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Why Bartenders Are Burning Citrus to a Crisp

BY JUSTINE STERLING | POSTED JANUARY 15, 2015 AT 1:00PM EST



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It's not uncommon for bartenders to flame an orange—but usually they don't let it actually catch on fire, let alone burn to a crisp. Right now, pyromaniacal mixologists are garnishing and flavoring cocktails with ultra-charred citrus for super-smoky flavors and strikingly beautiful presentations. Here, three examples of this new hot trend (pun intended).

Lemon Ash at Eastern Standard in Boston

A toasty take on a classic sour, The Phoenix is made with barrel-aged gin, burnt sugar syrup, lemon juice, amaro and egg white. It's garnished with a jet-black line of

lemon ash. To make the citrusy ash, bar manager Naomi Levy roasts lemon scraps from the bar for six to eight hours at 400 degrees until they turn to charcoal. She pulverizes them in a food processor then uses a fine strainer to sift out the bigger chunks. What's left is a bitter-tart ash that offsets the cocktail's frothy sweetness.

Candied Burnt Orange Wheels at Ivan Ramen in New York City

The coziest cocktail at noodle expert Ivan Orkin's Ivan Ramen is the Sake Hot Toddy created by bar manager Jennifer DelGrande. Made with warmed junmai sake and barley tea, the malty, earthy cocktail is garnished with a crispy candied burnt orange wheel studded with cloves and topped with whole star anise and a cinnamon stick. To make the wheels, DelGrande burns oranges whole over a flame until they are so charred that they look like avocados. She slices them into wheels, sprinkles them with sugar and broils them until the sugar turns golden brown.

Burnt Orange Zest Whiskey at Restaurant Latour in Hamburg, NJ

At Restaurant Latour, the luxe restaurant in the Crystal Springs Resort, the “New” Fashioned from manager Stephen Thomas is a bright but smoky cocktail somewhere between an old fashioned and a Manhattan. It’s made with sweet vermouth and burnt orange zest-infused Tuhtilltown white corn whiskey. “The whiskey gets a nice smokiness without overpowering the drink with oak and vanilla flavors from the traditional process of aging whiskey,” Thomas says. The drink is garnished with local pickled concord grapes, a dried orange segment and a burnt orange twist for an extra hit of charred citrus aromatics.

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