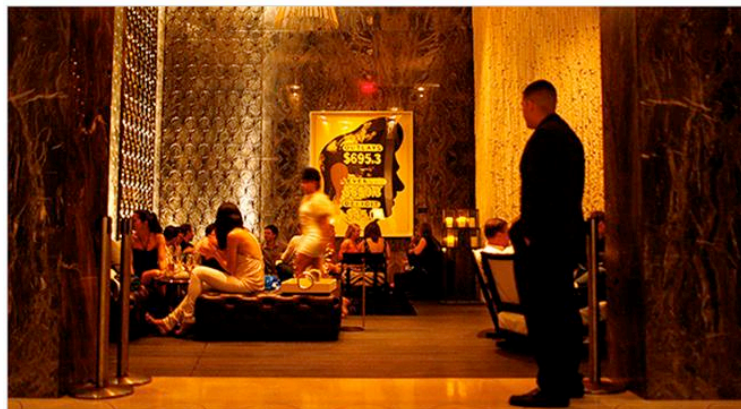


BOITE

## So an Herb Walks Into a Bar ...



Oscar Hidalgo for The New York Times

Cocktails at the Living Room bar can be ordered couture style.

By LEANNE SHEAR  
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IN an enclave better known for bodacious beach bodies, pumping dance clubs and misbehaving reality TV stars, there's a mixology movement afoot in Miami, led by the cocktail gurus at the Living Room, the bar and lounge of the W South Beach hotel and residences.

Elad Zvi and Gabriel Orta are the chief executives of Bar Lab, a beverage consulting firm, and the master mixologists at the Living Room. Together with their team, they play down the ordinary in favor of their super-culinary concoctions (although if you still insist on a boring old gin and tonic, they will oblige).

"We call them couture cocktails," Mr. Zvi said on a recent Saturday night, as he shook one of his inventions, which was cabernet-based and infused with red and yellow pepper and thyme. He set a sprig of rosemary on fire to release its essential oils before placing it gently in the drink.

The Living Room houses a veritable pharmacopia of obscure cocktail accouterments. "I got all these in Estonia when I was there," said Isaac Grillo, a mixologist, holding up a bottle filled with what looked like a witch's brew of herbs and spices steeping in clear liquid, with a label reading, "Isaac's Eau de Vie."

Infusions and flavored bitters are made on-site, and ingredients like saffron, basil, lavender and kumquats are blended with unusual liqueurs and hard-to-find spirits to make libations. Even the ice is homemade, chipped for each individual drink from a large block in the middle of the bar.

"You think of Miami as somehow faux," said one guest, Kelly Stogsdill, 33, who moved to the city last year from New York. "You know, fake tans, fake hair extensions, fake — everything. But this? This is authentic like no one has ever seen" anywhere else in Miami.

She sipped the drink Mr. Grillo had made for her — Yuzu liqueur, cinnamon simple syrup, fresh apple cider and Bison Grass vodka from Poland, topped with jalapeño ginger apple foam — and nearly swooned.

If you can tear yourself away from the cocktails long enough to notice the décor, you will see the same funk-infused attention to detail, like original artworks (including a Warhol) and large, spiky lanternlike light fixtures. Of course, very high ceilings, marble walls, low lighting and generic house music all remind guests that they are in a hotel, albeit a cool one where all the public spaces were created by the young designer-of-the-moment Anna Busta.

But back to the bar. There, 29-year-old Sophie Riley of Miami was sampling Mr. Orta's riff on his fellow mixologist Clark Clark's creation: a blend of smoky mezcal, sweet passion fruit and spicy sriracha, the Thai hot sauce.

"I'm so impressed — what they do here is amazing," she said with awe after taking a sip. "I'm never going to be able to drink just a beer again."

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