

## MEET YOUR MIXOLOGIST

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### ABOUT THE SERIES

In a saloon town such as San Francisco, the bartender plays a crucial role. Confessor, friend, sounding board — the man or woman behind the plank sees to it that our needs are met with elegance, grace and often wit. They see humanity at its best and most convivial, but also offer a nod and a welcome to the lonely. But what do they see when they look at us? What are the tricks of their trade? And what lessons have they learned along the way? In this Examiner weekly feature, we talk to some of our local bartenders to find out.

### FEATURED RECIPE

#### WHEEL IN THE SKY

- ¾ oz. Calvados
- ¾ oz. scotch
- ½ oz. Velvet Falernum liqueur
- ½ oz. Averna bitters
- ½ oz. lemon juice

Shake ingredients together in a shaker filled with ice. Strain into a tall glass filled with ice. Peel a twist of lemon over drink so it gets the zest. Use twist as garnish and top with soda.



**Absinthe Brasserie & Bar** *Even if you have never been to Absinthe — the sexy French bistro in Hayes Valley — you know you've always wanted to take a peek inside. For many, it has a certain je ne sais quoi. Well, lucky for you, we've uncovered the elusive "quoi" of it all, a journey that led us to Jeff Hollinger, who, in addition to being the restaurant's general manager, is often found behind the bar helping to mastermind its amazingly creative bar program. He also penned "Art of the Bar," a handy little book that showcases Absinthe's vast archive of cocktails, while helping the folks at home replicate that genius in their rec rooms. We've always been a fan of the bar's clever names for cocktails, like the Hipster (skinny jeans and Chuck Taylors not required for consumption) or the Wheel in the Sky, an ode to Hollinger's (and your) love of Journey. 398 Hayes Street, San Francisco; (415) 551-1590, [www.absinthe.com](http://www.absinthe.com)*

**How long have you been in the bartending business?** The bartending business specifically, seven or eight years. For me, I got into it from experimenting at home, playing around with cocktail books. It was a hobby for me. And I was working at a place where I was making coffee drinks in the morning, and they had a full bar and so I would just get behind the bar and start messing around. I got into it really for the first time professionally at Gordon's House of Fine Eats. Gordon's was the only real proper cocktail program. I got into it as this new wave of cocktails was starting to happen.

**So, you also are an author. How long did it take you to write "Art of the Bar"?** Start to finish, two years. To me, it's a great snapshot of what we were doing in '04 or '05.

**How many cocktails would you say you had to try to write that book?** You know, it was less that I had to consume than our guests had to consume or our staffs had to consume. What would end up happening is I would come in here and be working a Sunday night shift, and it'd be a little bit quiet, and I'd just start making drinks. So, I'd have seven variations of a cocktail lined up on the bar and if you were sitting here, you were drinking them and telling me what you thought. We still do it that way.

**What's the most over-the-top cocktail you've ever done here?** We had a cocktail for a while that was called Jitterbug Perfume. It was roasted beets and green Szechuan peppercorns infused into gin, where I made a sherry-vinegar gastrique, Aperol and a Szechuan tincture. It was absolutely incredible.

**Are you a fan of absinthe?** The spirit itself? Yes. **Have you ever had enough to see the "green**



CHRISTINA McNEILL/SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**Artiste in action:** Absinthe bartender Jeff Hollinger says he has been making creative cocktails for at least seven or eight years. He cites his grandfather as an early influence on his future career.

**fairy?"** You'd be so wasted. No. It's a different buzz. It hits you hard and it hits you fast ... even when it's been cut. But when people ask me are you going to hallucinate? I kind of equate it to a Fernet or a Chartreuse buzz.

**If you could serve a drink to anyone, who would it be?** My grandfather, Lin Hollinger (Grampy, to me). When I was a kid, my family and I would go and visit my grandparents in Glendale, and all of the kids would end up playing behind Grampy's home bar. His bar was the kids' unlikely gathering place, and we'd often spend hours crushing ice, making Shirley

Temples, and playing with the various bar and golf-related artifacts decorating the space. In many ways, I've always attributed my love for the classic ideal of cocktail culture to those days spent playing "bartender" at Grampy's house. When Grampy passed away, my parents asked my brothers and I if there was anything that we wanted of his, and my first and only response was anything from his bar. Today, my home bar is filled with an array of glassware and artifacts from Grampy's bar, and it is always touching for me to think about him when I reach for one of his old cocktail glasses. — *Tiffany Martini*