




MIXOLOGY

Master Class

THE PETER KERN LIBRARY
IS A STUDY IN COCKTAIL CRAFT

BY NATE ROGERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE VAUGHN



A photograph of a textured wall, possibly made of brick or concrete, with a red light fixture mounted on it. The light is glowing, casting a red glow on the wall. To the right, a black door is visible, partially obscured by the text. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the red light being the primary source of illumination.

Tucked away behind a moving wall inside the Oliver Hotel and accessible only by heading down an alley to a black door marked by a lone red light,

the Peter Kern Library is the anchor of Knoxville's craft cocktail scene. The bar has been going strong for six years in this college town in a whiskey state that's otherwise just catching up to the cocktail craze.

Maybe the Kern's longevity comes from the staff's love of crafting classic gin cocktails, or their incredibly thorough absinthe selection. Or maybe it's the atmosphere, says manager and bartender Kevin Armstrong: "It's just warm and cozy and time stops." That's thanks to dark wood, rows of books, and plush communal seating with cocktail service, bookended by a fireplace and the bar itself.

Despite the throwback atmosphere, Armstrong acknowledges that the staff's attention to detail is partly inspired by something undeniably modern: Instagram. Every photo of #cocktails beckons friends to the bar. The key to a share-worthy libation? The garnish. "I would rather a drink taste right than look right every time, but I think presentation is really important and the garnishment's really important—not just to be a garnish but to be part of the drink," says Armstrong. "For the Holly Golightly, the garnish is just a garnish, so I kind of contradict myself there. But that one's really playful anyway."





A portrait of eponym Peter Kern hangs behind the bar, overseeing the nightly festivities.

Drinks named after literary characters are all part of a theme that nods to the bar's history-rich location. It's hidden in a building that used to house Peter Kern's namesake bakery, which eventually became a hotel. That hotel, which had a library, is now the Oliver Hotel, and that library is now the Peter Kern Library bar. Mr. Kern, by the way, was known for throwing parties in Market Square and later became the mayor of Knoxville. Today, his portrait hangs behind the bar—quite the honor for a politician.

Here, the encyclopedia is a must-read: it has been modified to house the bar's literary-themed drink menus. The most popular drink is the Holly Golightly, made with house-infused raspberry-strawberry vodka and topped with prosecco. In second place: "Twenty-five percent of our drinks are probably Old Fashioneds," says Armstrong. "Some people argue that it's the first classic cocktail."

Whether your tastes are classic or contemporary, there's sure to be a drink for you. "Some people come in here not knowing what they like, and other people come in here who have been to hundreds of cocktail bars all over the world and they want to compare classics," says Armstrong. Custom creations for patrons can even be found in a handwritten book that the bartenders keep hidden behind the bar. With the right order, you just might be written into Kern's story.

FEATURED DRINKS



Holly Golightly

"It basically funds our bar"

- ◆ Strawberry & raspberry infused vodka
- ◆ Lavender liqueur
- ◆ Fresh lime juice
- ◆ House-made strawberry bitters
- ◆ Topped with prosecco
- ◆ Shaken and served in a martini glass
- ◆ Garnished with a single raspberry



Roland Deschain

"A boozy, warm-you-up cocktail"

- ◆ Ryemageddon Rye Whiskey (made with chocolate malted rye)





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- ◆ Ryemageddon Rye Whiskey (made with chocolate malted rye)
- ◆ Grand Marnier
- ◆ Dolin Rouge Vermouth
- ◆ Peychaud’s Bitters
- ◆ Aromatic bitters
- ◆ Stirred and served in a snifter
- ◆ Garnished with orange peel, set on the rim just so

Old Fashioned

“Some people argue that it’s the first classic cocktail.”

- ◆ Rye whiskey
- ◆ Turbinado simple syrup
- ◆ House-made orange bitters
- ◆ Aromatic bitters
- ◆ Maraschino cherry
- ◆ Stirred and served in a rocks glass
- ◆ Garnished with a flamed orange peel for aromatics—and for show

