

toast of the town



THE BONTANIQUE
FROM CASIMIR'S LOUNGE

PHOTOS BY ANGELA HOPPER

SIPPING IN SAVANNAH

Craft cocktail culture has arrived in this port city

// BY STEPHANIE BURT

SAVANNAH IS NOTHING IF NOT surprising in the sweetest way possible, a real Southern belle in that she has plenty of brains behind the beauty. Although the city is fostering a growing progressive vibe, to visitors she might feel just the opposite—a bit old-fashioned, all friendly smiles, carriage rides, and those magical park squares. When trying to get a handle on her personality, it is easy to stop at the Spanish moss and shops on the Riverfront, and there's no blaming you for doing so.

Those who watched *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, the movie based on the best-selling book, might have been harboring particular notions about the city, despite the fact that no one has a Southern accent like Kevin Spacey's interpretation of it. Savannah is not necessarily the way she was depicted, and yet the film does offer hints of her true quirkiness. Even today, you'll still find numerous references to *Midnight* in the city. In short, Savannah is complicated, and complicated is *fun*.

She is architectural eye candy and tour guide stories and sweet pralines handed out on the Riverfront; she is refined cocktail parties and crowds jamming the street for St. Patrick's Day festivities; she is





THE MANSION ON FORSYTH PARK



CASIMIR'S LOUNGE

of the many choices on its classic menu, and locals will often tell you that you can't miss the The Olde Pink House basement tavern for a burger, a bevvie, and live piano music.

However, if you seek a taste (and a sip) of a city coming into her own, then Perch at Local 11ten and Casimir's Lounge at Mansion on Forsyth Park offer two of the most con-

trasting yet one-of-a-kind experiences, both in the neighborhood adjacent to Forsyth Park.

"Perch has the most amazing atmosphere, and both myself and a lot of servers love it when we get the opportunity to work up here," says Brad Ciechanowski, bar manager of Local 11ten, which houses Perch on its roof.

"Houses" might be a strong word actually. "Urban tree house" might be a more accurate descriptor. In the summer months, when the sun goes down, the live oak trees that surround the location come alive with the calming sound of cicadas. It's easy to feel far away from the college clubs and bars only a short drive away when you're "perched" in one of the numerous comfortable seating areas on this exposed deck, large fans keeping the summer air circulating.



BONTANIQUE

the creative energy of the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and coffee shops and farmers markets; and she's a place where what's in your glass is more important than wearing the rose-colored variety.

Alcohol has been a companion to Savannah since this colonial port city was in her youth. A reputed haunt for many a pirate (rum isn't a stereotype for nothing), there is even a pirate-themed bar, also on the ghost tour, which has an old tunnel beneath it leading directly to the Riverfront. For shanghaiing of course.

Additionally, Savannah is one of the only cities in the nation where on-street imbibing is permitted. Therefore, a quick stroll down the busiest streets in the historic district might have you thinking that the main drinks aflowin' in this flower of the South are ones of the florescent slushy variety served in a skinny souvenir cup.

Do not get shanghai'd into that line of thought.

Sipping in Savannah is as rich and diversified as its history, and if craft cocktails are on your to-do list, Savannah has plenty of worthy spots, from respectable big hotel bars, such as 22 Square Bar at Andaz to a torch singer-themed speak-easy named House of Mata Hari, with Theda Bara-worthy décor and an under-your-nose location (we'll never tell). Chive Sea Bar & Lounge, beckoning on Broughton Street with its glowing interior, makes a mean sidecar, one

"I started bartending in a nightclub in downtown Savannah, and eventually I wanted something a little more stable, something where I didn't get off at five a.m.," Brad explains. "So I started as a bar back for Jamie [the owner] at another place he used to own and learned as much as I could, and then I started here. It really is a collective effort, bartenders here learning from each other, and soon I started experimenting.

"I like making a lot of drinks that are refreshing and unique, and they stuck on the menu."

He's recently been experimenting with pisco, a brandy from South America that has been popping up on many a Southern cocktail menu as of late. He loves how fresh fruit brings out its depth, and in fact, muddling fruit is a step in many of Perch's drinks.

If it's cool interiors and conditioned air that beckons you after a long day, then Casimir's Lounge has a hefty dose of both, and a popular new cocktail menu as well. Located in the visually striking Mansion on Forsyth Park, the bar tables are made from petrified tree trunks and the general bar theme is "carnival." With live music Thursday through Saturday evenings, the soundtrack is contemporary jazz with a decidedly upscale vibe. A nice spot and a nice evening calls for an expertly crafted cocktail.

"We've recently switched many of our standard spirits for small-batch varietals," says Casimir barman Tim Hayman. "We've added more cordials, more craft spirits, and now we have a new craft cocktail menu that uses these spirits."

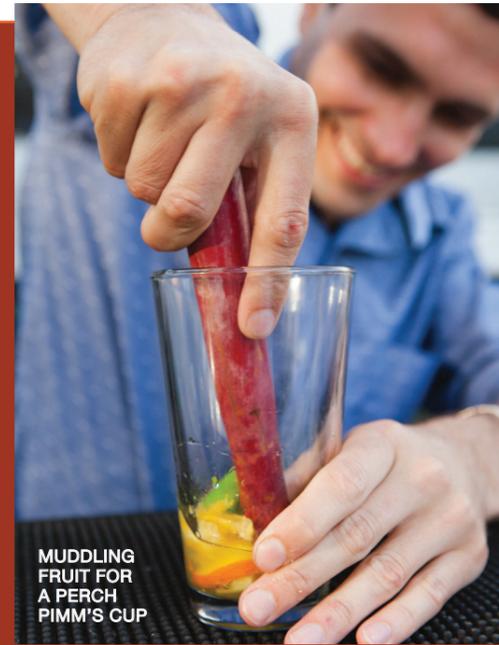
The lounge will change its cocktail menu seasonally, reflecting what is happening in the larger cocktail culture. That's something to toast to, and toasting comes quite naturally in Casimir's, especially in a building with such a storied Savannah history, especially if you wander out onto the patio and look out over Forsyth Park, the green jewel of a thriving city.

PERCH PIMM'S CUP

FROM BRAD CIECHANOWSKI OF PERCH AT LOCAL 11TEN, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

- ½ ounce simple syrup
- 2 thick slices cucumber
- 1 orange slice
- 1 lemon wedge
- 1 lime wedge
- 1¼ ounces Pimm's No. 1
- ¾ ounce Hendrick's gin
- ½ ounce lime juice
- ½ ounce fresh orange juice
- Good-quality ginger ale

Pour simple syrup in the pint glass side of a Boston shaker. In same glass, add 1 cucumber slice with orange, lemon, and lime wedges, then muddle. Add rest of ingredients, shake well, top with ginger ale then pour over ice into a Collins glass. Garnish with cucumber slice.



MUDDLING FRUIT FOR A PERCH PIMM'S CUP



PURPLE RAIN

FROM BRAD CIECHANOWSKI OF PERCH AT LOCAL 11TEN, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

- ¼ cup blueberries
- 1½ ounce pisco
- ½ ounce maraschino liqueur (see editor's note)
- ½ ounce lime juice
- ¼ ounce simple syrup
- ¼ ounce Chambord
- Lime peel for garnish

Muddle blueberries in a small glass, then add fruit to shaker along with ice and all ingredients. Shake well, then strain into a coupe glass and garnish with a lime peel.



PURPLE RAIN

BONTANIQUE

FROM CASIMIR'S LOUNGE, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

- ¾ ounce gin
- ¾ ounce Aperol
- ¾ ounce lemon juice
- ¾ ounce orgeat syrup
- 1 dash orange bitters
- Club soda for topping
- Sprig of mint for garnish

Shake in a shaker, then strain into Collins glass filled with ice. Top with club soda and garnish with a sprig of mint.



EDITOR'S NOTE:

Maraschino liqueur, an ingredient in the Purple Rain, is not akin to the neon-colored cherries of the same name. It is, instead, a clear liqueur distilled from crushed sour cherry pits. A worthy addition to a home bar, it's essential in the Hemingway Daiquiri and currently a favorite among mixologists for adding complexity and depth to many a concoction.