

**MIXOLOGY**

# LIFE BEHIND THE Bar

## Secret Santa: Vermont's Top Mixologists Gift Readers With Their Tips and Tricks

**B**ecoming a great bartender takes a great deal of knowledge, commitment and the ability to think on your feet. Knowing a few trade secrets can also help move an aspiring bartender's career along and keep things running smoothly.

Over the years, *802 Spirits* has asked bartenders from around the state to share their best secrets from behind the bar. In the spirit of the holidays, we'll share some of the best-kept secrets from some of the top mixologists in Vermont — a holiday gift from some of the best in the business.

By Bill Burke | Portrait Photography by Matt Thorsen

### Mulled Morgan

*recipe on page 10*





**Ivy Mix** opened her own spot, Leyenda, in Brooklyn, but her journey began in the Green Mountain State. It all started in Tunbridge, took a turn into Bennington, where she went to college, and then made an unexpected and lengthy detour to Latin America — a destination that influenced her bartending style and informed her career in dramatic ways. Ivy took home the coveted Spirited Award for Best American Bartender of the Year at the 2015 Tales of the Cocktail Festival; she worked at several renowned hot spots in New York City, including Fort Defiance, Flat Iron, Lani Kai and the Clover Club, before opening her own bar, Leyenda, in the Cobble Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn. She's also the cofounder of Speed Rack — a bartending competition that raises money (more than \$700,000 to date) for breast cancer research, awareness and prevention.

"If you are the type of person who's trying to get super-duper clear ice, you can get it this way: Get a tiny cooler, like a Coleman cooler, fill it up with water and stick it into the freezer," Mix says. "Because it's insulated, it will freeze on top first and all the impurities will rise to the top. When you take it out, it will be frozen, and you just chip off this layer of white ice — underneath that you'll have a perfectly clear block. It's great if you want to do punches that have perfectly clear ice. I do it in the summer when I'm hosting at home, or even during the holidays when I have people over. People always underestimate ice, and it's always what people are most excited about."

While the bar area at the Blue Paddle Bistro, in South Hero, may be small, it's easy to locate — just look for the canoe. The cozy space is welcoming and comfortable, and perhaps most notable thanks to the upturned canoe suspended above it.

"Mandy (owner Mandy Hotchkiss) once managed a canoe sales company and sold them all around the world," Bartender/Bar Manager **Mathew Smith** says. "There's also a canoe over the register and a canoe outside with our paddle."

Spot the tile wall with blue mood lighting and you've found the bar — and on most nights, Smith. His secret?

"90 percent of the time, the guest has no idea what they're asking for. It's funny — someone might come in and say they're a Scotch or a bourbon connoisseur, but when it comes down to it, they can't tell the difference between Maker's Mark and Crown Royal. For the love of God, listen to your bartender."



**Skip Verchot**, the Innkeeper at the WilloughVale Inn and Cottages in Westmore says that engaging your guests can make everyone's night better.

"Reach out to people after you've taken their order and put the drink down," Verchot says. "The classic up here is 'where are you from?' Just start a conversation. And the good thing is that it gets other people talking to each other. The next thing you know, your job is real easy. It goes back to when I was bartending on the Cape — it was a horseshoe-shaped bar, and we'd have commercial fishermen in who might be sitting next to wealthy tourists who wanted to do some tuna fishing. They'd start talking to each other, buying each other drinks and life would be good. It's always good to interact with people because people are always wondering about the area. When you can impart some knowledge to them, it makes them very comfortable."





The Bistro at Ten Acres Owner/Bar Manager **Mark Fucile** admits that sometimes, a good bartender has to be a good salesman.

"If someone asks you a question and you don't know the answer, you make up an answer and say it with confidence," he says. "Just look them in the eye and say it confidently."

Jay Village Inn and Restaurant Owner **Holly McKeown** concurs.

"A lot of what we do is smoke and mirrors," she says. "If you do it well, it looks like you're great at your job. And I think a lot of it is recognition. It's just not working with your blinders on. You have to keep your head up and your head in the game."

McKeown and her husband, J.R., have operated the iconic inn for nine years (though she's been a part of the place for nearly 13 years) and Holly runs the intimate, comfortable bar. The restaurant and dining room is on the first floor and the Inn's 15 rooms are located on the second floor. Ask a knowledgeable local, however, and you'll be directed to a highly sought-after spot just inside. Call it the ultimate insider's tip.

"We have a wood-burning fireplace that's the most popular seat in Jay from December until April," McKeown says.



**Mark Rosman**, co-owner — along with **Jamie Persky** — of Plate, in Stowe, plies his trade as part of a marriage (both literally and philosophically) of a west coast sensibility and Vermont flavors. The result, the couple likes to say, is "California inspired, Vermont made." It creates a familial atmosphere in the kitchen and behind the bar. And that vibe lends itself well to Rosman's most valuable secret — which can also be easily applied as a personal philosophy:

"It's just enjoying your job, your life and understanding what it's all about," he says. "We have a very close-knit family atmosphere here as far as everybody is willing to help everybody. A chef and I were talking about how before leaving the kitchen, everyone will check to see if anybody else needs help. There's a lot of hugging and high-fives and thank-yous."

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## MIXOLOGY: BARTENDER TIPS & TRICKS



**Ami Wright**, a bartender at the Creamery — a longtime Danville destination known as a go-to for great food and outstanding service for more than four decades — was slightly less forthcoming when it came to offering up secrets.

“Bartenders and servers are like doctors and lawyers — we’re not allowed to tell secrets,” she says. “There are no secrets here. We live in the town of Danville, there are no secrets. I don’t think you can get away with anything.”

“Here’s a tip, though: Pour without measuring but never over-pour. You learn to count. It pays to be good at that. Measuring takes a lot of time. You can save time and money because if you can do that without pouring over, you’re saving money all the way around.”

The restaurant, which counts loyal locals as well as leaf-peepers, skiers and travelers among its clientele, was at one time an actual creamery.

“Lots of people think we serve ice cream,” Wright says. “We do, for dessert, but that’s not our main thing.”

## HOLIDAY COCKTAIL

### Mulled Morgan

*courtesy captainmorgan.com*

- 1½ cups water
- 2 cups Malbec or Cabernet wine
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 cup Captain Morgan Spiced Rum

Bring water, wine, cinnamon, nutmeg and honey to a boil in a 1½- to 2-quart sauce pan over moderately high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, whisking occasionally, 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in rum. Serve hot. Garnish with orange peel, cinnamon stick and star anise.

Makes 4 servings

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