

barstars: CROATIA

Croatia's Cocktail Revolution

Many great revolutions in human history took root in unassuming places, hidden in plain sight. Croatia's percolating cocktail cultural revolution is no exception.





"You can drink a glass or bottle of wine at any good restaurant, but to find the best cocktails, you have to seek out the bars which offer them," says Zlatko Orečić, a lead bartender at Esplanade 1925 at the historic Esplanade Zagreb Hotel. "With increased interest in cocktails and more trained bartenders appearing, Zagreb is finally becoming a serious destination for cocktail culture."

As Esplanade Zagreb Hotel is located on the route of the famous Orient Express, the team at **Esplanade 1925** created a collection of signature cocktails inspired by the cities on its route. However, Orečić is equally excited about the creative happenings at bars beyond the hotel.

"What makes the bartending scene unique is that it is still in its infancy," agrees bartender Ivan Mandarić of **Joe's Bar** at the Arcotel Allegra, a popular destination for young professionals just up the street. "When we talk about real-deal cocktails, prohibition classics, and above all, our original signature cocktails, there are just a few bars providing those in Zagreb. However, that's what makes our scene exciting and mysterious."

Crafting in the Capital

Business partners and bartenders Saša Lovrenščak and Marijan Maksan spent more than a decade developing **Nekić Barology Cocktail Studio** to get Croatia's bar scene up to speed. Although they initially went into business with cocktail bar **Indus** 16 years ago, they realized passing their bartending skills on to others would put Zagreb on the map for cocktail enthusiasts. The team launched *Cocktail Week Zagreb*, drawing young people from all over the country and beyond every May.

The Cocktail Studio is located a few blocks off Ilica, Zagreb's main thoroughfare. According to Teja Lovrenščak, Saša's sister and the school's head of marketing, the perception of bartending has shifted from a temporary survival job to



a full-time career involving the ongoing perfection of skills, thanks in part to the expanded presence of bartending schools in town.

"Up until a few years ago," she observes, "people went to our bars mainly for wine, beer, Champagne and grappa. Our biggest challenge is that trends come to Croatia late. While gin-and-tonic drinks have been popular in Croatia for years, the arrival of craft gins from different places has motivated bartenders to take more risks, with interesting results."

Even with Teja's concerns, talent coming out of the Cocktail Studio and other cities makes hard to believe that the lively bars steps from the school, like the **Swanky Monkey Garden Bar** and **Bar Dežman**, have only been in business for a few years, or in some cases, a few months.

"Inspired by the character and work of Ernest Hemingway, we wanted to approach recipe creation for Hemingway, trying to imagine what he may have enjoyed in his lifetime," continues Saša Lovrenščak on his work for the bar/restaurant. "Although our goal is to create new things, we wanted to preserve the glamour of an earlier era, and re-introduce things that may have been forgotten."

Jovrenščak insists on incorporating Croatian ingredients to make even basic recipes distinctively regional. Maraschino (sweet cherry) liqueur, domestic grappa, Badel 1862 "Antique" Pelinkovac herbal liqueur and Prošek (a Dalmatian dessert wine made with dried grapes), are all available in the U.S. and are standards in Zagreb bars. Local produce is also prized. Aromatic herbs like sage, mint, lavender, and basil from the Dalmatian coast are used for homemade bitters and syrups.

Maksan, who now concentrates on bringing people into his bars, **Dežman Bar** and **Dežman Mini Bar**, cites his bartender uncle as a role model, spinning martinis decades before the cocktail boom. However, when Maksan stood in for his vacationing uncle at his hotel workplace, an American guest became one of his best teachers by taking the

initiative to show him the proper way to craft a martini with the correct ingredients, tools, and procedure. The lesson and his uncle's work ethic are with him to this day.

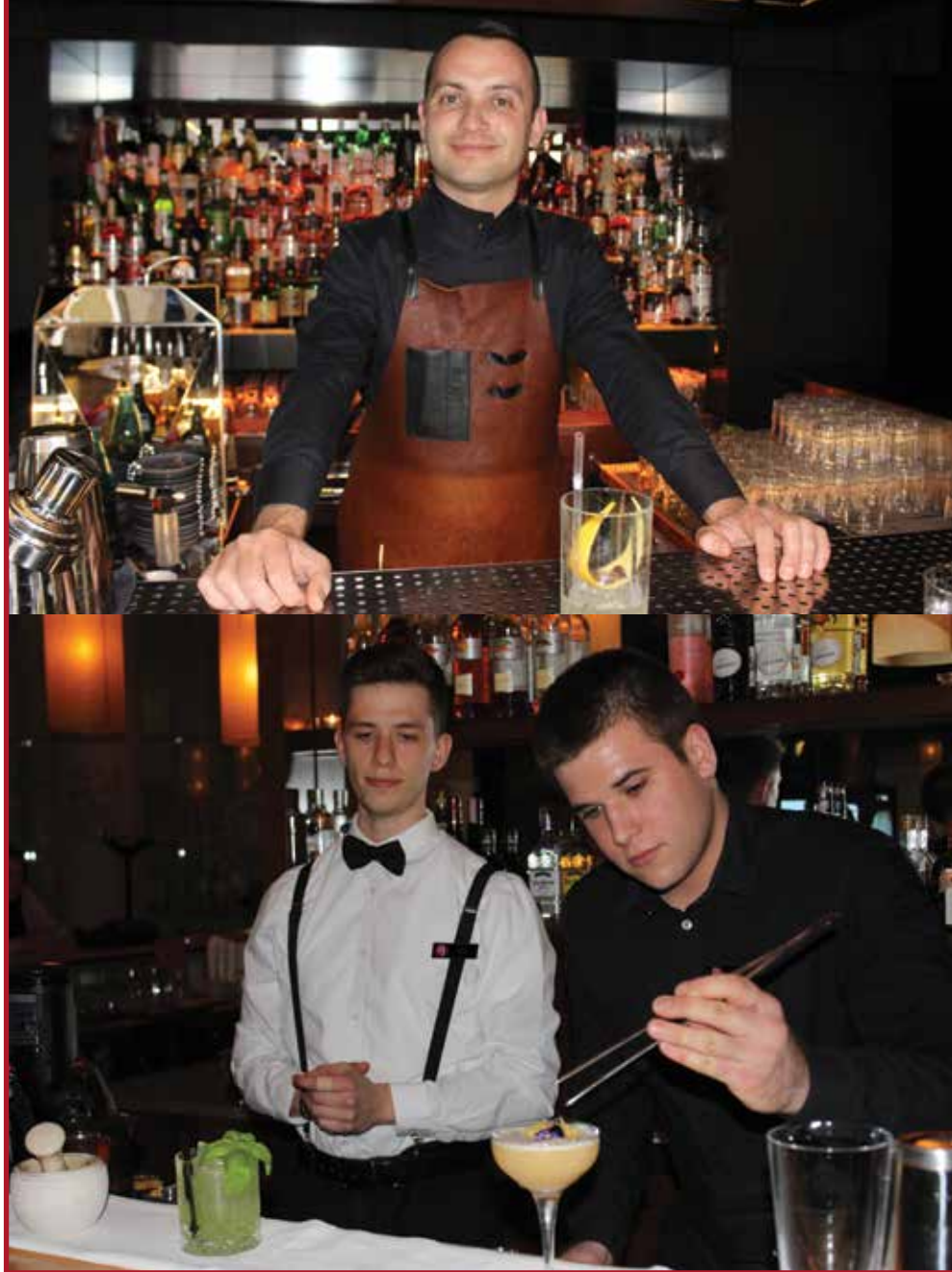
"The most important thing I teach my staff is that you cannot create signature cocktails without mastering the classics," says Maksan. His bar may be the first true cocktail bar in Zagreb. "We open at 4 pm, and offer espresso, macchiato and 60 different spirits, 11 signature cocktails, 15 classic cocktails and a handful of barrel aged cocktails," he explains. "The law dictates that cocktail bars cannot have kitchens, and the only fresh fruits permitted are lemons, oranges, and grapes."

Swanky Monkey Bar may be attached to a youth hostel, but the urban garden setting and generous drinks make it a draw for imbibers of all ages. Though open for less than a year, it draws standing-room only crowds on the outdoor patio at 5 p.m. Bartender Dino Zukić received culinary training and waited to support his kinesiology studies. However, he found himself so inspired by the culinary approach to bartending that he decided to make it a full-time vocation.

"I challenge myself not only to create beautifully crafted drinks, but also to make bartending sustainable," he says. Zukić predicts it will take about five years for Zagreb's scene to hit its momentum, as many bartenders work on the Dalmatian coast and elsewhere in Europe during the summer high season. He feels the scene will benefit in the long run when they later return to Zagreb, bringing new influences with them.

On the Waterfront—Split, Trogir, Hvar, and Beyond

Although Adriatic Coast wine bars are as popular as ever, Croatian and international bartenders colonizing this frontier are working diligently to create menus as nuanced as Croatia's best wines. Esther Canata, who honed her craft in the past 15 years at Ian Schrager hotels in New York and Los Angeles (where she met her



PAGE 1: Dino Zukić of Swanky Monkey Bar; PAGE 2: Split Harbor; LEFT PAGE, TOP: Ivan Nandarić of Joe's Bar; BOTTOM: CraftHouse Beer Bar; THIS PAGE, TOP: Marijan Maksan, Dežman Mini Bar; BOTTOM: Bartending team at Joe's Bar.

Croatian musician husband) looks forward to not only reshaping the beverage program at the newly-opened **Brown Beach House Hotel** in Trogir, but to having an impact on other restaurants in the community.

"It is cool to observe a modern cocktail scene taking flight in a very traditional world," Canata affirms. "It is satisfying to be working with young bartenders taking an interest in learning about craft cocktails, as just a few years ago people here didn't know what a mimosa was or how to craft a proper Bloody Mary."

Canata says that while it was love at first sight with the Brown Beach House Hotel, she found that nearby bars' craft cocktail efforts were not hitting their target—especially with mojitos and one Bloody Mary recipe she said tasted like "pasta sauce in a cup."

Her approach for the hotel is adapting classics in ways that fit the character of Trogir and change seasonally. She cites the example of her delicate Mojito Rose Martini, described as a traditional martini turned on its head. The Fizz à la Fleur, her riff on Sex on the Beach, incorporates

flavors, colors and aromatic notes inspired by Dalmatia's landscape, citrusy vegetation and Venetian legacy.

"I start with a classic mojito recipe, and flip it into an original using regional nuances and ingredients such as liqueurs, fruits, and so on," she says. "This makes for something recognizable, yet definitively Croatian. As bartenders here, and in Split and Zagreb are going to do things slightly differently from one another, this will allow a new craft cocktail movement to grow and flourish."

In Split, **Brasserie on 7** stands out among old guard wine bars gracing Diocletian Palace for its breezy twists on old Dalmatian food recipes and garden-inspired decor. The beverage program is equally inspired with its refreshing signature gin-and-tonics and "spritzer" drinks with top shelf gin, seasonal fruits and herbs.

"Our mission is to make our drinks more approachable...upgrading the recipes with homemade syrups, liqueurs and fresh ingredients giving the sweetness our customers want but also make much better quality cocktails," assesses Mandarić on the evolution of bartending. "I, in turn, insist guests try new tastes and aromas, just to open their minds to different and better stuff. I even offer to pay for any drink I make, if they don't like it. Fortunately, I haven't needed to pay for anything so far!"

—ELYSE GLICKMAN



TOP: Luka Bokavsek of Bokeria in Split.

Don't Miss Out on Croatia's Wines

When visiting the Adriatic Coast, budding oenophiles should not miss **Kraljevski Vinogradi** and **Stina Winery**, both with beautiful tasting rooms and ambiance to spare. Split wine bars with excellent food and Croatian wine emphasis include **Uje Bar**, **Bokeria**, **Zinfandel Food and Wine Bar** and **Konoba Ma:Toni**. **Marvlvs Library Jazz Bar**, a favorite haunt for *Game of Thrones* cast members when shooting on location at the Diocletian Palace, is a magical place to wrap the evening, thanks to its intimate setting and knowledgeable Argentine-born owner.

In Zagreb, the decades-old **Bornstein** remains Zagreb's pre-eminent wine shopping destination and tasting room. The original founder passed the tasting torch along to Australian-Croatian Ivan Srpek in 2013, who brings in his easy-going Aussie attitude and encyclopedic background to a tasting room outing.

Sipping, Croatian Style

MONKEY WHISKEY SMASH

DINO ZUKIĆ, SWANKY MONKEY BAR, ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 2 oz Evan Williams whiskey
- ½ small lemon, cut into slices
- 3 mint leaves, for muddling
- ½ oz simple syrup
- Several dashes Angostura bitters
- Mint sprig, for garnish
- Lemon wheel, for garnish

1. Fill a rocks glass with crushed ice.
2. In a shaker glass, thoroughly muddle lemon slices with mint and simple syrup, to release lemon juice.
3. Add whiskey and ice cubes to shaker. Shake to combine and chill.
4. Strain into prepared rocks glass.
5. Shake bitters on top.
6. Finish with mint sprig and lemon wheel.

ELYSÉE TREATY

IVAN MANDARIĆ, JOE'S BAR, ARCOTEL ALLEGRA ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1½ oz Martell VS Cognac
- ¾ oz Jägermeister
- ¾ oz simple syrup
- 4 drops Bitter Truth orange bitters
- 2 wide strips orange peel
- Orange twist, for garnish
- Chamomile powder, for garnish
- Edible flower, for garnish

1. In a shaker glass filled with ice, combine liquids; shake vigorously.
2. Twist orange peel over the mixture, to incorporate essential oils from the orange into cocktail.
3. Double-strain into a chilled cocktail glass.
4. Garnish with orange twist, chamomile powder and edible flowers.

COCKTAIL STUDIO NEGRONI

SAŠA LOVRENŠČAK, KA'LAVANDA MUSIC BAR, HVAR, AND NEGRONI WEEK CROATIA

MAKES 1 DRINK



- 1 oz Tanqueray No. 10 gin
- 1 oz Campari
- 1 oz Carpano Antica Formula
- 1 dash orange bitters
- Sage leaves, for garnish
- Orange peel, for garnish

1. Fill a rocks glass with ice.
2. In a shaker, gently stir all liquid ingredients together. Pour into prepared glass.
3. Top with dash of bitters.
4. Garnish with sage leaves and orange peel.

JUST A LITTLE BIT

MARIJAN MAKSAN, BAR DEŽMAN, ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1¼ oz gin
- ¾ oz chai tea-infused simple syrup
- ⅓ oz chili-infused cherry juice
- 1 oz lemon juice
- 1½ oz sparkling water
- Lemon peel, for garnish
- Red peppercorns, for garnish

1. In a shaker, combine all ingredients except sparkling water.
2. Fill a tall glass with ice. Shake cocktail and strain into prepared glass.
3. Top with sparkling water.
4. Garnish with lemon peel, twisted to resemble horns, and red peppercorns.

CROATIAN BLOODY MARY

SAŠA LOVRENŠČAK FOR HEMINGWAY'S, ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1¼ oz Ketel One vodka
- 1¼ oz tomato purée
- 1 oz fresh lime juice
- ½ oz carrot purée
- Bengal pepper, to taste
- Dehydrated garlic, to taste
- 3 thyme leaves, lightly muddled
- Reduced balsamic vinegar, to rim glass
- Himalayan salt, to rim glass
- Crispy pancetta, olive, parsley, lime wedge and capers, for garnish

1. Rim a tall glass with balsamic vinegar and salt; fill halfway with ice.
2. In a shaker filled with ice, combine vodka, tomato purée, lime juice, carrot purée, pepper, garlic, and thyme.
3. Shake vigorously and strain into rimmed glass.
4. Put pancetta, olive, parsley, lime wedge and capers on a skewer or long toothpick to garnish the drink.

FIZZ A LA FLEUR

ESTHER CANATA, BROWN BEACH HOUSE HOTEL, TROGIR

MAKES 1 DRINK

- ½ oz Monin Crème De Violette liqueur
- 1 oz Monin's Elderflower syrup
- ½ oz fresh lemon juice
- 3 oz Prosecco
- Lemon slice, for garnish

1. Fill a highball glass with ice.
2. Add Crème De Violette, elderflower syrup, and lemon juice; stir well.
3. Top with Prosecco.
4. Garnish with a lemon slice.





ABOVE: Esther Canata, Brown Beach House Hotel, Trogir

CROCTAIL

SAŠA LOVRENŠČAK FOR HEMINGWAY'S, ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

Not to be confused with the savory Italian rice ball appetizer, Croatian arancini is a traditional candy made from orange peel and sugar; you can find it online or at many Whole Foods Markets.

- 1 3/4 oz Maraschino (Croatian Amarena Cherry) liqueur
- 1 oz fresh lemon juice
- 1 oz sour cherry juice.
- 1 oz orange juice
- Fresh pitted cherry or candied amarena cherry, for garnish
- Croatian Arancini, for garnish (see headnote)

1. Fill a tall glass with crushed ice.
2. Add liquid ingredients in the order listed; stir gently.
3. Garnish with cherry and arancini.

LEGACY 1862

IVAN MANDARIĆ, JOE'S BAR, ARCOTEL ALLEGRA ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

The Badel 1862 "Antique" Pelinkovac is a Croatian bitter/sweet herbal liqueur, available in liquor stores throughout the U.S.

- 1 1/2 oz Broker's London Dry gin
- 2/3 oz Badel 1862 "Antique" Pelinkovac

- 2/3 oz homemade chamomile and tonka bean-infused simple syrup
- 1/4 oz fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 oz pasteurized egg white
- Red peppercorns or flower petals, for garnish

1. Chill a coupe glass.
2. In a shaker glass filed with ice, combine all ingredients; shake.
3. Strain into a large glass; discard ice. Pour liquid back into strainer and dry shake it.
4. Garnish with red peppercorns or flower petals, depending on season.

CONTESSA NERA

IVAN MANDARIĆ, JOE'S BAR, ARCOTEL ALLEGRA ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 3/4 oz Broker's London Dry gin
- 3/4 oz Coca-Cola combined with Rosebud liqueur
- 3/4 oz sweet vermouth
- 1/4 oz Campari
- Large ice cube
- Dried orange slice, for garnish
- Rosebud, for garnish

1. In a shaker glass, stir together gin, Rosebud, cola, vermouth Campari.
2. Place ice cube into a rocks glass. Pour cocktail over ice.
3. Garnish with dried orange slice and rosebud.

KHAI MAI

DINO ZUKIĆ, SWANKY MONKEY BAR, ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1 oz light rum
- 1 oz Amaretto liqueur
- 1 oz Amarena (cherry) liqueur
- 1 oz orange juice
- 1 oz pineapple juice
- 1 oz dark rum
- 3 fresh pitted black cherries, for garnish
- 2 each mint and basil leaves, for garnish
- 1 red currant, for garnish

1. In a shaker glass half-filled with crushed ice, combine first 5 ingredients.
2. Shake vigorously; strain into a tall 8-10 oz. glass.



3. Float dark rum on the top.
4. Skewer the cherries, herbs and red currant; place on top of cocktail.

MOJITO ROSE MARTINI

ESTHER CANATA, BROWN BEACH HOUSE HOTEL, TROGIR

MAKES 1 DRINK

To make the drink truly Croatian, use rakija, a white spirit indigenous to Croatia with a similar flavor profile to Sambuca, in place of the white rum. It is available at some specialty groceries in North America.

- 3 oz Bacardi White Rum
- ½ oz Fentimans Sparkling Rose Lemonade
- ½ oz simple syrup
- ½ oz fresh lime juice
- 4 mint leaves, for muddling
- Mint sprig, for garnish
- Rose buds, for garnish

1. Chill a martini glass.
2. In a shaker glass, muddle mint, lime, and simple syrup together.
3. Add rum and shake vigorously.
4. Strain into martini glass; top with rose lemonade.
5. Garnish with mint sprig and rose buds.

GARDEN GIN & TONIC

BRASSERIE NO. ON 7, SPLIT

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 2 oz Hendrick's gin
- 1-2 oz tonic water
- ½ oz rosemary-infused simple syrup
- ½ oz elderflower-infused simple syrup
- 1-2 oz tonic water
- 2 cucumber slices, cut lengthwise
- Rosemary sprig, for garnish
- Red peppercorns, for garnish

1. Line a rocks glass or tumbler with cucumber slices, and add a few ice cubes. Set aside.
2. In a shaker glass, combine gin, tonic and simple syrups; stir well.
3. Pour drink into the cucumber-lined glass.
4. Garnish with the rosemary sprig and red peppercorns.

THE FOLLOWING ORIENT EXPRESS-THEMED
SIGNATURE RECIPES ARE PROVIDED BY
ZLATKO OREČIĆ, ESPLANADE 1925 AT THE
ESPLANADE ZAGREB HOTEL

LONDON

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1½ oz London Dry Gin
- 1 oz Archers Peach Schnapps
- ⅓ oz orange juice
- 1½ oz lemon-lime soda
- Thinly sliced orange, lemon and lime peels, for garnish

1. Half fill a tall glass with ice.
2. In a shaker glass, combine gin, schnapps, and orange juice.
3. Shake, then pour into prepared glass.
4. Top with lemon-lime soda.
5. Garnish with citrus peels.

ISTANBUL

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1 oz brandy
- 1 oz Maraschino (cherry) liqueur
- 1½ oz orange juice
- ⅓ oz lime juice
- ¼ oz grenadine
- Edible flowers, for garnish

1. In a shaker glass half filled with ice, combine brandy, cherry liqueur and fruit juices.
2. Shake and strain into a martini glass.
3. Top with edible flowers.

ZAGREB

MAKES 1 DRINK

- ⅔ oz honey liqueur
- 1½ oz brandy
- 1½ oz orange juice
- Maraschino cherry, for garnish
- Thinly-sliced apple wedges, for garnish

1. In a shaker glass filled with ice, combine juices and liqueurs.
2. Shake and strain into a champagne flute.
3. Top with maraschino cherry and sliced apples.



IF YOU GO

ZAGREB

ESPLANADE 1925

esplanade1925.hr/

JOE'S BAR

arcotelhotels.com

SWANKY MONKEY GARDEN

facebook.com/swankymonkeygarden

HEMINGWAY'S

hemingway.hr/lounge

OZREN KANCELJAK/BEER TOURS

kanceljak.com

THE CRAFT ROOM

facebook.com/craftroombeer/

TOLKIEN'S HOUSE

facebook.com/tolkienszagreb

RO & DO

facebook.com/Ro.Do.Zagreb

VINOTEKA & WINE BAR BORNSTEIN

bornstein.hr

FOR GENERAL INFO

infozagreb.hr

SPLIT/DALMATIAN COAST

BRASSERIE ON 7

brasserieon7.com

MARVLVS LIBRARY JAZZ BAR

facebook.com/marvlvs

BROWN BEACH HOUSE HOTEL

brownhotels.com/croatia

KA'LAVANDA MUSIC BAR

kalavanda.com

KONOBA MA:TONI

ma-toni.com/en

BOKERIA

facebook.com/bokeriasplit/

UJE OIL BAR

oilbar.hr

KRALJEVSKI VINOGRADI

facebook.com/VinaPuntaSkala/

STINA WINERY

stina-vino.hr/en

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION

visitsplit.com/en

TRULY CROATIA TOURS

croatiatours.com

COCKTAIL WEEK ZAGREB

Staged annually in late May, it is Croatia's national bartending competition featuring talent from Zagreb, Split, and other cities. The week of competitions concludes with a two-day outdoor party dedicated to bartenders, bars and cocktails, as well as cocktail enthusiasts who support Croatia's growing bar scene.

facebook.com/cwzgb.

