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GOOD TIDINGS

pearl of wisdom

THE VIBRANTLY REDESIGNED PEARL SOCIAL COCKTAIL CLUB POURS UP A TRANSPORTIVE, THOUGHT-PROVOKING MIXOLOGY VOYAGE



BY *Nicole Johnson*
PHOTOGRAPHY *Silas Fallstich*

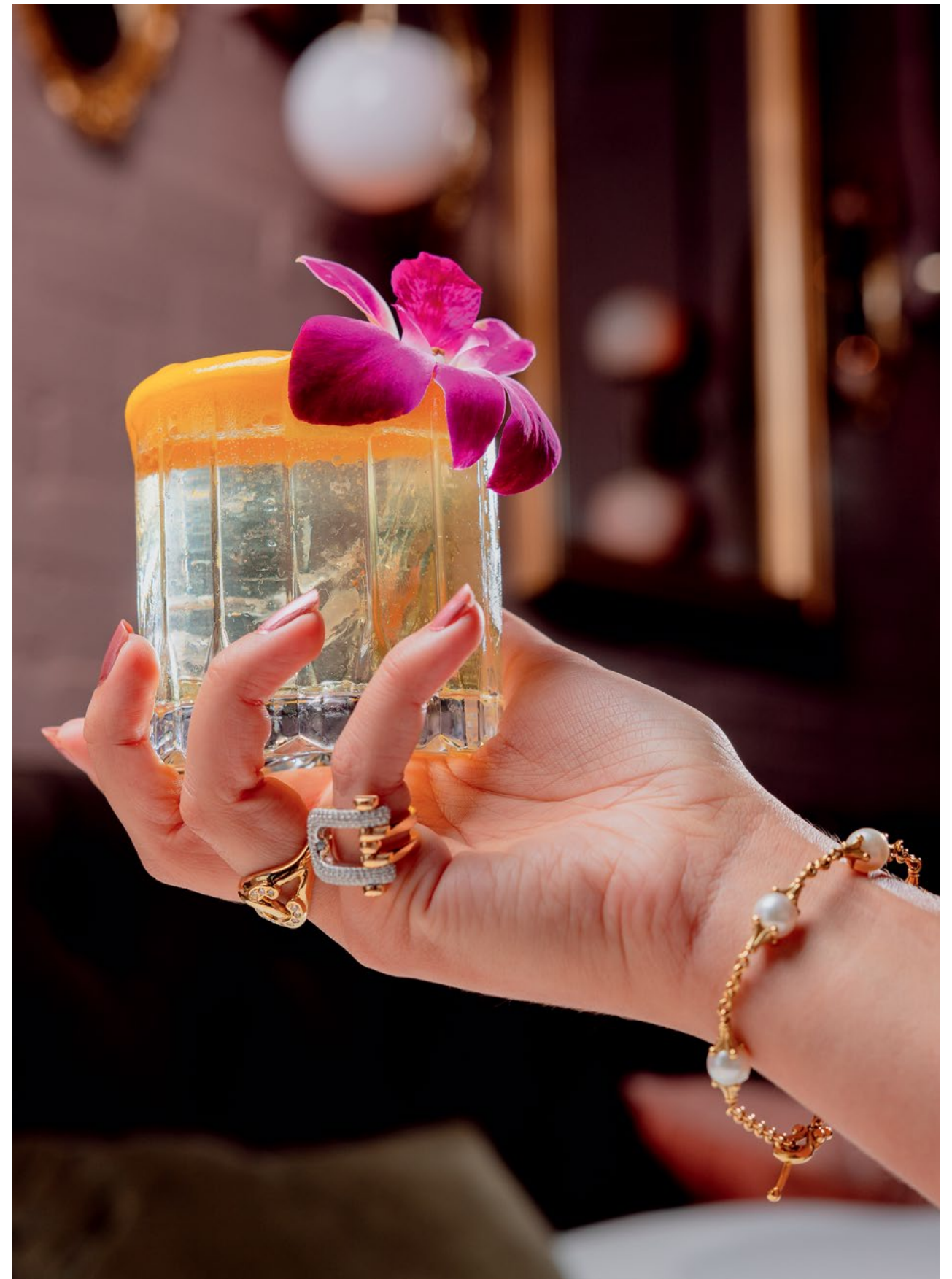
If the newly reimagined Pearl Social Cocktail Club were to have an ideal customer, they would be an epicurean with a literary mind and a discerning palate. They would be the infectious entertaining and deeply introspective leader of a booze-friendly book club, whose sharp insights are as intoxicating as the speakeasy's bold beverage offerings. They would speak with a keen wit, carry a Santa Barbarian ease, and dress with proper panache (wrists adorned in pearls, of course).

It's easy to get carried away with this sort of daydreaming in Pearl Social's grandiose parlor, the Funk Zone's whimsical gathering place of well-traveled, well-read spirits. Replete with renovated interiors and a revamped mixology menu, it appears a token of times past, yet beckons for times ahead.

As with any masterpiece, it's the brainchild of a few creative collaborators. Classic Californian interior designer Nathan Turner is the virtuoso behind the bar's visual storytelling. His penchant for Wild West motifs—proudly etched across his Cowboy Toile wallpaper—invites a quirky interplay with oil landscapes of rugged coastlines and idyllic countrysides. Dusty blush and hazel tones layer a dreamy haze over the space, inviting escapism and intimate celebrations.

An 18-foot-high bookcase scales an entire wall, brimming with richly colored hardcovers and rustic artifacts, seemingly curated from secret corners of the world. But this salon is not the kind of dark, moody study where tortured artists and intellectuals brood with an aged whisky in hand. Instead, imaginative elixirs get creative juices flowing, and youthful energy abounds from every gilded mirror and golden orb of light. The space sparks a certain wanderlust, but you don't have to move an inch from the tufted velvet banquettes to be transported.

Thankfully, Beverage Manager Liam Baer has already crafted my international tasting itinerary. I ask him about the philosophy behind his pours. "For me, crafting cocktails is about more than just mixing ingredients; it's about weaving together flavors with stories and emotions," he says.



MIXTAPE
Jewelry **LAYKIN ET CIE**



The seasoned creative has no shortage of material: prior to joining Acme Hospitality this April, Liam mixed at and managed bars across bustling hubs like New York City, Hong Kong, Singapore, and most recently, Los Angeles. Baer also clearly infuses musical memorabilia into his repertoire: several cocktails pay homage to late '80s punk tracks (for a proper throwback, try "This Monkey's Gone to Heaven," a scotch and banana liqueur tribute to the Pixies).

"Inspiration can come from unexpected places—a song, a location, or even a fleeting memory," Liam shares. "Each cocktail is a chance to evoke a feeling or share a narrative, transforming a simple drink into an experience that lingers with guests long after the last sip."

Tonight's sipping story starts off with a taste of the tropics: the Mixtape, a deluxe twist on a Pornstar Martini. A glassy potion of passion fruit liqueur, sparkling wine, and light rum bubbles with anticipation for what's to come—and when Liam hovers a siphon over the glass, so do I. He swirls on a luxurious, fragrant mousse that effuses hints of pungent citrus: he explains it's a passionfruit and vanilla espuma, but to me, it appears a sumptuous cloud of Dole Whip. The foam's impossibly smooth texture pillows the lips and prepares the taste buds for an assertive, well-rounded tartness below.

Next, I swoon over the Salad Days, a white Negroni that brings a light, bright air of sophistication to a classic. Liam begins squeezing droplets of olive oil from a dainty pipette, suspending liquid bubbles with the meticulous eye of a scientist but the fine-tuned finesse of an artist. The drink provides a delicate emulsion for the eyes, and a bitter, botanical bite for the senses. I relish in the savory complexity of its subtle tomato infusion, which imbues unexpected notes of umami.

Though a library lingers nearby, Liam's mixology MO is anything but by the books. My gaze wanders, scanning the space for hints of the holidays. From November 16 to January 1, the Cocktail Club will swath its refined, swanky design in glitzy gift wrapping. The fourth-annual Miracle at Pearl Social will ring in the celebratory season with an extravaganza, in the truest sense of the word—I'm booking my spot as I sip.

But for now, I delight in the culinary accouterments by Chef Jason Paluska of The Lark. Of the delicate canapés, The Cheese Board's earthy honey pistachio praline and whipped goat ricotta perfectly pair, and of more hearty bites, the silky Eagle Rock Oysters and spicy Caribbean Fried Chicken satisfy.

Richly flavored and ruby toned, the Chan Chan Smash cocktail glides in next, a sprig of leafy basil cascading from its sleek stainless cup. The drink marks my first encounter with pisco—a floral, grapey spirit of Peruvian origin—which brings an enlivening piquancy, and achieves dimension with herbaceous infusions of blackberry, basil, and lemon, and a bittersweet edge of amaro. It's lovely to be acquainted—I know we'll meet again.

My final nightcap is the funky, elevated Kamata Hollywood City. Raspberry, lemon, and bright shiso vibrantly bloom from a foundation of herbal bison grass vodka, harmonizing with the cherry blossoms of sakura vermouth. A Japanese rose hip tea saturates this Tokyo-inspired blend with a brilliant crimson color, and dried rosehips daintily perch on its film of froth.

As I savor my last sips, I lock eyes with a portrait of a woman resembling the Cocktail Club's namesake. She looks like 20th century preservationist Pearl Chase—endearingly known as the First Lady of Santa Barbara—who flipped the city from a seaside shantytown to the burgeoning creative, historical hub it is today. Perched atop a myriad of landscape scenes, she proudly watches over her imagined parlor, embodying an authentic, spirited stewardship.

"Drawing inspiration from Santa Barbara's past and the fresh, contemporary feel of the redesign, the drinks are designed to evoke a strong sense of place and time," Liam shares. "Just as the décor honors Pearl Chase's legacy, the menu invites guests to experience her influence in a sensory way."

Among the dusty books and daring cocktail program, I feel exactly that: a dedicated reverence for the past, blended with an eager desire to revel in the present.*