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STAR BARTENDERS

By Joshua Lurie 03/19/10 at 12:00PM

Bartenders Also Shine at "Star Chefs"



Eric Alperin of The Varnish Joshua Lurie

Last night, **Star Chefs** convened their 2010 "Rising Star Chef's Tasting Gala and Awards Ceremony" in the fig-shaded courtyard of the Santa Monica's Fairmont Miramar Hotel. The focus was on the "Rising Chefs" and their food, but two marquee bartenders also demonstrated their considerable skills behind temporary bars: Eric Alperin from **The Varnish** and Julian Cox from **Rivera**.

The Varnish co-owner Eric Alperin made The Highlander: Highland Park 12-year whisky and Cherry Heering on the rocks with a lemon twist. If you substitute Rye, it's called a Hunter, a popular option at The Varnish. Alperin said that since he had to make 600 cocktails, he was looking for a drink with "durability," meaning the flavors would hold up after 10 minutes, unlike a daiquiri. "A big misconception with cocktails is that it has to be complicated," said Alperin. At "Star Chefs," he proved otherwise.

Rivera bartender Julian Cox made his signature Barbacoa, a mezcal cocktail with chipotle, lime juice and red bell pepper. The garnish, as always, was beef jerky. "I didn't cut any corners," said Cox. "Do it exactly like I do it at the restaurant." In fact, at Star Chefs, his Barbacoa had a secret weapon: Chichicapa. Cox enjoys how the single-village mezcal from Del Maguey contributes "spicy and smoky" qualities. He made several hundred cocktails before taking to the stage to receive his award. After the final applause for the collected stars, he was back behind the bar, making more Barbacoas. Ah, the glory of victory.

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