

The South's Best Bartenders

It's a cocktail revolution. Like celebrity chefs, today's barkeeps attract a loyal following, with their house-made bitters and tonics and locally sourced ingredients. Here, our favorites. BY JENNIFER V. COLE



..... Eric Simpkins

Where to find him: DRINKSHOP, W Atlanta Downtown, Atlanta 45 Ivan Allen, Jr. Blvd; whotels.com or 404-582-5800

The vibe: A stylish, modern watering hole with attention paid to every little detail, from music to glass shape. There are even five different types of ice (cubes, spheres, spears, crushed, and chipped), made daily to complement specific drinks.

Eric's approach: A foundation of classic recipes, seasonal ingredients, and a little improvisation. "All cocktails should have balanced, clean, unmuddled flavors. Perfectly put together. Not too sweet. Not too sour."

His favorite celebrity/drink pairing: Ernest Hemingway and the Jack Rose—bonded applejack, lemon juice, and grenadine made fresh from pomegranate juice—from his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*.

Eric's pick for Atlanta's signature drink: "I wish it could be the Georgia Mint Julep, made with peach brandy—a slight twist on the classic—but no one seems to make peach brandy anymore."

In his words: "I spend as much on produce as a small restaurant."

Editor's tip: The menu itself is the tip of the iceberg. Order "Bartender's Choice" and let Eric customize a drink to suit your palate—or even go for a cocktail tasting menu.

The drink he created for us: Sweet Georgia Peach Smash. Eric combines mint leaves, fresh peaches, and simple syrup with black tea-infused bourbon for a refreshing, citrus-y homage to the state's signature fruit. (TURN THE PAGE)

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