

Doc Ponds

Informal Excellence on the Mountain Road

When the bar that Sam Sheldon and his friends frequented got a little too crowded for his liking, he did what any creative, resourceful person would do: He found a way to set up shop on his own.

"It got really busy and popular, which was great for them, but not fun for us," Sheldon, bar manager at Doc Ponds in Stowe, says. "We found a local Indian restaurant that had a liquor license they weren't doing anything with, so we started bartending there for our friends."

Sheldon was living in Washington, D.C., at the time, working in commercial real estate while learning the mixologist trade on weekends for fun. A move north — and to a region where the commercial real estate market was significantly less hot than it was in D.C. — found him making drinks first at The Rusty Nail and then for the past six years at Doc Ponds.

Located right on the Mountain Road, Doc Ponds is known for combining an informal atmosphere with outstanding dining options.

"We've really got it all dialed-in as far as what the food should be," Sheldon says. "We're known for our fantastic beer list and really good food that trends casual but is really well done. With our relation to Hen of the Wood, we've got heirloom-level offerings."

And to drink?

"I try to bring something out of the cocktails to match that environment. Our clientele is more vacation-oriented, and we have a little more of a relaxed atmosphere. Things here are more classically fun."

The bar area greets visitors as they step inside the front door, seating 11-13 people. Just off to the side, a record player and a stack of vinyl. It all creates the perfect environment for which



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOC PONDS



Stowe has become renowned.

"You could be sitting down next to someone who has been here for years, or you could meet someone in town for the first time ever," Sheldon says.

What was your first night behind the bar like?

"When I was at the Indian restaurant in D.C., it was definitely like making

drinks for friends at home. It went from beers and shots for friends to coming to Vermont at the Rusty Nail, a 700-person music venue, and we'd be three-deep at the bar. Suddenly, you're behind the bar looking at tools you've never seen before. It was a major paradigm switch in your head of what's important and not important. Getting drinks out fast and accurate was suddenly the most im-

BY BILL BURKE

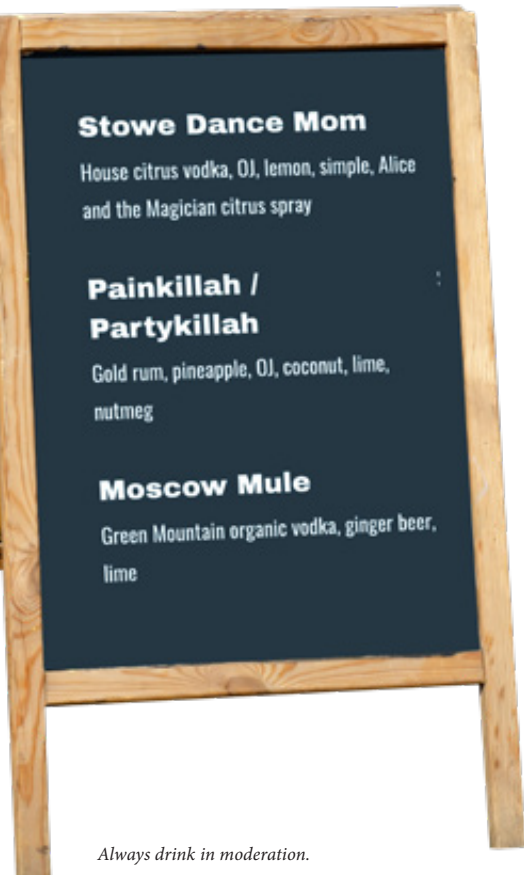
portant thing. Get it done, get it done quickly and hopefully you can smile.”

What was the biggest eye-opener?

“Watching a venue fill up from zero to 600 people in the matter of an hour, being eight people deep at the bar, and knowing there’s no way to get out of this other than to make drinks. There’s nothing you can do but put your head down and pour drinks as fast as possible.”

What’s a cocktail Doc Ponds does particularly well?

“We do a rotation about every three months, but right now one of the more popular is The Painkillah. Everywhere on the Mountain Road has a painkiller now, which is awesome. Obviously, I’m biased, but I’m loving ours the most. We also do a group version of that called the Partykillah. It comes in a scorpion bowl and you have to be in groups of three or more, but it’s something we love to do and something people love.”



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What’s the story behind the Stowe Dance Mom cocktail?

“We have a cocktail called the Citrus Gimlet, and because of that we’d go through so much fruit — orange and lemon peels. We were always throwing them away and composting them, so we started using that fruit, with the rind off, to infuse vodka, which became this vodka citrus gimlet. It gives a nice lemon flavor to your vodka, and you add orange juice, lemon juice and sugar. Well, one of our owner’s friends was in a group of Stowe dance moms. A lot of people think we named it that to rag on these people, but it’s actually a term of endearment. They asked for it, and we were happy to oblige.”

The Painkillah

courtesy Doc Ponds

- 1 ¾ ounces pineapple juice
- 1 ½ ounces Bacardi Gold rum
- ½ ounce Coco Lopez
- ½ ounce orange juice
- ¼ ounce lime juice

Add ingredients to a shaker tin with ice. Shake vigorously. Pour liquid and ice into a large rocks glass. Grate nutmeg on the top. Add an orange peel garnish.



Share a bartending secret.

“My secret is simple syrup. That is one thing that will save cocktails when they’re not quite working. People don’t realize how much of an important aspect sugar is in everything, in all drinks. If you’re trying to get the flavors right and they’re not quite there, a touch of simple syrup pulls everything together.”

What advice would you give to an aspiring bartender?

“It’s important to know your basics. Memorizing your basics is one of most important things in the world. Once you have those down, then you can really spread out. It gets your speed up — doing stuff fast and efficient is key. Nobody likes to wait 5-10 minutes for a drink, so you do what you can to be faster and correct.”

At the end of a shift, I...

“Lock the doors and put on our Smashing Pumpkin records to finish closing. ‘Siamese Dream’ is the one I tend to go to.”

If you weren’t doing this, what would you be doing?

“The things I love doing are writing and playing music. Those are the two things I do outside of here. It would be hard for me to consider not bartending in some capacity even if I was doing those things full time, though. It’s my social outlet and how I stay in touch with people. But I’ve played guitar my whole life, and I love writing.”



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