



Making waves

EKTORAS BINIKOS TURNS ANCIENT FLAVORS INTO MODERN COCKTAILS AT OCEANA

by Kate Parham

With a father who distilled grappa and a mother who made her own cherry herring, it's no wonder Ektoras Binikos's passion for cocktails started as a child growing up on the Greek island of Ikaria. From there he moved to Athens to study film direction, graphic design and video production, and now combines his passions for cocktails and art as the head mixologist of Oceana in New York City.

How did you first get into mixology?

I have been a bartender for a few years now. About 13 years ago, I was bored on

a slow night behind the bar, so I started experimenting by mixing all sorts of ingredients. I created a successful cocktail program and even won a few awards.

How does your background in multimedia art inform your approach to mixology?

What I love about my work as a mixologist is that I'm creating an experience for someone right in front of me. That is very satisfying and rewarding. As an artist also, I tend to work for many hours in a solitary environment. I get into this insular space that I am sure, after a while, is

not very good for me. My bartending job brings a balance to my life by creating the space for me to interact and try to take care of the needs of someone else. Also, as a mixologist, I find creating original cocktails is a similar creative process to my art making; it is a transcendent experience that, when it works, amazes and excites both me and the guest.

How has being born in Greece influenced the way you create cocktails?

My parents are a big influence. My dad is a winemaker and a grappa maker and my mom experimented with liquors and infusions. Also, both parents are into fresh food and are advocates of using the highest quality of ingredients for their home cooking. Some of my earliest memories in Greece are of my dad distilling grappa and then looking for herbs such as wild sage or mint to flavor it. I also remember my mom making cherry herring for Christmas.

How do you use ouzo in cocktails?

I believe a cocktail must satisfy the eyes, the nose and the palate. The perfect cocktail is a crescendo or an apotheosis of three elements: color, flavor and texture. *Ouzo* is a difficult spirit to play with because it has such a strong character with all that anise right in your face that overwhelms every other ingredient. You want to mix two ounces of *ouzo* with four ounces of water and then five or six drops of *mastiha* water (see "Chew on this," p. 84). This will make it cloudy, intensify the aroma and create depth. I call this cocktail my Greek column—it's all poetry.

Binikos' Resume

Degree in economics, Higher Industrial School of Piraeus, Greece, 1984

Degree in film direction, Greek National Film Institute, Greece, 1984

Video studies, The New School, New York City, 1987