



ART & ENTERTAINMENT

DRINKS & DINING

JOURNEYS

PEOPLE

Peter Kern Library



Sometime after I turned 21, I became completely engrossed in the art of the cocktail. Manhattans, Pimm's cups, and Sidecars could be found in my hand any evening. I'm not sure if I was trying to impress the cougars at the local pub with my sexy maturity, or if it was just because I was an asshole, but something about sipping on a classic, well crafted drink trumped dollar beer specials any evening.

Now five years later, my life has evolved enough that these drinks have become a rare luxury in my life. First off, I'm broke, and these drinks don't come cheap. A well crafted cocktail is somewhere in the ballpark of \$10+ in most major cities. Mix that with the fact that 99% of bartenders don't know a damn about bitters, Campari, or what they're doing for that matter, and you'll find yourself sipping "rip-off-tini's", sober and broke by the end of the night. Secondly, I got no time. Kicking back at home and taking 15 minutes to craft up a drink is currently being trumped by the convenience and quickness of whisky and ice in a Ball jar. Money and time have cruelly kept me from enjoying the drinks I so dearly love; the last place I thought these cocktails and I would get reacquainted was behind a hidden door tucked in the back of an obscure hotel in Knoxville, TN.





How we ended up at The Oliver Hotel is an infamous tale that will forever live in our minds, but what we found there was an astonishing blend of hospitality, creativity, and debauchery. Just past the reception desk and to the right sits an unmarked, handleless, white wood slab door. Slide the door to your right and you walk from the bright, chipper, family friendly lobby, into a dimly lit wonderland of wood paneling, plush low back booths, and a bar organized like some kind of shrine to booze.

The southerners call this a speakeasy; I called it home, but the whisky pouring woman behind the bar tells us it's called The Peter Kern Library. The history of the space is clouded in a few different stories. From what we gather, at some point a German cobbler comes to America, opens a confectionery/bakery in Knoxville, and at a later time a library and sex dungeon are located within the walls of what today is The Oliver Hotel. Thankfully they chose the former when naming the bar. Bookshelves and a fireplace sit warmly at one end of the space, and a well stocked bar with a painting of Kern, hangs at the other. The room is a Mad Men-esq step back in time, where the only element missing is some cigar smoke and a burlesque hussy.

The space is enough to draw you in, and it's cocktails are enough to keep you there well past midnight. Hidden within the hallowed pages of old encyclopedias, the menu is meticulously crafted with selections of cocktails long forgotten, as well as classic interpretations from the head of the owner and bartender, Jessica Rabbit. You can find this girl slinging drinks composed of ingredients you weren't even aware you could consume, for only \$9.00. And after you stumble home, you'll also probably find her in your dreams, as she's got a personality like an old western movie hussy. Don't let that southern charm and smile fool ya; in this life she is hustling behind the bar, but we could see her in some past-time, with a pistol in a garter, hustling men's hearts along the way. She brews her own bitters; she has a notebook composed of drink sketches, and she can shake a cocktail like it owes her money.

My grandfather once told me he always orders another beer about the time he's halfway done with the one he's on. Simply put, he never wanted to be left empty handed. When dealing with fresh squeezed juices, egg whites, and apothecary jars of unmarked liquids, the process of constructing one Peter Kern cocktail can go over the 10 minute mark. So save the bartenders the stress of you leaning over the bar and finger tapping in anticipation. Instead, sip what ya got slowly, enjoy its subtleties, and do yourself the favor of cuing up a second cocktail before you see the bottom your current glass.

Rachel Says:

Evan's business cards say: Writer. Thinker. Drinker.

My business cards say: Writer. Dreamer. Nerd.

And with The Peter Kern library, it was as if we had landed in a place that ~~l~~ew lived our identities. This vacation, which was more an off-the-cuff desire for both of us to escape an endless work schedule, could not have been more perfect, if we had planned it for months.





The Peter Kern library had me at the name library, and then the drinks were hidden in encyclopedias? Be still my nerd heart. But maybe when I realized this was something more, was the second time we went back (ummm we went three, maybe four times in two days). We were alone with Jessica, and Evan was in his own world taking pictures of the amazing space. There, in this moment, I met a woman who lived, breathed, and moved with the kind of grace and power that I've only ever dreamt about.

She pulled out her journal while we were sitting there, and then she made us a drink that she had first sketched dreamed in there, in her book. The drink was amazing, but that wasn't the point. Right in front of me, I witnessed a woman who was bringing her dreams to fruition and standing behind them. She admitted that, "Creativity is not usually well accepted," and added that in her business, "Recipes that can be accounted for stifle creativity."

So there she was dreaming up creative drinks, writing them down, and then confidently placing them behind the bar. Certainly, this is what the Average Enthusiast wants for everyone, the courage to believe in yourself, the courage to know you've got something amazing to offer. And while maybe, what Evan needed on this trip was a good drink and a place to relax, what I needed was to be reminded that dreams are meant to live in journals only for so long. The best dreams need to be shaken, poured out, and stood behind. My name is Rachel Smith. Average Enthusiast is my dream.