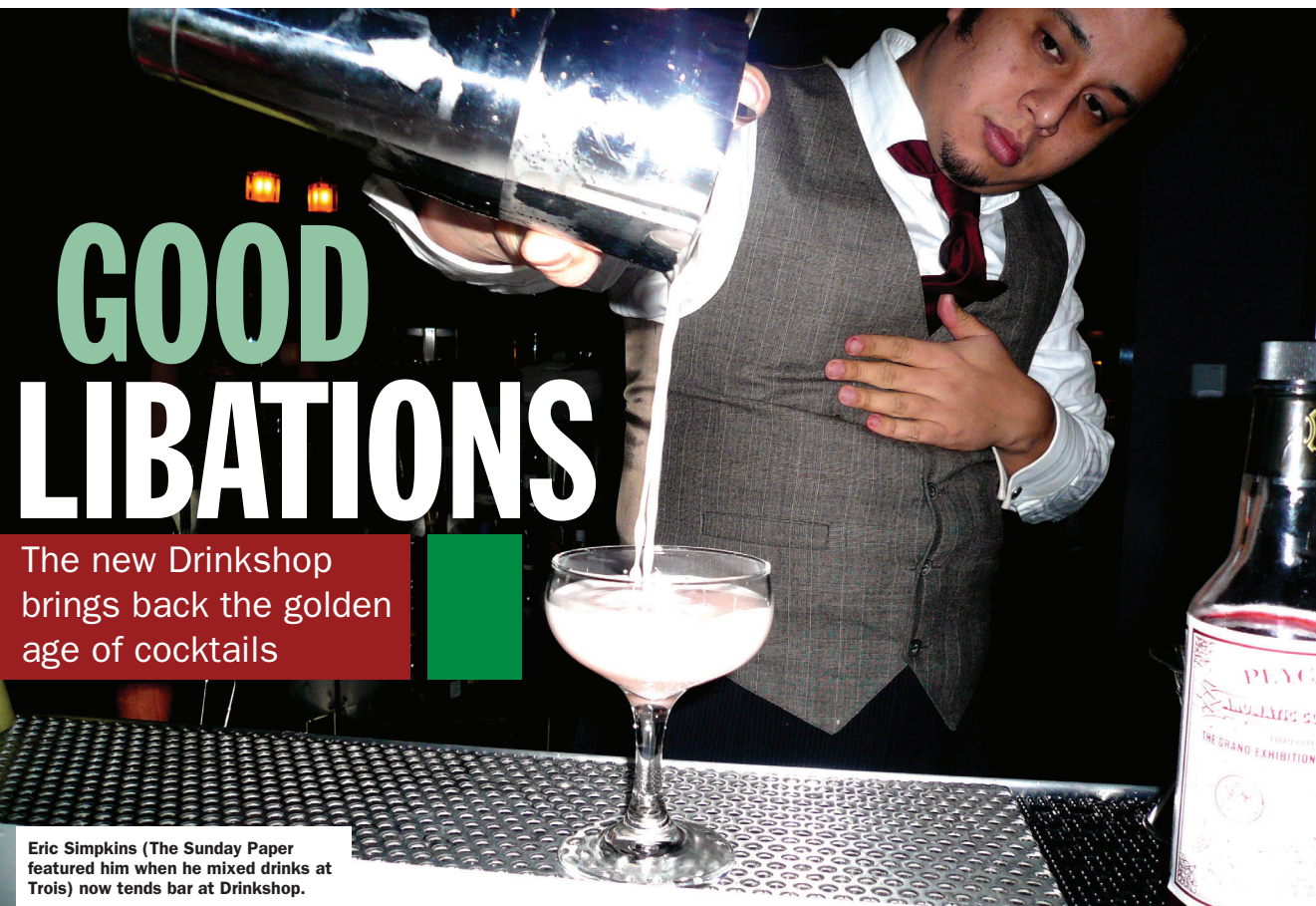


GOOD LIBATIONS

The new Drinkshop brings back the golden age of cocktails



Eric Simpkins (The Sunday Paper featured him when he mixed drinks at Trois) now tends bar at Drinkshop.



Sasha Petraske

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

The good news about the new Drinkshop bar, which opened this month in the W Atlanta–Downtown hotel, is that you don't need a password to get in. Even better: Unlike most bars, you can make a reservation. And you'll want to, if you like cocktails. Because the best news is that Sasha Petraske is the creative force behind the place, consulting on everything from the drink list to the uniforms.

Who is he?

Petraske is a world-class mixologist credited with helping revive the classic 19th-century style of bartending. Milk & Honey, his first bar located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, became an international sensation—and frustration, since it's modeled after a speakeasy and thus hard to track down, with an unlisted phone number that changes often.

But we Atlantans will have things easier than those New Yorkers. "I believe the speakeasy thing is pretty much dead," says Petraske. "I'm not going to do any more bars like that. In fact, my new bar in Queens has a gigantic neon sign." And Drinkshop's phone number is on record: 404-582-5787.

After working as a barista for 10 years, Petraske became a bartender because he thought it would pay better. He discovered his passion and opened Milk & Honey in New York's Chinatown in 2000. Since then,

he's licensed Milk & Honey in London, and opened several other bars with various partners, including Little Branch and Dutch Kills in New York and White Star in Los Angeles. While his bars have earned acclaim and numerous awards, Petraske has been named one of the most influential New Yorkers (by New York Magazine in 2006) and one of the 10 sexiest everyday men (by Jezebel—the NYC-based, not Atlanta's version—in 2008).

All this came from one focus: the value of the cocktail. "The quality standard that I'm doing here at Drinkshop isn't any different than the stuff that I do in New York," he says. "We're getting back to the basics in bartending, when it was more of a craft. It's bringing it back up to what was standard 70 to 90 years ago." Drinkshop is modeled after hotel bars of the 1920s and '30s, before the advent of ice machines, soda guns and bottled mixes, when hotel bars were glamorous institutions. To reflect its chosen era, the staff dresses in vintage attire.

Old is new again. "The stuff I do isn't really original," says Petraske. "Almost all the drinks we make were common in the 1890s, which was the golden age of cocktails. I think it's funny that people think bartending is creative, because it really isn't. People always want to liken bartenders to chefs, but that's not really true. What chefs do is more complicated than what a bartender does. I'm a lifelong bartender and don't want to degrade bartending, but it's a craft—not an art. I think the word 'craft' gets a bad rap, but I prefer to think of myself as a craftsman,



Swizzle cocktail at Drinkshop

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—Sasha Petraske, Drinkshop

because craft is a high level of doing something. There's nothing wrong with being a master carpenter or master plasterer or master bartender."

Signature cocktails at Drinkshop include the Swizzle, a variation on the mojito using Peychaud Bitters. The Cosmonaut blends red currant preserves, gin and lemon juice and aspires to be everything a Cosmopolitan is *not*. El Diablo pairs fresh ginger juice with tequila, club soda and currant. Bee's Knees is a mix of gin, lemon juice and honey.

The critical ingredient, ice, is showcased with a 150-pound block standing ready for chipping with an ice pick. Three types of ice—block, cracked and crushed—are used in various applications (as are their derivatives like spears, spheres, pellets and chunks). Why so many? "Modern ice is a travesty," says Petraske. It melts too fast and dilutes cocktails. The goal is ice that "you can shake longer and not get a drink that gets too watery," he says. "The customer can drink a cocktail over time and not get a watery, mushy drink at the end that you drink anyway because you paid for it. With this, the last sip is as good as the first."

As he gets to know the Atlanta scene through his new venture, Petraske is anxious to work with fresh ingredients. "I've never had a Georgia peach," he admits. "I'm looking forward to it." And we look forward to Drinkshop. **SP**

W-Downtown is located at 45 Ivan Allen Jr. Blvd. Drinkshop is open Monday through