

GARDEN & GUN PRESENTS

THE SOUTH'S *Best New* BARS

Sure, they've got great drinks and distinctive settings. They might specialize in brandy or vermouth or, of course, whiskey, and the food sometimes rivals the meticulously crafted cocktails. But the best part? These recently opened establishments will make you feel right at home

By WAYNE CURTIS

The Run Devil Run at Atlanta's Golden Eagle, with tequila, Scotch, lemon, cacao, orgeat, and bitters.

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THE SOUTHERN CRAFT-COCKTAIL RENAISSANCE IS STILL DOING BOFFO BOX OFFICE—THE SHOW’S RUN IS NOW WELL INTO ITS SECOND DECADE. BUT THE STAGE DIRECTION FOR THE CURRENT SCENE HAS SEEN A CHANGE IN PROTAGONIST:



An old-fashioned at the Bluebird Cocktail Room. Opposite, clockwise from top left: The Bluebird’s bar; cucumbers with Aleppo chile pepper and lime at Babas on Cannon; Babas’ beverage director Lane Becker (left) and co-owner Edward Crouse.

“Exit: Mixologist. Enter: Bartender.” Or, more precisely, *reenter* bartender.

The early acts of the revival emphasized the specialized handiwork of drink masters armed with eyedroppers and hand-carved muddlers and house-made this and that, served up in hushed temples devoted to the bibulous arts. These places offered a distinguished alternative in a milieu still hungover from a long dalliance with Long Island iced teas. But while the drinks were delicious, something had been lost among the mumbled incantations and muttonchops: that sense of feeling welcome, as if returning home, even if you’d never set foot there before.

The drinks magic remains (there’s no better time since the late 1800s to step out for a perfectly made Sazerac), but

the new class of bar is bringing back the lost art of hospitality. Bartenders are acting like bartenders again, and new venues are taking some of the settings we’re familiar and comfortable with—the dive bar, the honky-tonk, the classic corner tavern—then adding to the mix outstanding cocktails, a wine library that runs quiet and deep, a mood that refuses to take itself too seriously, and bar food that doesn’t seem in the same genus as cheese fries. (Also, USB outlets.)

By definition, new bars are, well...*new*. They lack the natural patina that comes with age. Yet many of these Southern bars, all opened within the past two years, will leave you feeling as if they’ve been around for a while. Put your feet up on the brass rail. Settle in for the next act.

Alex&nder LOUISVILLE, KY Est.: June 2018

Joe and Lesley Heron made a splash when they opened Copper & Kings distillery in Louisville in 2014, specializing in brandy. (*Brandy! In Louisville!*) They set up shop in a cathedral-scale industrial building that happened to have a great top floor with stunning skyline views. As of last summer, the Herons have turned that perch into the brandy-centric Alex&nder. Forget the club chairs and smoking jackets of the brandy dens of yore—it’s bright and contemporary, with an adjoining rooftop deck, and an ideal spot to rethink what you know about this spirit.

Babas on Cannon CHARLESTON, SC Est.: October 2018

Inspired by bars and restaurants they frequented in Europe, Babas co-owners Marie Stitt and Edward Crouse teamed up with veteran barman Lane Becker and launched this all-day “old world café” in a former barbershop downtown. During the day you’ll find coffee along with pastries, salads, or a chèvre and roasted carrot sandwich. Come evening you can pivot to wines and enjoy aperitif bites—olives, cheese, pickled okra—in a cozy space that’s quickly gained a local following. Cocktails don’t stray far from well-crafted basics (Manhattan, gin and tonic), or try sipping on a symbol of prosperity—Babas serves up fresh-squeezed pomegranate cocktails, with your call on the liquor.

Helen Norman



Top: Helen Norman; bottom and right: Olivia Rae-James

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The Bluebird Cocktail Room BALTIMORE, MD Est.: July 2017

The cocktails at the Bluebird are as sturdy as a three-legged stool, served in a room with the feel of a well-funded library at a small but prestigious school. Add to that a cocktail menu that’s chatty without being overbearing, and a sense of communal collegiality along a welcoming bar and tables sized for groups mid-room. Cool weather is a perfect excuse for a hot toddy with apple and ginger, sipped while watching the daylight diminish outside the broad windows as the soft glow of the globes and chandeliers quietly confronts the evening within.



has legs? Consider that it’s now reached Livingston, an unincorporated community that was once listed in the 1902 inventory of “extinct towns of Mississippi.” This distant suburb of Madison (population 25,627) is now home to the Briar Patch, a beguiling spot with the vibe of an Edwardian bird hunting club (see: painting of a pointer over the bar), a fine selection of cocktails in elegant glassware, and punch by the bowl. Need ballast? The charcuterie and shared plates can turn a brief stop into a long, pleasing afternoon.

Bourbon on Rye LEXINGTON, KY Est.: October 2017

Bartenders or professors? Hard to know at Bourbon on Rye, set on the ground floor of the Ballroom Building in downtown Lexington. Here, the well-educated staff loves to enlighten guests about the nuances of the noble brown spirits, with the professors holding court in front of a nineteenth-century mahogany backbar. Order by the dram, grab a private-selection bottle to go, or let your guide mix up something memorable.

Dot Dot Dot CHARLOTTE, NC Est.: July 2017

“It’s only hard to find the first time,” says co-owner Stefan Huebner of his modern speakeasy tucked behind a strip mall. Inside is a relaxing, casual space that doesn’t so much call attention to itself as set a stage for fabulous cocktails and good conversation. Drinks are divided among “classics” and “house” cocktails, with the latter including such riffs as Burning Leaves, with mezcal, Chartreuse,

The Briar Patch LIVINGSTON, MS Est.: July 2018

Is further evidence required that the craft-cocktail revival

YOUR NEXT FAVORITE BAR

Five more fledgling spots to belly up to this year

Add to life's certainties: Another bar will be opening tomorrow, or next week. Keep your eye on these new places, from some of the South's top drinks maestros, which were just on the cusp of throwing open the doors at press time.

The Crunkleton Charlotte, NC

▶ Gary Crunkleton did nigh the impossible when he opened his namesake bar in Chapel Hill in 2006: He proved that refined drinking could survive and thrive in a college town, earning a national reputation along the way. Now Crunkleton is bringing that same courtliness and flair to Charlotte, this time with bites to complement the drinks.

Jewel of the South New Orleans, LA

▶ The newest project from celebrated Big Easy bartenders Nick Detrich (Cane & Table) and Chris Hannah (Arnaud's French 75 Bar) will be a paean to traditional New Orleans drinking. (It's named after a once-famous bar where the brandy crusta was invented.) Expect exemplary service with a heaping side of nineteenth-century New Orleans showiness.

Kingfisher Durham, NC

▶ A former bar manager at Durham's 21c Museum Hotel, Sean Umstead is teaming up with his wife, Michelle Vanderwalker, to open a new downtown bar focused on cocktails incorporating produce from the state's farms. That means lots of pickling and preserving and a strawberry daiquiri you'll actually want to drink.

Miss Carousel Houston, TX

▶ One of a trio of new spots from the group behind the Houston heavyweights Coltivare and Eight Row Flint, this 200-seat lounge's expansive cocktail menu, overseen by beverage director and co-owner Morgan Weber, is broken into engaging categories, including one labeled "Extremely Interesting Non-Conformists."

Tiki TNT Washington, D.C.

▶ Since opening PX in Alexandria, Virginia, a dozen years ago, Todd Thrasher has been quietly upping the food-and-drink game around Washington. His new bar will be folded into his next venture: a rum distillery, which will of course provide the fuel for many of his concoctions.—W.C.

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and a syrup of cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, and anise. This is ostensibly a membership club (join online for ten dollars, or become a member at the door), so "wear something that you wouldn't mind wearing on a first date," the bar advises.

The Elysian Bar NEW ORLEANS, LA Est.: October 2018

The backbar rises like a fevered swamp dream—stylized trunks of cypress trees as envisioned by a mildly unhinged art deco artist. Situated in the 1875 rectory of a former church complex a few minutes' walk from the Marigny neighborhood's bustling Frenchmen Street (the complex is now a lovely new boutique hotel), the bar lures hotel guests and neighborhood residents alike each evening with light fare and drinks overseen by the talented team from Bacchanal Wine and chef Alex Harrell. Order an exquisite Sazerac or select from a list of refreshing aperitif cocktails, then find a seat where mood dictates: the garden room, the elegant parlor, or that otherworldly bar.

The Expat ATHENS, GA Est.: May 2018

Expectations were high when Jerry Slater—the experienced barman behind Atlanta's late and much-beloved H. Harper Station—decamped for Athens to open his next venture. Slater and his wife, Krista, a sommelier, have elevated the college town's drinking options in a spot

that bridges the gap between bar and restaurant. They offer seating upstairs and down in a renovated two-story bungalow, serving a range of classic cocktails both untouched and revamped. The name is a nod to their love of the Paris of the 1930s, and the downstairs has the charm of a French bistro, bolstered by a hefty dose of Georgia ingredients, from local cheeses to a White Oak Pastures duck breast with charred eggplant and peaches.

The Fox Bar & Cocktail Club NASHVILLE, TN Est.: September 2017

A compact, cozy spot created by music industry pros Bryan Rushton and Andrew Cook, the Fox feels like a hidden room at the Church of Good Times—all tin ceilings, worn antiques, and globe lamps. The cocktails, created by local bar veteran Will Benedetto, are as deft as the club's design, offering a sideways tour of the great tipples and their progeny without ever taking them too seriously. Among the drinks: the Irish Exit, made with coconut-infused Jamaican rum and macadamia nut liqueur, spritzed with orange flower water. It's a trip to the tropics without leaving home.

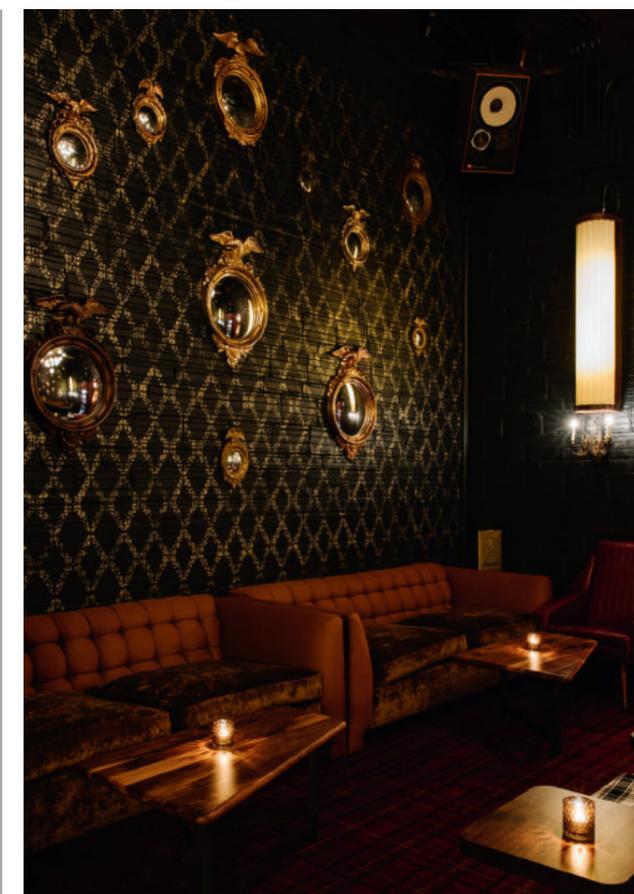
Golden Eagle ATLANTA, GA Est.: October 2017

Golden Eagle is the bar secretly constructed by the eccentric uncle you never knew you had. Inside a former train station on Atlanta's BeltLine Eastside Trail, it

Toasting an evening at New Orleans' Elysian Bar.



PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSH JAGOE



has an interior duskiness that twinkles with brass accents, with a stag's head imperiously presiding over a horseshoe bar. The overall vibe is 1940s as envisioned by the 1970s. Drinks are similarly full-chord swanky, and range from classics to cocktails that may one day vie to be classics. Feeling splurgy? Order the Traveling Suitcase, an old-fashioned for the table that comes in its own valise.

Above, from left: A Suffering Bastard at Golden Eagle; comfy seats inside the bar. Opposite: Elysian bartenders Jasmine Bradley and Roy Chavez welcome guests.

Goodnight Charlie's

HOUSTON, TX
Est.: December 2017

Think tried-and-true Texas honky-tonk...except sparkly and clean. Located in a cedar-clad contemporary building in Houston's Montrose neighborhood, Goodnight Charlie's retains the lively heart of a dance hall (foot-stomping bands, a compact wooden dance floor) but with drinks that exceed one's notions of roadhouse fare: Choose from a solid beer selection or a deep bench of agave spirits and whiskey, along with cocktails that

range from a barrel-aged boulevardier to a Paloma on tap.

The Green Zone

WASHINGTON, D.C.
Est.: July 2018

Best named cocktail ever? The Green Zone's variation on a New Orleans favorite: the Saz'Iraq. There will be no further discussion of this matter. That's just one of the irrepressible drinks at a bar that draws from a palette of Middle Eastern flavors for its innovative concoctions (for instance: gin, pistachio, lemon, and "silky magic"). Don't expect fancy—the two-story

storefront bar with a tiny sidewalk patio in the Adams Morgan neighborhood blends in more than it stands out. Do expect a DJ spinning Middle Eastern party songs come dark on weekends, getting the whole place up and moving.

Hayride Scandal

BATON ROUGE, LA
Est.: May 2017

Does it come as a shock that a bar in Louisiana's capital is named after a scandal that ended with a governor in prison? Hardly. But it's still a pleasing twist that Baton

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Rouge now has a cocktail bar inspired by the history of drinking in Southern Louisiana. It has the feel of a private club from the 1930s or '40s, though with some curveballs. (Is that a portrait of Bill Murray?) Whiskey is well represented, with four hundred brown spirits, but you'll also find such departures as the Oaxaca old-fashioned, which takes a familiar favorite on a trip abroad by swapping out whiskey for smoky mezcal. The bar just recently added a new space, the Parlour, serving Victorian-era cocktails from the 1890s.

The Holler BENTONVILLE, AR Est.: July 2018

You have bills you should deal with. But you'd really like to go out for a drink. Problem solved! The Holler is Bentonville's version of a social hub/coffee shop/bar mash-up. Bring your laptop and type while you tinkle, then take a break at the shuffleboard courts, which fit right in with



Clockwise from above: A barrel-aged boulevardier at Goodnight Charlie's; enjoying a drink at the Fox Bar; the Goodnight Charlie's dance floor.

the Holler's fresh, mid-century sensibility. Drinks on tap include a Moscow Mule and a margarita, as well as a straight-up shot of Old Grand-Dad from the spigot—comfort food for the parched. Really thirsty? There's also rosé by the pitcher.

The Jasper RICHMOND, VA Est.: January 2018

Craft-cocktail whizzes Mattias Hägglund and Thomas Leggett—formerly of Richmond drink havens Heritage and the Roosevelt, respectively—joined forces with restaurateur Kevin Liu to open this sleek addition to downtown. It's possessed of a precise, minimalist air that will appeal to the secret Scandinavian in anyone. The drinks list is well rooted in history (hello, Quoit Club Punch!) but swiftly moves on to destinations unknown, such as a Jungle Bird variation made with molasses-infused tequila. Don't overlook the stellar draft Zombie.

Lone Wolf Lounge SAVANNAH, GA Est.: September 2018

Another bar opened by musicians? Yawn. A bar opened by the principal oboist of the local philharmonic? *Excuse me?* Andrew Jay Ripley and his business partner (and a drummer), Tom Worley, each held down enough shifts in bars that they knew just what they wanted when they set out to open their own—a Midwestern-style neighborhood "grandpa bar" that went on a Caribbean cruise and refused to come back.



Bottom left: Ralph Smith Studios; bottom right: Cameron Blaylock

Lone Wolf is boisterous and friendly, with a tiki-inflected house cocktail list in addition to a roster of "classics for a reason"—including Harry Johnson's 1888 fifty-fifty martini (equal parts gin and vermouth). Among the original martini recipes, this drink was big in the late nineteenth century. Find out why here.

Longway Tavern NEW ORLEANS, LA Est.: May 2018

This latest elevation of French Quarter drinking comes from the restaurateurs behind Sylvain and Meauxbar, who've carved out a welcoming, neo-rustic tavern that provides a calm oasis amid the Quarter's questionable mixology and aural chaos. The decor is equal parts spare, friendly, and bold, and the staff serves up impeccable cocktails—Sazerac, Pimm's Royale, sidecar—made with stellar ingredients. More good news: There's no need to roam the Quarter when hunger strikes, as the bistro fare here is countless notches above ordinary, including an outstanding cassoulet and such simple but elegant bites as radishes enhanced with caviar.

Nickel City AUSTIN, TX Est.: August 2017

Like fancy cocktails but hate fancy cocktail bars? Nickel City (forthright slogan: "Cold Beer & Mixed Drinks") has you covered. The bar occupies a boxy, nondescript building of blond brick and deco-era glass blocks. Inside, you might think you've

Amy Sinclair



The doors are open at our new Atlanta outpost



A view of the raw bar from the dining room at the Garden & Gun Club.

Garden & Gun Club Atlanta, GA

Opened last spring at the Battery Atlanta, in the shadow of the Braves' new stadium, the Garden & Gun Club is our take on the perfect Southern bar. It's intimate and full of touches Southerners will appreciate (including host stands made with Charleston, South Carolina, ironwork), with food and drinks that reflect the region's ingredients and history while also putting a spin on tradition. You'll of course find a range of Southern classics on the cocktail list (to date our Proper Old-Fashioned has been ordered 4,237 times), along with originals such as the Rabbit Will Run, a bourbon, vermouth, and spiced-pear combo. To devise the menu, we partnered with the James Beard Award-winning chef Mike Lata of Charleston's FIG and the Ordinary, and like the drinks, the food blends staples we love with dishes that surprise. Sample Southern oysters from the raw bar or start off with an order of boiled peanuts or a Benton's country ham plate with biscuits. Should you need something more substantial, try the turkey neck gumbo with Carolina Gold rice, or Korean short ribs over grits, or just go for a burger with comeback sauce. We like to think of it as the magazine brought to life, but most of all, it's a celebration of the South and the pleasures that come from slowing down and sharing a drink or a bite with friends old and new. Don't take our word for it, though. Swing by if you're in the neighborhood.



stumbled into a Milwaukee dive with its vinyl banquettes, long and unfussy bar, and low ceilings with exposed rafters (not the lovely rustic exposed kind). But this is a bar that takes its liquor seriously. Backbar bottles include J.M. rum from Martinique, Del Maguey mezcal, and WhistlePig single-barrel ryes. Cocktails run the gamut from top-notch standards to surprising originals, such as the coffee julep.

Above, from left: Nickel City's Jungle Bird; sharing a laugh at Pearl Diver. Opposite: Bartender Nick Dolan hard at work at the Fox.

Officina Amaro Library

WASHINGTON, D.C.
Est.: October 2018

Squirreled away in an alcove off the dining room at Officina—a new three-story culinary complex celebrating all things Italian in D.C.'s Wharf project—a modest bar fronts a well-curated collection of more than a hundred varieties of amaro, the dusky, bittersweet liqueur that quietly informs so many after-dinner moments in Italy. It's a fitting place to retire after embarking on new gustatory adventures courtesy

of chef Nicholas Stefanelli, who has a Michelin star four miles north at his luxe Masseur. But you don't have to dine here to enjoy a brief detour to Italy by the glass.

Paper Crane Lounge

ATLANTA, GA
Est.: November 2017

A visit to the Paper Crane Lounge is like a meditation session, but one, you know, with cocktails—relaxing, soothing, and rejuvenating. It's located above (and part of) the lauded restaurant Staplehouse, and while popular as a de facto way station

for those awaiting reservations downstairs, the lounge shouldn't be overlooked as a destination in its own right, especially for those who could use a little de-harrying and unstraining in their lives. Look for a drinks list that's modest but creative, with enticing descriptions ("acidic, witty, well-traveled") replacing run-of-the-mill ingredient lists.

Pearl Diver

NASHVILLE, TN
Est.: July 2018

Call it a seasonal miracle: It's summer year-round at Pearl

FROM CUBA WITH LOVE

New bars inspired by the *cantinero* tradition

▶ Julio Cabrera is improving your drinking experience. The Cuban-born, Miami-based bar entrepreneur has instructed dozens of Americans in the ways of traditional Cuban bartending, organizing and leading some twenty trips to his homeland in recent years. Visiting bartenders spend time mastering drink-making techniques while experiencing fabled Cuban hospitality at the hands of revered local *cantineros*. And a number of Cabrera's pupils are now spreading those traditions stateside.

A society of bartenders devoted to preserving the country's time-honored practices, El Club de Cantineros de la República de Cuba was founded in 1924, during the height of Prohibition, when American swells flooded Cuban bars in search of a good drink (or any drink). The group survived repeal, Castro, and embargoes. Cabrera taught at one of Cuba's top *cantinero* schools for sixteen years before eventually emigrating to Miami in 2006 to work with the chef Michelle Bernstein. Since then, his influence has reached well beyond South Florida.

New Orleans bartenders Nick Detrich and Chris Hannah visited Cuba several times under Cabrera's tutelage, and with fellow barman Konrad Kantor, they opened **Manolito** last year in the French Quarter. Focused on authentic Cuban drinks, it's named after the late Manuel Carballo Aguiar, a twenty-year veteran of El Floridita in Havana.

TJ Palmieri visited Cuba twice with Cabrera, and in 2017 he opened **Madrina's** in Gainesville, Florida. Like Manolito, his bar has a distinctly Cuban air. Palmieri likens it to what a bar in Cuba might look like if the country had access to the full range of U.S. ingredients. Another Cabrera alum, Riicky Gomez from New Orleans, also opened a Cuban bar, in Portland, Oregon, last year called **Palomar**.

Cabrera isn't slowing down. He's partnering with Bernstein to open **Cafe La Trova** in Miami's Little Havana. The new space will feature two bars and an all-day café, plus its own school to formally instruct bartenders in the art of the *cantinero*.

"We want to be very classic and authentic, so [our staff] will have to respect a lot of rules," Cabrera says. Those rules include no facial hair, always wearing long sleeves and never rolling them up, and no sneakers. "Grooming and outfit are very important," he says. "But most important for *cantineros* is hospitality." —W.C.



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Diver. Four Nashville restaurant/bar associates made like hermit crabs and moved into a midcentury car-repair shop, converting it into their own tropical oasis. There's a fun vibrancy throughout, with bright, jungly wallpaper, pink and teal tiles, and other exuberances. The courtyard has the feel of a South Seas beer garden, scattered with tiki torches and conversation pits. Let your tropical night unspool with sips that channel the sultry South, including Cuban classics such as the Hotel Nacional and a highball made with Jamaican rum and Ting grapefruit soda that brings home the funk.

Tongue-Cut Sparrow

HOUSTON, TX
Est.: February 2017

Bobby Heugel jump-started Houston's cocktail revival when he opened the doors to Anvil a decade ago. Heugel's latest contribution to the city's better drinking is **Tongue-Cut Sparrow**, a snug, comfortable, and slightly stealthy lair. Tucked up a flight of stairs behind the Pastry War (Heugel's popular mezcateria), it's informed but not dominated by an understated Japanese flair, from the name (a Japanese folktale) to happy-hour Japanese highballs, with plenty of intriguing detours, like the Falernum Fix and Scotch-based Bobby Burns. Couches and leather upholstered seats give it a Somerset Maugham-in-exile sensibility, making this shrine to the perfectly built cocktail a splendid destination from which to explore the world, one coupe at a time.

The Vermutería at Cúrate

ASHEVILLE, NC
Est.: March 2017

Chef-restaurateur Katie Button felt a certain something was missing at Cúrate, the traditional Spanish tapas restaurant she opened in Asheville to great acclaim in 2011. It lacked a *vermutería*—a bar devoted to the low-proof pleasures of vermouth, sherry, and cider. "Vermouth is having a moment now in Spain," Button says. So when an adjoining fro-yo shop became available, she and her Catalan-born husband and business partner, Félix Meana, took it over, installing a zinc-topped bar backed by barrels and taps serving up draft Spanish vermouth and cider, which pair perfectly with the cured *jamón ibérico*.

Whiskey Thief

CHATTANOOGA, TN
Est.: September 2018

Revisit Chattanooga... now with a new aerial view. **Whiskey Thief** sits atop the recently opened Edwin Hotel, providing a panorama of the city's iconic Walnut Street Bridge. The space has a fun, boho industrial vibe, with soaring windows, and the drinks are as well made as the vintage-style glassware in which they're served. The Eighteen Seventy-One, with Glenfiddich 12, Campari, Punt e Mes vermouth, and a touch of hickory smoke, is a good starter. Or you can rummage through the cocktail attic, sampling such throwbacks as the Aviation, concocted with gin, lemon, and both cherry and violet liqueurs. ☑



The Kilauea Bowl at Pearl Diver, with fresh juice, rum, gin, sherry, and apricot brandy.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMILY DORIO