curaçao
- ▶ 3 drops of Fee Brothers Aged Whisky Bitters
- ▶ Garnish with a pull of orange or tangerine and a cherry

all, this is art and theater behind the bar. Anyone who is successful knows this, and you just shouldn't stifle creativity and personality—it's what separates the queen bees from the drones. They should also see educational investment in their bar staff as a return in their overall bottom line, as well as the positive reinforcement and betterment of their working staff.

BA: How has the career path and opportunities changed for a bartender in the past ten years?

Pilar: The path of a bartender used to be something they did along the way. One might have said, "I am bartending now to get through school to be an accountant." Now, we are going to school and taking courses and self-study to become a bartender/mixologist, and we read-up on accounting. Many are also finding out from history that this used to be a prestigious position, and we were treated with respect and admiration. That is a big change involving the realization of the craft. It makes it worth dedicating time and effort to be good at what you do—and to be respected for your choice. ■