

THE T+L GUIDE TO

Drinks

A visual tasting note
for Jean-Louis
Ermitage Cuvée
Cathelin 2003, by
Sarah Heller: "dense;
chalky tannins; dried
black fig; finishes
with brightness."

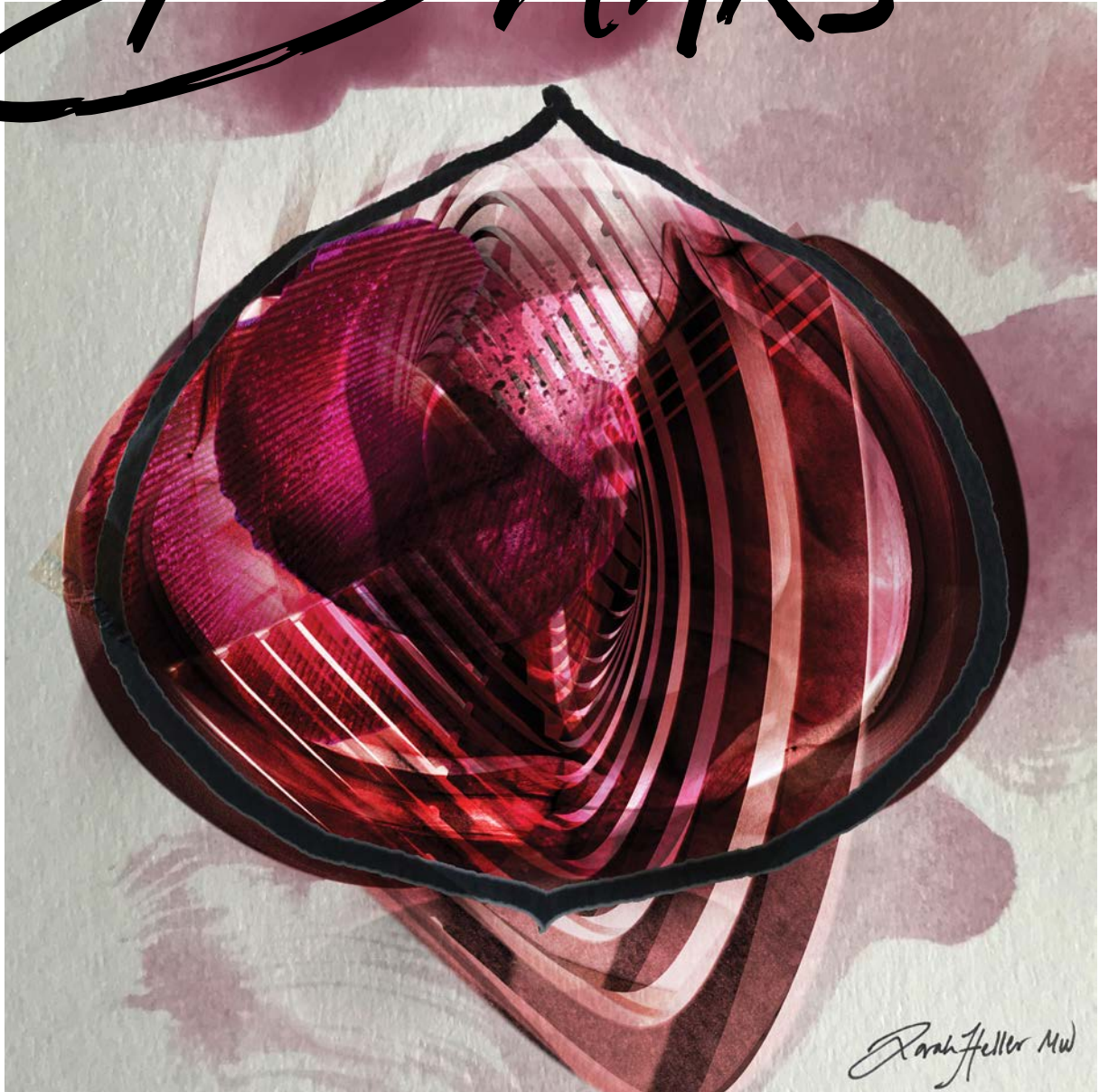


ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH HELLER

Thirsty? No need for that with next-gen tipples in Singapore, the team of top Bangkok barkeeps, the coolest spots in Taipei and new-look wine-tasting notes. Oh, you can also stir things up in Hokkaido and Saigon, and country-hop for stellar craft beers or fresh mixes from some of Asia's best female bartenders.



SINGAPORE

MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY IN A GLASS

From saucy to wacky, cleverly concocted cocktails are bringing kitchen techniques behind the bar. **Grace Ma** filters and distills Singapore's tastiest new tipples.



OPPOSITE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF MADAME FAN BAR; COURTESY OF MO BAR; COURTESY OF B BAR; COURTESY OF SMOKE & MIRRORS; COURTESY OF SKAI BAR; COURTESY OF IDLEWILD; COURTESY OF JAM AT SIRI HOUSE; COURTESY OF IB HQ

THESE DAYS, IT'S hard to distinguish between a bar and a chem lab. Move over infusing: techniques such as fat washing, milk washing and smoking are increasingly common to imbue drinks with more layered profiles. Rotary evaporators have practically become standard equipment—even though they cost anywhere between S\$8,000 and S\$20,000. Bartender-owner Kamil Foltan of IB HQ, for one, only broke even on the price of his rotavap, including staff, utility and ingredient costs, after about 1,500 drinks. But, we assure you, his next-level innovations are worth it. With more mad scientists investing in toys like bee smokers and sonic wave machines, now is the best time to have your drink and eat it, too.

JAM AT SIRI HOUSE

Sour-cream potato chips, sesame oil and burnt butter are just some of the homey ingredients lending their whiffs to the cocktail list of JAM restaurant and bar in chichi Dempsey's lifestyle space Siri House. Head bartender Kavinn Raaj recreates a refined yet fun home-dining atmosphere with delish food-and-drinks combos such as the Spudni, a blend of gin and house-made sour-cream liqueur—the latter a mix of vodka, sour cream and sugar—that is topped with three wee cubes of onion chutney jelly balancing on a rice crisp. *sirihouse.com.sg; cocktails from S\$15.*

IB HQ

Industry veteran Kamil Foltan and his wife Zurina Bryant run this lab-bar on the upper floor of a shophouse, spinning odd, local ingredients such as curry leaves, bananas and jackfruits into brilliantly balanced drinks that leave a lingering, often unforgettable, aftertaste. Go sweet-and-spicy with the Maharaja, or be a daredevil with the Pi Pa, which was inspired by cold parsnip-and-pineapple soup. Their house-made bottled cordials are available for purchase, too. *ibhqsingapore.com; cocktails from S\$24.*

MADAME FAN BAR

Border-jumping tipples and nibbles with an Oriental twist is the mission statement from Italian-Filipino mixologist eye-candy Davide Boncimino. Shoot for the unorthodox (Not) Classic PBJ concocted from peanut butter fat-washed Glenfiddich whisky and caramelized kumquat liqueur, which comes with a bamboo tray of three smoked chocolate-coated macadamia nuts and chili puree. *madamefan.sg; cocktails from S\$22.*

SMOKE & MIRRORS

What you see is not what you get at this rooftop bar with smashing sunset skyline views. New head bartender Jorge Conde conjures up flavor illusions such as a clear Bloody Mary and his weirdly delicious Dali's Self Portrait, which completely befuddles your mind about the typical Manhattan, as he makes his twist on it with smoky-bacon fat, artichoke and swirls of rosemary smoke added to a vermouth and whiskey base. Come when you're feeling particularly adventurous. *smokeandmirrors.com.sg; cocktails from S\$20.*

B BAR

Don't let this bar's western outskirts address nor its hidden location in the wine-and-spirits section of a supermarket deter your hunt for it. From toasted sesame seeds in honey lining the glass of a Beehive to a bee smoker sending delicate sandalwood wafts into the Rhubino cocktail with tart rhubarb notes, bar manager Anton Gornev pulls out all the stops to deliver drinks ranging from low to high ABV, depending on your mood for the night. *instagram.com/bbar_sg; cocktails from S\$18.*

IDLEWILD

Fly high in this live-music bar decorated with golden-age-of-travel paraphernalia, including a cabinet of curiosities featuring rare and exotic spirits (go ahead, ask for a tasting shot). Bartender Andy Griffiths has a

few kitchen shenanigans up his sleeve. Think sous-vide, reductions, carbonations and original syrups, all of which translate to heady blends such as the Sugarloaf, where pineapple rum, cognac, house-fermented pineapple skin tepache, tamarind, lime and palm sugar are mixed together and the final result garnished with a mini taco rolled from pineapple skin and pickled watermelon rind. Whew. *idlewild.sg; cocktails from S\$22.*

MO BAR

Mandarin Oriental Singapore's sophisticated bar has a beguiling cocktail list inspired by the flavors and cultures in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Ocean and the Coral Sea. Liquid treasures in bar manager Michele Mariotti's experimental chest include a barrel-aged water and herb cognac in-house concoction called Rough Waters by the Coral Sea, topped with an edible coral garnish that is dotted with mild red-pepper sauce. In the 7,000 Leagues Ahead is the unlikely scientific mix of gin and oils from kaffir lime skin using a sonic-wave machine that results in a highly concentrated version of the light and zesty gimlet. *mandarinoriental.com; cocktails from S\$24.*

SKAI BAR

On the 70th floor of Swissotel, The Stamford, the heights that offer killer views act as a metaphor for the theme of elevation that divides the 12-cocktail menu into the categories of sea, rainforest, high desert and alpine. Salty sips Samphire and Buckthorn Cliff change to fruity and herbal gems such as The Shaman (which has curious earthy undertones from house-made shiitake syrup) before giving way to thirst quenchers such as the Desert Rose and ending on a herbaceous high in drinks such as Rolling Stone, where rye whiskey is blended with an Austrian Amaro that has been sous-vided with fragrant wild thyme. *skai.sg; cocktails from S\$25.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Madame Fan Bar's (Not) Classic PBJ comes with snacks; Michele Mariotti experiments at MO Bar; the Beehive cocktail at ultra-hidden b bar; the head bartender of Smoke & Mirrors, Jorge Conde; a nori cocktail called Sea Level on the 70th-floor SKAI Bar; settle into throwback seating at Idlewild; head bartender Kavinn Raaj elevates homey to haute at JAM at Siri House; snap peas garnish IB HQ's Snap That.



BANGKOK

TOP OF THEIR GAME

This year, seven Bangkok watering holes made it onto the Asia's 50 Best Bars list. Credit these guys and gals for the great drinks, good vibes and all-important *je ne sais quoi*.

DANNY YEUNG
Head Bartender
SMALLS

DEDSAKDA THIANHONG (KENNY)
Senior Bartender
VESPER

SUPAWIT MUTTARATTANA (PALM)
Group Bar Manager
VESPER

DAVID JACOBSON
Founder
SMALLS

PINSUDA PONGPROM (ANN)
Head Bartender
THE BAMBOO BAR

JAMIE RHIND
Bar Operations Manager
THE BAMBOO BAR

PAROM MALAKUL (LEO)
Senior Bartender
BACKSTAGE COCKTAIL BAR

PARADEE SAHATHANASOMBOON (BELL)
Assistant Group Bar Manager
VESPER

ARRON GRENDON
Bar Manager
TROPIC CITY

NIKS ANUMAN-RAJADHON
Founder
TEENS OF THAILAND

PHILIP STEFANESCU
Co-Founder
TROPIC CITY

SUWINCHA SINGSUWAN (CHACHA)
Head Bartender
RABBIT HOLE

SEBASTIAN DE LA CRUZ
Co-Founder
TROPIC CITY

NOPPASATE HIRUNWATHIT (DEPP)
Senior Bartender
RABBIT HOLE

The gang gathered at Tropic City, in the ever-hipper Charoenkrung neighborhood.

AARON JOEL SANTOS

MIX LIKE A PRO

SECRET RECIPES

We persuaded the bars to let you (try to) recreate their winning tastes at home.

Bar: BACKSTAGE
Drink: FORGETFUL PAINTER
• Vodka infused with chamomile tea, 45ml
• Passionfruit juice, 20ml
• Pineapple juice, 20ml
• Lime juice, 20ml
• Maple-and-caramel syrup, 10ml
• Absinthe, 2 dashes
• Egg whites, 15ml
fb.com/backstagecocktailbarbkk

Bar: THE BAMBOO BAR
Drink: HAWKER
• Coconut fat-washed tequila, 45ml
• Lemongrass syrup, 20ml
• Lime juice, 15ml
• Coriander bitters, 4 dashes
• Kaffir lime leaves, 2
Shaken and topped with ginger beer.
mandarinoriental.com/bangkok

Bar: RABBIT HOLE
Drink: CRY ME TO THE MOON
• White-truffle fat-washed gin, 45ml
• Apple juice, 45ml
• Homemade pandan syrup, 15ml
• Citric solution, 10ml
rabbitholebkk.com

Bar: SMALLS
Drink: LUCID DREAMS
• La Maison Fontaine Blanche, 20ml
• Martini Bianco, 20ml
• Punt E Mes, 20ml
• Homemade grenadine, 10ml
• Lemon juice, 15ml
• Kaffir lime leaf
Topped with tonic.
fb.com/smallsbkk

Bar: TEENS OF THAILAND
Drink: GUAVA-SALTY PLUM GT
Macerate guava with salty plum, then infuse it with gin.
• Special guava plum gin, 50ml
• Dash of fresh lime
• Guava slice for garnish
Topped with Mediterranean tonic.
fb.com/teensofthailand

Bar: TROPIC CITY
Drink: TROPIC THUNDER
• Jerk spice-infused Appleton Reserve Rum, 40ml
• Plantation OFTD Overproof Rum, 10ml
• Falernum, 15ml
• Ginger syrup, 20ml
• Pineapple juice, 25ml
• Lime juice, 25ml
Shaken and topped with soda and Angostura bitters.
tropiccitybkk.com

Bar: VESPER
Drink: SPATIAL CONCEPT
• Campari, 30ml
• Clarified milk punch with espresso, vermouth and gin, 60ml
vesperbar.co

STAFF ONLY CLUB

Like most speakeasies worth their salt, the first rule of Staff Only Club was, “do not tell anyone.” But good news travels fast, and soon after opening late last year, this members-only club became Taipei’s worst-kept secret. Set against a backdrop of rickety dwellings in an unlikely corner of the Zhongsheng suburb, its team has transformed a former soy-sauce factory into a Gatsby-esque hideout, replete with plush velvet couches and copper chandeliers. The cocktail menu (presented in vintage pop-up books) focuses on elevated takes on tried-and-tested classics, and locally inspired mixtures. Signature drink Navy Club, for example, combines kaffir leaf-infused gin, house-made oleo-saccharum, peppery capsicum juice, and saline solution into a punchy drink, perfectly capturing the local palate for salty-and-sour. The list extends during the monthly “Part Time Bartender Project,” which sees the movers and shakers of Taipei’s cocktail scene whipping up their signature drinks during guest shifts. There is a strict “no card, no entry” policy, but out-of-towners can call ahead for a travelers’ pass (NT\$2,000 for a week). [staffonlyclub.com](#); cocktails from N\$430.



Staff Only Club's signature Navy Club. LEFT: Buy a travelers' pass to this members' club.



Heading for the tiny kitchen of Room by Le Kief. LEFT: Owner Seven Yi.

TAIPEI

NEW CAPITAL OF COOL

Hidden above coffee shops and behind pizza parlors, Taipei’s drinking dens are pushing the cocktail envelope. Get on-trend tipsy in the Taiwanese capital.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS SCHALKX

ROOM BY LE KIEF

This tiny cocktail kitchen in buzzy Da’an district actually serves up a full culinary experience. In his space of dimly lit booths around a stage-like bar, owner Seven Yi takes guests on a two-hour tasting journey. As a chef at Joël Robuchon’s kitchen in Taipei, Yi didn’t just pick up a French cadence; he also learned to push his ingredients to perfection. From his lab, he concocts wildly creative spirits, redistilling them with such items as toasted bread, kombu and grass. The menu rotates with the season and combines matching canapés, ever-changing decor, and music to hit all the senses. Yi took inspiration for his latest menu from A-sha instant noodles, a brand that lies deep in the country’s collective nostalgia. Each drink is named after a sauce: The Sesame tastes like a comforting bowl of *ma jiang mien* (spicy sesame noodles), derived by redistilling gin with sesame, and garnished with a fruit leather-like sheet of dehydrated pickle juice; the Tomato is a clarified Bloody Mary infused with Sichuan peppercorn that delivers a tongue-numbing hit. There are two seatings per night (from 8 p.m.), and booking ahead is highly recommended. [fb.com/lekief.00](#); NT\$1,200 for flight of three drinks and three canapes.

DRAFT LAND

“We make cocktails for people who usually order beer,” says Angus Zou, the brains behind Draft Land. After building a name for himself at Alchemy, a trailblazer in Taipei’s speakeasy scene, he opened this taproom in 2018 to take the fuss out of ordering a mixed drink. “I try to avoid the often-dreaded ‘What are you in the mood for?’” he says. All drinks served in this utilitarian-looking space are tapped straight from the keg. The ever-rotating drink list spans fizzes to cobbler, all served sans gimmicks or garnishes. Patrons are encouraged to sample a sip before committing to full pours—which start at a dangerously affordable NT\$200 a pop. Upstairs, The Testing Room functions as a sandbox for new concoctions. Here, Zou collaborates with pioneering local restaurants such as Gen Creative to develop new drinks. After each two- to three-month sprint, the favorite recipes are made into keg-ready batches (a process involving clarification and carbonation) to be served from one of the 18 valves downstairs. [draftland.tw](#).



Draft Land speaks for itself. BELOW: The bar’s ever-rotating row of taps.



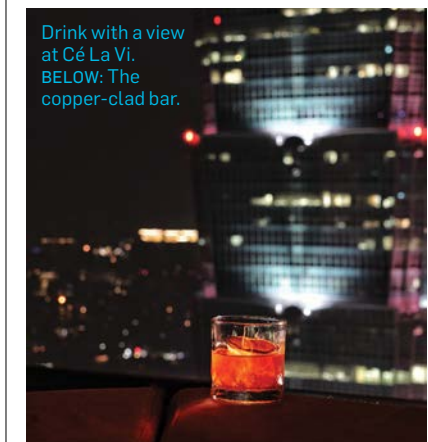
Eurasian-fusion cocktails at The Tavernist. ABOVE: Clubby and photogenic.

THE TAVERNIST

Occupying the 12th floor of the recently opened Kimpton Da’an hotel, restaurant-slash-bar The Tavernist offers yet another reason to venture around this district after dark. For their first opening in Asia, Kimpton has tapped into the cocktail knowledge of James Barker, the Hong Kong-based British bar manager at institutions like Duddell’s and Potato Head. “The drink list brings together the best of British and Taiwanese ingredients,” Barker says. Relying heavily on both local whiskies and Scotch, the signature cocktails deliver flashbacks of childhood memories with witty English names like the Taking the Biscuit, a combination of peaty Scotch, dry sherry and tropical fruit that hints of Taiwanese pineapple cake. Or try the Savory Sour, which combines two Macallan single malts with Earl Grey tea and house-made scallop powder. [thetavernist.com](#); cocktails from NT\$400.

CÉ LA VI

With last year’s completion of Nan Shan Plaza, Taipei 101 is no longer the only tower poking through the clouds on a foggy night. Perched on Nan Shan’s 48th floor is Cé La Vi, a ritzy rooftop lounge attracting the city’s young, hip and well-heeled like bees to a nine-meter-long copper-clad bar. Snug, sunken seating booths dot the semi-open-air skydeck on all sides, each equipped with climate control units to offer comfort year-round. Bottle service (starting at NT\$5,500) is the name of the game here, but that doesn’t make the cocktail menu any less creative. Signature drinks include a grown-up spin on Taiwan’s ubiquitous bubble tea (black tea-infused vodka, honey, milk and herb jelly), or a riff on the Old Fashioned, given a local touch with Taiwanese tea-infused bourbon and orange bitters. Award-winning local Kavalan whiskey shines in the Dancing Bird, a sweet number with plum liquor, white wine and pineapple juice. [tw.celavi.com](#); cocktails from NT\$400.



Drink with a view at Cé La Vi. BELOW: The copper-clad bar.





HONG KONG

A FEAST FOR ALL SENSES

Even the most seasoned oenophiles can do with palate primers. **Janice Leung Hayes** chats with a Master of Wine whose visual tasting notes ensure you aren't at a loss for words.

TASTING NOTES can seem abstract. Words such as “soft” or “earthy,” “stone fruit” or “ripe berry” have been the most common way that flavors, aromas and textures in wine have been communicated for decades. But as the appeal of wine spreads far and wide, the idiomatic nature of such descriptions has become apparent; words are in danger of being lost in translation.

Enter Sarah Heller, the youngest Master of Wine in Asia-Pacific. Heller shares striking works of art as an extension of her written tasting notes on her social media channels (principally Instagram: @sarahhellermw). She calls them “Visual Tasting Notes,” and they provide a pictorial mind map of her interpretations of wine.

“There are a few consistent elements in each note,” she says.

“The background color is supposed to evoke the overall flavor category—is the wine a grassy, greenish white or a luscious, golden white? The outline, which you read from top to bottom, is a chart of the impression the wine makes over time. Some wines start really faint then seem to get bigger in body and flavor intensity, others seem massive and fade quickly. Additional elements are sometimes fairly literal, for example, recognizable fruit if those fruit aromas are clearly present, and sometimes more metaphorical like textures or abstract patterns that come to mind when I taste.”

In speaking to oenophiles multilingually, Heller finds a picture can be worth all the words in *The Oxford Companion to Wine*. “The major advantage is that images don't rely on words, which are so culturally

specific. Clearly you can't totally avoid cultural disconnects—using a specific fruit that isn't available outside of Asia can create confusion for someone who has never tried it—but this more abstract medium has helped me bridge some of the gaps I noticed with verbal notes,” she says. “They also stimulate discussion and seem to excite non-technically minded wine drinkers; it puts them at ease and makes the whole subject more intuitive.”

Some elements of her digitally layered images are hand-drawn, some are painted (physically or digitally) and others are her own photographs or those sourced from stock—an in-depth creative process that makes sense from an art graduate of Yale University, which awarded her the departmental prize for an installation that was her senior year thesis. Heller opened her own graphic-design consultancy, all while falling in love with wine and working towards her MW.

Heller calls Hong Kong home, and when she's not traveling or being called on to share her expertise, you might find her in her favorite wine spots there getting inspiration for her next visual tasting note. Here's what she has to say about them:

LQV Les Quinze Vins “The spot in town for relatively affordable, intriguing bottles from every corner of France, frequently with some age as well.” lqv-group.com; 9 Swatow St., Wan Chai.

Nocturne “The most calming, quietly luxurious urban oasis of a wine bar you'll find in the city; but expect to pay Tokyo prices!” nocturnehk.com; 35 Peel St., Central.

Brut! “A rotating selection of thoughtfully sourced, international 'natural and friends' wines, charmingly explained

by owner Camille Glass.” brut.com.hk; Shop C, GF, Tung Cheung Bldg., 1-11 Second St., Sai Ying Pun.

Francis “Somm Simone Sammuri brings his magic to the list at this Israeli eatery (the food is brilliant too).” francis.com.hk; 4 & 6 St. Francis St., Wan Chai.

Giando “Chef Gianni Caprioli has dug into his own cellar for beautifully matured Italian gems hard to find elsewhere in Hong Kong.” giandorestaurant.com; Shop 1, GF, Tower 1, Starcrest, 9 Star St., Wan Chai.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF NIKKA WHISKY; COURTESY OF OCCIGABI; COURTESY OF TANAKA SAKE BREWERY

HOKKAIDO

WINTER WARMERS

Japan's most northerly island isn't just for thrill-seekers. **Julian Ryall** bypasses the ski slopes for three distinct tastes of the prefecture's best booze.

THOUGH IT'S BETTER known for its winter powder, Hokkaido also produces some of the best food and drink in Japan. Given that snow sports leave me cold, I'm here to exercise my tastebuds on a tour of its native brews, wines and spirits. My first stop is **Tanaka Sake Brewery** (tanakashuzo.com), which has been making the traditional rice wine in the west-coast port city of Otaru since 1899. The brewery's heritage building is entirely made of wood, and when I walk in during the middle of winter, icicles taller than a man hang from its eaves.

I join the brewery's free guided tour and see first-hand the polishing, washing and fermenting processes. All the rice is locally grown, and the brewers insist it is the best in the country because of Hokkaido's cooler climate and clean water. Like on all good brewery tours, we inevitably end in the shop, where staff offer tiny tumblers of sake to taste.

While mass-produced brews can be harsh on the palate, these small-batch bottles are as smooth as a Hokkaido snowdrift. The Junmai Ginjo is sharp, clean and warming, with a taste that lingers on the

tongue. The 40-percent Junmai Daiginjo Takaragawa is sweeter and more fruity, with a good depth to the flavor. Stock up here, because the brewery's limited output means these sakes are primarily sold locally and difficult to find off the island.

GIVEN HOKKAIDO'S severe winters, I'm surprised to learn that heavy snow and sub-zero temperatures aren't an obstacle to cultivating the vines needed for high-quality wines. But more than 280 wineries spread across the prefecture. At **OcciGabi** (occigabi.net), in Yoichi, winemaker Kiyoshi Kura takes advantage of the city's fertile soils and slightly milder climate, and has spent decades perfecting his product, which he makes of 40 varieties of European grapes he brought to Japan after graduating from the National Wine School of Germany in the 1970s.

On a tour of the vineyard, we pass rows of aromatic French barrels, which Kura says add depth and character. I swirl a splash of Zweigeltrebe 2017 around my glass; aged for six months, it is smooth and light with hints of incense. The Dornfelder 2016 is brighter in color

and more rounded, with the barrel-aging showing through in the taste.

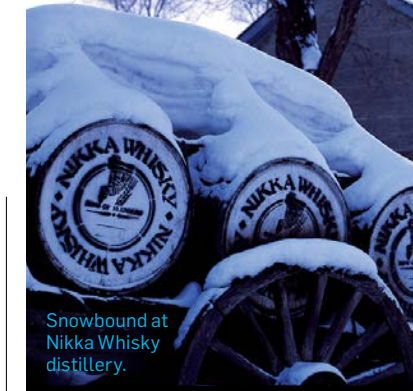
Ultimately, Kura envisions Yoichi, with several established wineries already in town, becoming Japan's Napa Valley. This lofty goal is confident proof that his labels stand up to some of the best wines out there.

YOICHI IS ALSO home to one of Hokkaido's most famous and historic brands, albeit one with its roots in the Scottish highlands. The **Nikka Whisky** (nikka.com) distillery was first opened in 1934 by Masataka Taketsuru, after he finished several whisky apprenticeships in Scotland.

Like Kura, Taketsuru chose Yoichi for its climate and nature: its proximity to the ocean; mountains on three sides; fresh water; and crisp, clean air—which reminded him of his time abroad. He insists on using direct coal-fired pot stills to give his whisky a bold and smoky flavor, a method rarely used today because controlling the temperature requires skilled distillers.

At Nikka, the practice lives on. As a member of the distilling team opens the heavy metal doors of the furnace beneath each still and heaps fresh coal on the glowing embers, I take an involuntary step backwards at the white heat that emerges. This task is carried out every 10 minutes, around the clock, to prevent the distillation from burning.

Taketsuru's vision has paid off. The whisky world's head was turned in 2001 when a single cask, 10-year-old Yoichi won the “Best of the Best” category in the U.K.'s *Whisky Magazine* competition. The brand has continued its winning streak, scoring World's Best Blended Malt at the World Whiskies Awards this year. I'll drink to that.



Snowbound at Nikka Whisky distillery.



SARAH HELLER (4)



OcciGabi grows 40 varieties of grapes. LEFT: Tanaka Sake craft brewery.



Rabbit Hole was founded to perfect the Negroni.

SAIGON

COMING OF AGE STORY

Young, discerning cocktail drinkers and single-malt connoisseurs are raising the stakes in Vietnam. **Connla Stokes** sips his way to the source of this intoxicating tale.

NOT SO LONG AGO in Saigon, a night of cocktail consumption most likely involved a hastily made mojito or a slapdash margarita, typically shaken and served in a clamorous club or a flashy rooftop bar. But lately a more mature species of watering hole has created a far mellower habitat for those who prefer more considered concoctions.

CURIOUSER, AND CURIOUSER...

Rabbit Hole is an urbane, underground lair with a long bar and chiaroscuro lighting that attracts a young, cosmopolitan clientele through the night. I am immediately tempted by the themed cocktails and Drink Me (gin, Lillet Blanc, Chartreuse Green, orange bitters) would seem an appropriate starting point for the evening but, emerging from the shadows, co-

owner Leon Nguyen reveals the catalyst for Rabbit Hole was a city-wide search for just-so classics rather than creative cocktails: “We drank a lot of Negronis that night, but couldn’t find anywhere that nailed one, so we opened our own bar to do just that.” Despite Leon’s hint, I can’t resist summoning The Mad Hatter (Earl Grey–infused bourbon, strawberry syrup, lemon juice, homemade spiced palm syrup and tonic). *BF, 138 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, Dist. 1; cocktails from VND200,000; open 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.*

THE MURAKAMI EFFECT

With a sheepish grin, Hoang Nguyen admits he hadn’t heard of an Old Fashioned just a few years ago. Now he’s the co-owner of **In The Mood**, a snug but sophisticated speakeasy, squirreled away in a French-period



Murakami-inspired speakeasy, In The Mood.

apartment block by the Opera House. “I started to drink whisky after reading novels by Haruki Murakami in my 20s,” says Hoang, who became so obsessed with single malts he traveled to Scotland, Taiwan and Japan solely to visit distilleries. Now thanks to pioneers like him, in a city where peaty Scotch and premium spirits were once exclusive to the corporate domain, hip, young Saigonese think nothing of sipping on Bruichladdich or a Sazerac made with Pikesville Straight Rye. Overwhelmed by an inventory of 180 scotches and whiskies, I opt for an After Dark (cacao bourbon, Campari, Martini Rosso and the essence of sous-vide shiitake) and raise my glass to Haruki-san. *3F, 151 Dong Khoi, Dist. 1; cocktails from VND220,000; open 6:30 p.m. to 12 a.m.*

THE BACKLASH THEORY

Despite the au courant portal (an ersatz cash machine at the end of an otherwise typical Saigon alleyway—fear not: you don’t need a pin code), there’s a throwback vibe inside **The ATM Cocktail Bar and Kitchen**: jazz music, a gorgeous high wooden bar, and low, leather seating in a lounge area. “I used to have customers asking for an Old Fashioned with apple juice, but day by day, drink by drink, everyone’s knowledge has been growing,” says the ever-dapper and utterly charming owner, Tan Pham, who partly attributes Saigon’s speakeasy trend as a backlash to the city’s brash clubs and pubs, where deafening tunes negate confabulation. Make sure to try Tan’s Mekong Negroni that eschews Campari for a

homemade bitter melon infusion, and for those in need of ballast, there’s also a full dinner menu. *Lane 27, 10 Nguyen Binh Khiem, Dist. 1; cocktails from VND170,000; open 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. (1 a.m. weekends).*

THE TIME HAS COME

Following a creaking staircase to the third floor of a French-colonial building, a soundproof door opens to reveal **Drinking & Healing**, a livelier affair than its peers (i.e., less soft jazz, more throbbing bass). “Drinkers” and “healers” trade banter across a funky, photogenic bar lined with fermenting potatoes, botanicals and syrups—all house-made—and distinctive glassware (I’d caution against the signature creation Your Toilet). Though there’s an iPad with a fun, build-your-own cocktail platform, I elect for a top-shelf G&T (Monkey 47 with Thomas Henry and berries, served balloon-style). “It’s crazy. We’re full every single night, even Mondays,” says head “healer” Vien Du as we step out onto the smokers’ (and, of course, vapers’) balcony, facing the 68-story Bitexco Tower—a handy visual reminder of how quickly this city moves when the time comes. *3F, 25 Ho Tung Mau, Dist. 1; cocktails from VND210,000; open 6:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. (3 a.m. weekends).*

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF RABBIT HOLE; COURTESY OF IN THE MOOD; OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF TAIHU BREWING; COURTESY OF THE ATM COCKTAIL BAR AND KITCHEN



Sorry, it's a bar, not a bank.

BEER GUIDE

ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Asia's craft suds scene keeps getting better. **Craig Sauers** checks in with six exciting breweries using local flavors and ingredients to push beer boundaries.



Take your pick at Young Master.

TAIHU BREWING TAIWAN

Taihu might be Asia’s most progressive brewery. The bathrooms are gender neutral, for starters, and when it comes to beer, head brewer Winnie Hsu is as relentless in her devotion to quality as she is in her rejection of traditional boundaries. That leads to some ground-breaking brews, like the Old Fashioned, a barrel-aged Berliner weisse that replicates the flavor profile of the classic cocktail (“A pain in the ass to brew, but a hell of a beer,” says co-founder Peter Huang), and the Woo May, a smoked sour ale brewed with Taiwanese smoked plums. **Where to try it:** Taihu beer is now served at Taiwanese institutions like Din Tai Fung, The Regent Hotel and even Starbucks. It’s also available in Osaka at Watering Hole and in Shanghai at 233. taihubrewing.com.



YOUNG MASTER HONG KONG

If Hong Kong’s craft beer is finally getting the global attention it deserves, thank Rohit Dugar. His brewery Young Master has continually pushed the boundaries since opening five years ago. Now, the brand hosts an international beer festival and boasts a huge barrel-aging program that produces some wild creations. Those include a white stout called Bak Mo Sheung, which comes in variations like matcha-vanilla “soft serve,” as well as an IPA brewed in collaboration with Norway-based Lervig that uses a farmhouse yeast strain and juniper straight out of the Scandinavian fjords. **Where to try it:** Young Master operates four bars in Hong Kong, including Second Draft and TAP, plus The Guild in Singapore. The beers frequently appear at Mikkeller Bangkok, as well. youngmasterales.com.



GOA BREWING COMPANY INDIA

The Subcontinent probably isn't the first country that comes to mind when talking about craft beer in Asia. But if Suraj Shenai has anything to say about it, that's about to change. The founder of Goa Brewing Company is bringing the craft movement to the south of India, brewing beer in an old heritage home while striving to be as sustainable as possible. That means making beers with local ingredients like lemon and pineapple, the latter of which goes into a refreshing pineapple saison. It's funky but tropical—"the perfect beer to have after a dip in the sea," Shenai says.

Where to try it: Goa Brewing Company, based in Sangolda, is only available in India at the moment. Try the beers fresh at restaurants in Goa like Gunpowder and Bomra's. [instagram.com/goabrewingco](https://www.instagram.com/goabrewingco).



MAGPIE BREWING CO.

SOUTH KOREA

Pizza-and-beer pioneer Magpie helped make craft beer a thing in South Korea with its pale ale, an easy-drinking brew with hints of apricot that seven years on is still its most popular. Now, Magpie is throwing beer geeks a bone. Look out for imperial stout Black Rock when it comes at the end of summer. "Pastry stouts are super popular globally," says co-owner Erik Moynihan, "but we wanted to do one that was a little bit more Korean, so we based it on the chocolatey, marshmallowy flavor of the Lotte Choco Pie."

Where to try it: Magpie has bars in Itaewon and Hongdae in Seoul, as well as two venues in Cheju. The beer should hit Hong Kong's shores this year. [magpiebrewing.com](https://www.magpiebrewing.com).



HEART OF DARKNESS VIETNAM

Inspired by Joseph Conrad's seminal novel, John Pemberton turned his homebrewing hobby into a full-time profession in 2015. Vietnamese beer hasn't been the same since. Heart of Darkness made its name on bold, hoppy IPAs, like Kurtz's Insane IPA and the Loose Rivet hazy IPA, two of 250 beers to come out of its Saigon operation. But some of its most fascinating beers lean local: the White Surf, a passionfruit-laced Berliner weisse, and the Hot and Cold, a pilsner brewed with cucumbers and Vietnamese chilies.

Where to try it: The home base in Saigon's District 1 and the new Heart of Darkness brewpub in Singapore have the biggest range. They also export to Thailand and Hong Kong. [heartofdarknessbrewery.com](https://www.heartofdarknessbrewery.com).



ANGLO JAPANESE BEER (AJB)

JAPAN

"When we started the brewery, we didn't want to be confined by styles. Allowing ourselves the space to work outside conventional parameters enabled us to create some really unique beers," says Thomas Livesey, co-founder of AJB. That's putting it mildly. Consider the Nagano-based brewery's Momo Sake Gose. Livesey and company take a traditional German gose (a salty/sour beer) and mix in sake ingredients and local peach to create a distinctly Japanese beer rooted in German traditions. Now, AJB is also aging beers in French foeders (large wooden barrels) to develop some especially wild and funky flavors.

Where to try it: AJB is relatively small, but its beers can be found at craft beer bars across Japan, including Watering Hole in Osaka. [anglojapanesebeer.com](https://www.anglojapanesebeer.com).



EXPLAINER

MEAD

What is it? Believed to be one of the world's oldest beverages dating back thousands of years, mead is made from a fermented blend of honey, water, fruits and other spices that takes about a year to mature.

Where can you get it? On the third floor of a small, nondescript industrial space on the outskirts of Singapore, one of the country's most unique alcohols is fermenting. **Rachelle The Rabbit Meadery** ([rachelletherabbit.com](https://www.rachelletherabbit.com)) is the Lion City's first ever meadery. Named after the daughter of owner Simon Zhao, this all-natural, no-additive meadery is making this golden elixir with honey from South Africa and Malaysia combined with Asian flavors and ingredients.

A selection of the brand's five flavors can be found at nearly 40 bars, restaurants and retailers around Singapore starting at S\$40 each. Keep an eye out for their masterclasses, sometimes held at Native, one of Singapore's best bars, as well as their new line of spirits distilled from mead.

What to order? Although the honey wine flavors may sound cloyingly sweet, they're surprisingly not. Rachelle's Bandung is a play off the rose-syrup beverage of the same name, but it is dry in texture. Rachelle's Uppercut, a mix of ginger and lemon, is light and refreshing. Their newest seasonal flavor, Rachelle's Fireball, combines honey and Canadian maple syrup, while Rachelle's Double Kick tastes like Christmas in a glass: a combination of orange, cinnamon and clove. —KATIE LOCKHART

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF RACHELLE THE RABBIT MEADERY; COURTESY OF A JOB; COURTESY OF MAGPIE BREWING CO.; COURTESY OF GOA BREWING COMPANY; COURTESY OF HEART OF DARKNESS



Natalie Lau.



Priscilla Leong.



Lolita Goh.

ON THE RISE

UNMANNING THE BAR

Meet some of the cool women shaking things up in Southeast Asia's best drinking dens. BY ALESSANDRA GESUELLI

THE WORLD OVER, talented young women are making their mark in the hitherto male-dominated bar industry. Hong Kong is the stomping ground of Victoria Chow, the mastermind behind The Woods and Kwoon, Asia's first artisanal pre-batched cocktail series. In Singapore, Sasha Wijidessa manages Operation Dagger, where the hooch bottles have no labels, and Bannie Kang is head craftsman at Anti:Dote, using spices and herbs from her native Korea. In Bangkok, multi-award-winning maestro Pailin "Milk" Sajjanit heads up hard-to-find, plush den oo8. Here are some other outstanding ladies manning the bars across the region.

PRISCILLA LEONG, head bartender, Long Bar at Raffles SINGAPORE

Way back when Long Bar was the place for gentlemen and plantation owners to gather, etiquette dictated that ladies couldn't consume alcohol in public. Long Bar's Ngiam Tong Boon saw an opportunity and created a cocktail that looked like juice but was actually brimming with booze. Hello, Singapore Sling.

Almost a century on, Priscilla Leong has taken over the renovated Long Bar, and is renovating their classic drink. Much like Raffles Singapore, reopening next month to its original colonial splendor with contemporary innovations: "we wanted to retain Long Bar's heritage, and stay true to the integrity of the iconic Singapore Sling recipe, while revitalizing it with craft ingredients to suit the modern palate," she says.

The grenadine is all-natural, the custom bitters "provide a backbone of spice to play off the cocktail's fruity notes," Leong says, and the bespoke gin, Widges, is made by Langley's Distillery in England. The new Singapore Sling is a touch more gin forward, which we think is exactly what the ladies—and maybe gentlemen, too—always wanted. [raffles.com](https://www.raffles.com); *Singapore Sling*, S\$28.

NATALIE LAU, bar manager, The Old Man HONG KONG

In 2017, Agung Prabowo had big ambitions for his new Hemingway-themed bar, and he poached Natalie Lau from American Bar at The Savoy in London to fulfill them. Today

The Old Man sits atop the Asia's 50 Best Bar list and in the top 10 of the World's 50 Best. They've opened two other venues, The Sea, in Hong Kong, and The Old Man in Singapore, and are running a pop-up til August 31 at The Bamboo Bar in Bangkok.

"We created a new standard for Hong Kong," Lau says. "All the staff are bartenders, and everyone is proactive in speaking with guests about the cocktails—or about anything in life." Bartending here means mastering the use of culinary gadgets and lab equipment to combine flavors, coaxing out interesting notes rather than making eye-catching garnish, an attitude she says is new in the Hong Kong market.

Take Lau's favorite drink, The Sun Also Rises: copra fat-washed Applejack, curry leaf-infused gin, sweet vermouth, sous-vide pandan leaves, and kaffir lime. "It is a very complex drink. The flavors come up layer by layer, and it creates a long, lingering taste." Much like the novel that inspired it. [theoldmanhk.com](https://www.theoldmanhk.com); *The Sun Also Rises*, HK\$90.

LOLITA GOH co-founder, JungleBird KUALA LUMPUR

If 250 hand-curated rums sounds like caramel-colored heaven, then fly as fast as you can to JungleBird, Kuala Lumpur's first rum bar, co-founded in 2017 by Lolita Goh. It is one of the hottest destinations in the



Shelley Tai



Suwincha
"Chacha"
Singsuwan.

EXPLAINER

NON-ALCOHOLIC SPIRITS

What is it? Imagine an herbal G&T that you can sip on all day without fear of a hangover, health risks if you're pregnant—or that dangerous sense of confidence that'll let you text an ex. You're the target for **Seedlip** (seedlip.com), a line of gin-like, booze-free spirits made by blending individually distilled botanicals. It is part of a larger trend towards mixed drinks with less or zero alcohol-by-volume. "Low ABV cocktails allow bars to be even more inclusive for potential guests. Bars can be intimidating to people who choose not to drink alcohol," says Charlie Ainsbury, of craft-spirits distributor and bar consultancy Proof & Co. In fact, studies show that millennials are actually drinking less than their predecessors—but a glass filled with soda water or a sugar-bomb of a mocktail just doesn't cut it.

Where can you get it? Pioneer Seedlip is widely available in Singapore and Hong Kong; try top-ranked mixology valhallas Operation Dagger, Native and The Old Man. Diversifying the non-liquor cabinet, **Lyres** (lyres.co) has a full line of "spirits" that range from absinthe-like to coffee "liqueur." They're now only available in Australia, but are moving into Southeast Asia soon.

What to order? The Old Man has a section of non-alcoholic options on the menu wryly titled "Not Hemingway's Favourites." Order the African Safari for a zesty mix of rosemary, Seedlip Spice, turmeric-tamarind cordial, and citrus. —VERONICA INVEEN



city and the most awarded bar in the country. Goh's latest passion project is a fermentation program, making ginger beer, vinegars, tepaches and lacto-fermented fruits using local ingredients and leftover produce that would otherwise have gone to waste. Kakariki Orchards is a New Zealand-inspired gin cocktail with homemade kombucha, plus feijoa, lemon, honey and lavender-infused kombucha soda.

The bar is named for the Jungle Bird, a rum drink with pineapple juice, lime and Campari that was invented in the 1970s as a welcome beverage for guests at KL's old Hilton Hotel's Aviary Bar. "This tropical creation has seen a recent revival," Goh says. She serves it with Diplomatico Mantuano rum, which imparts soft and sweet notes with herbal hints. But if that's not your bag, hey, there are 249 more options—plus their homemade *grog*. junglebirdkl.com; *Jungle Bird*, RM38–RM80.

SHELLEY TAI bartender, The Quinary HONG KONG

Her warm smile and graceful manner lend her strength as a host at work, where she never cracks under pressure, essential for working at Quinary, a high-volume multisensory bar helmed by master mixologist Antonio Lai. "Bartending to me is two parts: the bar and the tender," she says. "The bar represents the craftsmanship and the creativity. The tender part allows me to show care and hospitality."

Only in her early twenties, she uses her talent and love of experimenting to contribute to the menu of cocktails

engineered to stimulate the senses, using techniques from the kitchen world. Tai's favorite creation is a drink made of Yuk Bing Siu, a Cantonese rice liqueur. It's infused with coriander, mezcal, amaro Montenegro and toasted rice syrup. It has a smoky, sweet, spicy flavor with aftertaste of toasted rice that lingers pleasantly. quinary.hk; *Yuk Bing Siu*, HK\$150.

SUWINCHA "CHACHA" SINGSUWAN, head bartender, Rabbit Hole and Libération BANGKOK

When your aunt and sister are bartenders, a career mixing drinks is as steeped in your blood as that white-truffle oil you've fat-washed in gin.

Suwincha "Chacha" Singсуwan heads two popular speakeasies, the sultry, award-winning Rabbit Hole and its even harder-to-find baby sis, Libération. "My cocktail style is minimal. I do a lot of preparation, and present the finished drink quite neat," she says. At Rabbit Hole, the menu is categorized according to nose: "We process them a lot to get the most aroma to the cocktail." Prep time might be a full day, like for one of her faves at Libération, the Vegan War. She clarifies tomato juice, heats up red cabbage to extract the purple color, and adds carrot slices to prize out their taste. The alcohol is vodka redistilled with basil.

Look out for a third Singсуwan-helmed joint coming to Bangkok's Langsuan area in November, which "will be vintage deco and play jazz most of the time." rabbitholebkk.com, liberationbkk.com; *Vegan War*, Bt390.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF THE QUINARY; COURTESY OF RABBIT HOLE; COURTESY OF SEEDLIP