

Mixology with Matthew Biancaniello

Ologies Podcast

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Oh heeyyy, ologites. It's your dry cleaner who never judges your pit stains, Alie Ward, back for another episode of Ologies. So, winter celebrations are here, merriment is to be had, gatherings are gathering, you've got some weekdays off and you're expected to spend them in your pajamas. So I thought, "Why not an episode on liquid curiosities?"

Speaking of celebrations, really quick, up top— Happy birthday to Hannah Lipow, dear friend, admin of the Ologies Facebook group. We all love you very much. Deal with it. Also, more business before we get to the episode, thank you to all the patrons on [Patreon.com/ologies](https://patreon.com/ologies). Thanks to anyone who gets merch at [OlogiesMerch.com](https://ologiesmerch.com). Thank you for keeping Ologies solid in the ol' science charts by tweeting, and 'gramming, and telling your relatives, and subscribing, and rating and reviewing, which you know I creepily peruse because your reviews are hilarious and they perk me up. Then I read you a fresh one so you know I'm not just whistling very creepy Dixie. This week, Abikai says:

Straight up my therapist told me about this podcast when I was complaining about my pervasive news addiction. Thanks for saving me from reading way too many political articles.

Straight up advice from the therapist! [*applause*]

Okay, mixology. Let's get into it. First, let's tackle this etymology, because mixology is not a word used by mixologists a lot. Although it seems like it was a term that was just invented in the last decade with the resurgence of these Prohibition-era classics and cocktails and the resurgence of semi-ironic mustaches, it is actually a throwback to an earlier time. Before we had delights like indoor plumbing and vaccines, cocktail books and newspapers from the 1860s used phrases like, "Mixologists of fluid excitements," to describe bartenders. Then, in the 1980s, in an era when screwdrivers and Seagram's and Diet Pepsi were all the rage, a New York bartender named Dale DeGroff started bringing back old-timey recipes, and he started calling himself a mixologist just to impress the press and... it worked. But, maybe in the last handful of years, some suspended craft cocktailers took themselves a little too seriously and maybe gave the term mixology a bad name. We will discuss.

Anyway, this guest is one of the most highly respected cocktail makers in the country. His backstory is as riveting and inspiring as his advice. I met him about seven years ago. I was working with the Cooking Channel making and reviewing cocktail recipes and I tried a battery of his drinks at the Library Bar, which is in the very swank, very haunted vibe-y Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood. I'd never had a drink like his, *ever*. Stinging nettle-infused gin, mushroom-infused artichoke liqueur, pinecone infused into elderflower cocktails, quail eggs as a garnish... his drinks are like *Mad Libs* that somehow make sense in your mouth.

After years of building this reputation at the Library Bar and consulting at a bunch of restaurants, this past October he finally opened his much-anticipated own bar, Mon Li, serving up 12-course

dining and drinking pairings at the Calamigos Beach Club. It's right on Pacific Coast Highway, an actual stone's throw literally, from the ocean. His view from the bar is just this glittering Pacific, and then to his back is Solstice Canyons and the mountains of Malibu. It's gorgeous.

So, I visited him just this past weekend, a few days ago. I walked the grounds and he recounted that about a month after opening his dream bar, he had a night to remember:

Matthew: ...and it's amazing because that Thursday night I was going into my fifth week of service, the winds were ripping and I was just loving it. The windows were open and it was just beautiful. But you had that sense of that fire out there.

In early November, weeks after opening Mon Li, the Woolsey Fire swept through the canyon, and it destroyed 1,600 structures. It took three lives. It also consumed a portion of the Calamigos Beach Club. So, on Saturday we stepped over hunks of charred furniture and crunched over broken glass to the rear of the property to see that flames scorched the back of the restaurant, shattering glass, melting door knobs. But, thank you to firefighters, his little bar was spared. Just made it by a literal inch:

Alie: Even the rafters are charred a little bit.

Matthew: Oh yeah, no question about it. This was seconds from going up. No question about it.

The electric wires serving the property all melted and it's going to take months to clean out the burned down structures on the property, but that doesn't really keep him away.

Alie: So wait, now how much time are you spending here?

Matthew: Still?

Alie: Yeah.

Matthew: I can't help it. I come three or four days a week. I just love to sit in my bar. It's like a monastery. The whole thing it's like, when you build something you can't just walk away. Even if it's in disarray.

He opened up the bar for me and it's still in perfect condition. We took seats at a high-top table looking out at the ocean and the Pacific Coast Highway, which was buzzing with Saturday motorcyclists and SUVs carrying surfboards.

So, this ologist has been making drinks for over a decade, hosted the A&E cocktail travel show called *Good Spirits*, and wrote the book *Eat Your Drink*. We talked about his history, how he approaches the American cocktail, his own relationship to booze, his relationship to the word, "Mixology," how to make a good drink at home, how to do your own thing even if it seems weird to others at first. So, saddle up for the wit, the wisdom, and the whimsy of bartender, cocktail chef, and um, [*voice rises hesitantly*] mixologist, Matthew Biancaniello.

Matthew Biancaniello: The way I pronounce my last name, it's funny, if I say it the real Italian way, [phonetic: "Bee ahn kah NEE ELL oh"] Biancaniello, it's almost like someone who says, [ph. "Kwa-son"] croissant. [Alie laughs] You know what I mean? So I always feel a bit funny. The *correct* pronunciation is [ph: "Bee anh kah NEE ELL oh"] Biancaniello, but when I try to just talk, it's [ph. "Bee ahn kah NELL oh"] Biancaniello.

Alie Ward: Okay. You gotta use ya haaaands a little.

Matthew: Exactly. I was brought up more Greek than I was Italian.

Alie: Oh, you were?

Matthew: Even though I'm 50-50, I was brought up more on my Greek side.

Alie: Oh, I didn't know that! And now, where were you born?

Matthew: I was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, but grew up mostly in Boston. The Belmont and Cambridge area.

Alie: So, your accent has a little Boston?

Matthew: It's that and New York for nine years, too, because my father's from Brooklyn. So, I think I have a mix of that because I lived there for nine years. But it's weird, [laughs] people will say, "Are you from Portugal?" I'm like, "Where do you get that?!" [laughter]

Alie: How long have you been in L.A.?

Matthew: 18 years.

Alie: 18 years?!

Aside: Side note, 18 years in L.A. is like the scientific equivalent to four decades in any other city. Trust me. So, Matthew moved out here thinking there'd just be gobs of work in advertising sales, but he also pursued a bunch of passion projects like writing and directing a short film called *The Breadbasket*, which was based on some of his own experiences. It was about a man struggling with body dysmorphia. But to make art in L.A., you also have to pay the bills. So, what did he do? Did he wait tables? No. Nope, nope.

Matthew: I was kinda just trying to figure it out, so I didn't really get into what I'm doing until 10 years ago. For eight years, I was doing all kinds of crazy shit. My brother was the director of Michael Jackson's zoo, so I would do animal training with him. I'd pick up animals, like venomous snakes, from the airport in a wooden box. I've had a black mamba next to me for two hours in a box. I was like, "Okay..."

Alie: Whaat?

Matthew: I got into wanting to make underwater films at the time, and then I did these crazy eating stunts.

Alie: I heard that you have eaten cow eyeballs and chicken feet.

Matthew: I did all these things. I had made a film called *The Breadbasket*, which is actually a colloquial term in New York for your stomach. I made this film all about a guy who's kinda obsessed with his stomach and I needed the money to finish it. What happened was, my brother had the Guinness world record for being covered by the most bees at one point.

Alie: WHAT?!

Matthew: Yeah, like, 450,000. Now someone has a million. I don't know how they got up to that, because it's insane how they do it. It's all about money for these things. So, he was gonna do something with leeches and I was like, "He's getting \$10,000 to be covered by... this is ridiculous!" I remember I went up to the producer and I said, "I'll eat anything." He goes, "Oh, that's nice, that's nice." So, I waited for my brother to kinda do his stunt— I didn't wanna rain on his parade. I went over, I grabbed a handful of leeches [*clip from Stand By Me, "Leech... LEECHES!"*] and I put 'em behind my back. I went up to the producer and said, "No, I'm serious, I'll eat anything," and I took them live, threw them in my mouth and swallowed them. [*snaps fingers*] He jumped back like 10 feet. He goes, "You'll be hearing from us." Within three weeks I was on Hollywood Boulevard at three in the morning, in front of the Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum, eating all this disgusting stuff.

Alie: Oh my god!

Matthew: And I did it so well that I got picked up and I went on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and all this stuff. I made like \$30,000 in six months, and that was in 2000, 2001. I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna finish my film and I don't have to worry about working." So that all came out, until I was on the old Steve Harvey Show [*Steve Harvey: "You've got the wrong damn daytime show! I'm just trying to work a joke in here!"*] and I had to eat raw chicken feet.

Alie: Oh god, no.

Matthew: And I got so sick that I've been sensitized forever, which is a good thing, don't get me wrong. But I had such a high white blood cell count that— I was just sick and they never aired the episode because they heard about that. They were probably worried about getting sued or something like that.

Alie: Oh my god, were you in the hospital?

Matthew: No, I wouldn't go! I don't know what it was. I was living in Burbank at the time and I was just ill. I never told my father what I was doing, but he said, "Why did you eat raw chicken?" I said, "Well, I just wanted to see how it tasted." I was the kid, growing up,

where someone would be like, "I dare you to eat that potato chip off the ground with the worm on it," and I'm like, "Okay."

Alie: Oh no.

Matthew: It was easy for me.

Aside: Quick PSA from your ol' Dad Ward von Podcast here. Please don't eat raw worms. Never eat a raw slug or snail. Come on, kiddos. Google, 'rat lungworm'. It can literally kill you. If you've gotta eat a slug just, I dunno, microwave it first. If anyone is your real friend, then they will like you even if you don't eat a raw slug to impress them. *[singing]* The more you knooooow!

Alie: So, you were in L.A. just doing everything?

Matthew: I was doing so many different things. I actually worked for this art guy who sold erotic art. *[sultry jazz saxophone]* I was like, "Shit, what the hell am I gonna do?" I just did so many random things.

Alie: Now, you started working at the Library Bar at the Roosevelt.

Matthew: Exactly 10 years ago.

Alie: Because that's where I first had your drinks.

Matthew: Yeah, oh yeah!

Alie: I remember being like, "This person is a wizard. These aren't normal cocktails." *[laughter]* When you started at the Library Bar, did you ever bartend before?

Matthew: I never really bartended. I think I did a few catering events where you're just doing like, Jack 'n Cokes and vodka sodas. I do remember my first night I was with this woman, Jamie, who was working there. I had to duck down and literally say to her, "What's in a cosmopolitan?" *[Alie laughs]* Because I didn't know! The only reason why I got the job is I knew the manager through yoga. She was like, "Listen, I have this opening at the Library Bar. It's very slow and might be good for you to start." I'm like, "Okay, I'll do it." It was crazy because that's what happened and pretty quickly I was like, "Yeah, these drinks don't seem like they're worth \$15 or \$16, so let me just start replacing them with fresh stuff." That was kinda the beginning of it.

I remember one day she tried one of my drinks and goes, "What the hell is in this? This is amazing!" Well, I just put in fresh pomegranate juice. She goes, "Are you buying this out of your own pocket?" I go, "Yeah." She goes, "I'll start reimbursing you." She was giving me \$100 a week but I was spending \$400 a week. I spent about \$8,000 out of my own pocket that first year. I knew nothing about alcohol. I would slowly get these things and educate myself, but it was really the farmer's market which was the biggest education. I grew up on the east coast, now I was seeing stuff I'd never seen before. It

was kind of instantaneous and I think, because I didn't have any training, I didn't think about right or wrong. I just did it.

I read about the daiquiri and I said to myself, "Oh, wait a second. Okay, this is a daiquiri: it's rum, lime, and sugar. If I take out the rum and put in tequila, it's a margarita. If I take out the rum and put gin, it's a gimlet. If I put in mint, it's a mojito." A huge lightbulb went off [*ding*] and I really just stuck with the daiquiri for the first two or three years. I think everybody thought, "Oh my god, look what he's doing!" But what I was really doing was a daiquiri in every drink. [*Alie laughs*] But, where my passion came from was finding these ingredients and mixing these unusual flavors.

Aside: From there it's just a formula and you can tweak the flavors and the infusions and the base spirit. Just get weird. Just get a little wacky. The world is your smoky mezcal, wheatgrass, elderflower foam, sour pickled button mushrooms, mustard blossom, and spicy arugula flowers oyster shooter cocktail. In Matthew's case. And that is a real recipe.

Matthew: It became kind of a free-for-all for me, and it really escalated quickly. I mean, I can't believe how quickly I got attention in a short period of time for doing that, you know? Because if I was to do that now it would never be the same. I didn't think about a void in the market, I just thought, "This is all I know."

Alie: Well, I guess there was kind of a cocktail revolution. I feel like *Sex and the City* awakened people to the cosmo. [*Carrie Bradshaw: "Yes, I'd like a cheeseburger, please, large fries and a cosmopolitan?"*] [*Matthew laughs*] And then there were apple martinis, with Apple Pucker in it. And then something happened, like, 2006 or something, where...

Matthew: It also started at Milk and Honey in New York, around 2005 or so. That's what started it. They started recreating classic cocktails in the real way, which is how they did it in Prohibition, with the ice, the fresh juice. But for me, none of that stuff really appealed to me. I was kind of on my own island, but I love all these fresh things. That was more appealing to me.

Alie: How do you feel about the term, 'Mixology'? Because it's so loaded. It's the title of this episode, like tongue-in-cheek, but it's such a hated term!

Matthew: You know, I don't have the same hatred. I kinda have more of a dismissal thing about it. I don't really call myself that. If someone introduces me as a mixologist, which they do all the time, I don't need to correct them. The quicker I just let it dissolve, the better. [*Alie laughs*] I don't really give any attention to it either way.

I always considered myself more of a chef. Those were the people that I was identifying with. Those were the people I was talking to. Those were the people I was seeing at the farmer's market. I wasn't really talking to bartenders and I don't really go out. One reason is I don't really drink that much and the other reason is I never wanted to be influenced. I wanted it to come from me naturally, and I think I still have a little bit of that. I still feel like there's so much more inside of me. I don't wanna be influenced out

there and have someone say, “Oh my god, he got that from...” I wanna deal with what’s inside of me first.

So, those are the two components, but I loved when chefs used to come to me like, “What are you gonna do with THAT?” I love that! Like, “What are you gonna do with that emu egg?” Stuff like that.

Alie: What *did* you do with an emu egg?

Matthew: I think the drink that I did, I used the actual egg for the vessel. But what was great at the Library Bar—this was always January through March—when the restaurant closed at midnight, people were hungry. I would take the emu egg back and have them scramble it up, just on the house. One egg would feed six people, [*Alie laughs*] so I would just feed the whole bar with this emu egg. And I realized how creamy it was, how rich it was, so that escalated to me making egg-nogs with it. And the shell is so beautiful.

Alie: I know, it’s like a dragon egg! So, you mentioned that you don’t drink, and I know that about you, but that always kinda surprised and honestly kinda impressed me because I know that there are a lot of people who are cocktail chefs, who are maybe in it because of a certain lifestyle, but that never seemed to be you.

Matthew: No. [*laughs*] You know what it is? My mom, and she hates that I keep saying this, [*annoying Mom voice*] “How many times are you going to keep talking about your Mom?!” But I say it because it was a very profound thing. My mom was such a hardcore alcoholic that it really just turned me off. I remember even just going on a date with a woman, if I smelled alcohol on her breath, it was a turn off, you know? I think that was the beginning of that, and I just never felt great on it. I do enjoy certain things, probably wine a little bit more. But I love the creation of it.

What happened, too, was that a year and a half into doing what I was doing—I still remember this woman because I see her on Facebook. She was taking pictures of my drinks and she was savoring them and she was going crazy, and I looked up and a huge lightbulb went off inside of me where I was like, “Oh my god. You are unconsciously re-scripting your relationship to alcohol. You’re making it beautiful. You’re making it something that you savor.” All of those memories of alcoholism and what I thought alcohol represented were gone forever.

Alie: Wow!

Matthew: So, I never looked at alcohol the same. I didn’t care if I had it or not. That’s what’s great about alcohol is that I can be one of those guys that can have a drink and not worry about it. But see, I was always that way. I’m gonna tell you a crazy story. I didn’t try drugs until I was 23 years old, and the first drug I did was heroin in New York.

Alie: WHAT?!

Matthew: I know, everyone's like, "What the fuck you talkin' about?" I said, "No, you don't understand. I tried heroin, I loved it, I did it for six weeks straight. Everyone I did it with went down the toilet, and then I got out of it. I just walked away one day and I was fine." I used to run on it. Crazy! You know what I mean? This was in New York when you could buy it for \$5 in Alphabet City. So, it was one of those things where I had that kind of personality where I love to dive into something but I can dive out.

Alie: Oh my god.

Matthew: So, I was lucky.

Alie: Sooo lucky. Also, 0 to 60, on that! Slow your roll!

Matthew: *[laughs]* Yeah, big time. And I think I had pot a few times and was like, "This is stupid," and then, "I don't care about drugs," you know?

Alie: Oh my god. And you've definitely had some ups and downs in your life. You're such a survival story.

Matthew: Oh yeah, big time. Lots of things.

Aside: So, Matthew went from swallowing leeches and even living in his car for a quick spell to becoming the most respected cocktail maker in the city, and an author, and a TV host, and then in command of his own Tony Malibu spot, all just by finding something that he was curious and really passionate about and then *pouring* himself into it. And I swear that was not an intentional pun.

Okay now listen up, because this may be the most useful mixology lesson you can ever learn. You can never make a bland or syrupy gross drink again if you know this.

Alie: How did you dive in to try to understand the craft of cocktails? It sounds like you started looking into daiquiris and realized, okay, there's a formula. There's math here and it's plug and play, right? What are the basic ratios of that?

Matthew: It's very simple. It's always two ounces of spirit, three-quarter lime, three-quarter agave. If you're just doing it on its own, you would up the lime to one.

Aside: An easy way to remember this is the golden ratio: roughly two to one to one. Two parts spirit, one part sweet (like a liqueur or some kind of simple syrup), and one part tart (like lemon, lime, or grapefruit). Two to one to one. You can make almost any cocktail a good one at home for almost free. And then, when you go to fancy speakeasies like L.A.'s Varnish or New York's Death & Company, you'll be able to nod at the mixologist in a way that says, "I know your tricks. You're a math nerd."

Matthew: I remember one time, this guy got me the specs from The Varnish for all of their classic drinks. I looked at it and was like, "Okay, I can see what they're doing. I can see some patterns here. I can see what they do when they do a straight thing." So that just kinda strengthened it. In terms of technique, I still feel like I don't really have technique.

Alie: Really?

Matthew: Yeah, I still think I lack that, if I'm being honest. It's not that I don't have some technique, but I think what's interesting about where I'm at right now is that there's still so much to learn. I think it was also Dale DeGroff's book, *The Essential Cocktail*. I ended up getting that book and I got to read why he did certain things: the stirring, the shaking, all that. I adapted that stuff. But no one taught me! There I am, trying to stir, and I couldn't do it with the spoon, so I had to bend it into a C-shape! I took the metal spoon and bent it so that it was easy for me to stir!

Alie: [laughs]

Matthew: It also got to the point when I started doing some consulting and I would tell people, "You know what? You don't need to worry about that right now. Let's just get a metal chopstick and it's the same thing. Just get used to stirring it." So, I got sympathetic and interested in teaching people that knew nothing. It was more interesting to me than someone who had technique already. But I still feel like I don't really have a strong technique.

Alie: That's funny that you say that, because I think you're widely regarded as probably one of the best cocktail chefs in the country. Easy. Hands down. You're just at the top of the pyramid for sure. How do you feel about cocktail culture and the buttoned vest, sneery-faced, suspender-clad...

Matthew: Well, I understood where it started from. I'm not even referring to the vest, because I think it's nice for people to look nice. I understand all that. But I really do think that as time went by, a lot of the attitudes that people had, and the feeling superior... it kinda killed the culture a lot. I really feel like when drinks started escalating, people were more, "Ugh" about it. You know what I mean? I feel like some of that really destroyed some of the culture of cocktails and how they should be regarded, I guess.

People would tell me stories, like, they'd go into a bar and they'd ask for this drink and they didn't really like it, and the bartender would be like, "That drink is perfect." [Alie laughs] The thing is, that's the opposite of how I operate. I operate all on, "I am going to make this drink for you until you tell me it's great." I would horrify people where I'd make a drink and I could see it in their face—I would grab it out of their hand and dump it. [Alie laughs] They didn't understand that! They'd be like, "That's booze!" I don't think of it that way, and I would dump it.

So, there's a lot of layers in that, and the biggest challenge for me was to just stay true to who I was even though some of the time it was like, fuuuck, you know? Difficult. And I never wavered from what I did. That was always important to me. I never wavered from what I was doing. I still have never been in a bar, and you think about *this* bar is really only truly the second bar I've ever worked in! [Alie laughs] If you really think, in 10 years—I worked at The Library Bar for four-and-a-half years, and I worked here in service for four weeks.

Aside: So, Matthew clearly took his own path to get good at what he does. Also, just because this is a fun place to do it, here's a quick whisky breakdown for anyone who gets confused but doesn't want to admit it, which was me for a long time. So, a whisky is distilled from grain. It's aged in barrels, although corn whisky, (aka moonshine) does not have to be aged. Scotch whisky is made in Scotland. Bourbon is a type of predominantly corn whisky, aged in new charred white oak barrels. Rye is a type of aged whisky made with predominantly rye grains. So, if someone's like, "What'll it be?" and you're like, "Well, I'm a grown-up, so I'd like one bourbon scotch," just know, bourbon scotch isn't a thing. Also, just be yourself. Order what you want. We're all just doing our best, okay?

Alie: Was there ever a moment where you had to write out, "This is a whisky, this is not a whisky, this is a type of whisky, bourbon is a type of whisky..."

Matthew: I had to do that for trainings. I had to educate myself on alcohol with my palate, because most of the stuff I tried I'd be like, "This is disgusting." Oh my god, I'd be like, "Ugh!" So I got to learn to love scotch, I got to learn mezcal. All of these things that I know people really, really love, they weren't in my wheelhouse at all. Alcohol just seemed gross to me a lot of times.

Alie: Really?

Matthew: Yeah. A lot of palates, I know for a fact, can be developed. If I could develop a palate for alcohol, I know people could develop palates for anything. because that was so out of my realm of something I would enjoy. I remember also, my father had gotten remarried, and I think I had nine Jack 'n Cokes at his wedding, and I was just throwing up like crazy. I was shit, what was I, 25? I wasn't that young, but that's the kind of shit I remember. You used it just to get drunk, and here I was doing something which was more about the experience, the palate.

Aside: So, Matthew changed his view of alcohol from something that just gets you sloppy hammered to essentially a liquid art supply that one can drink and eat. He started getting more and more into the intersection of food and alcohol, doing alcoholic ice creams and savory cocktails like chamomile-infused rum with cherry tomatoes and apple mint and lemon balm. He made an icy-cold goat milk and tequila with black cardamom. He even made an alcoholic smoked garlic soup. Just doin' his own thing keeps him excited about his work.

Matthew: The other thing is, not going out and not being around that community, it allowed me to keep my passion strong. I didn't want my passion to dissipate. I isolated myself for that reason. I have just as much if not more, than when I started.

Alie: Oh, that's good.

Matthew: That hasn't died, and that is because I preserved it.

Alie: What would you do if you're at the Library Bar, you've got a plate of fresh herbs and you've got hand-picked mushrooms you've foraged, and then someone comes up and they're like, [*Valley Girl voice*] "Can I get a Red Bull and vodka?"

Matthew: In the beginning it bothered me. It really did. What I ended up doing was reverse psychology. The first thing is I got rid of Red Bull, so they didn't have that option. And I would be nice about it! I'd be like, "I don't have it," and they'd be like, "What do you mean, you don't have Red Bull?" So, they would ask for a Bloody Mary, a dirty martini, or a Long Island iced tea. And I thought, "I can make my version of that," because that's something they have a point of reference to. If I can make my version of that, make it great, they will trust me with anything I do, and that's what happened! So, a kid would come in and be like, "Yeah, can I have a dirty martini?" and I'd make my dirty Sicilian. They'd be like, "What the fuck is this? This is amazing!"

Aside: Quick question, "What's in a dirty Sicilian," you ask? I had to know. It's Matthew's dirty martini. It involves garlic, fresh olive juice, oregano, red pepper flakes, and some fresh oregano buds. It's like sippin' a pizza!

Matthew: And now I got them to try anything. They trusted me.

Alie: What about a Long Island iced tea? That was actually literally on my list. Has anyone ever ordered a Long Island from you?

Matthew: No question about it, and that's why I started making an incredible Long Island! I even did it when I consulted for Roy Choi when he opened The Line. I did organic cachaça, Akvavit, [*Alie laughs*] mezcal, all these things, and I did it with fresh blood orange juice instead of Coke.

Alie: Oh my god.

Matthew: You just reminded me, there was this one guy who would come in and he would say specifically, "Do you have that *seasonal* Long Island iced tea?" [*laughs*] I'm like, "You just made my year calling this a seasonal Long Island iced tea!"

Alie: Do you think your yoga training helped you be patient with patrons?

Matthew: No question. No question about it.

Aside: You know what? Let's hop in a time machine. Let's grab a bag of context about ye olde history of cocktails.

Matthew: So, the first cocktail really went way, way back. People don't realize that cocktails are really our true culinary contribution to the world. The cocktail was born here.

Alie: Really?

Matthew: Absolutely. Around 1860 or so, it came out of New Orleans, the Sazerac really being one of the first cocktails. People don't realize that the reason why it spread is when

Prohibition came and these bartenders couldn't work here, they went to Europe and other places and they spread their knowledge. That's how the cocktail started to spread.

Aside: A Sazerac, by the by, is a stirred drink made with absinthe (just a lil' bit), a sugar cube, rye whisky or cognac, and a few dashes of these pink anise-y floral Peychaud's Bitters, which are local to New Orleans. They're so good. Whenever I've had a Sazerac, I always feel like I should just bob my hair and do the Charleston and pine for a lover that went off to war.

Matthew: The thing that's significant about the Sazerac is it was originally made with cognac. I think at that time, maybe late 1800s or early 1900s, there was a major problem with drought in France and all those grapes were lost, so they stopped making cognac. That's why they started to put rye into the Sazerac. It was during Prohibition when they couldn't get rye here, that they were starting to get Canadian rye whisky. So that's the interesting thing about how this things came about. Most of these things, just in life, come about because of necessity. You lose something, you have to replace it, right? And that's what that was. I think a lot of people don't realize that there was a huge operation of rum coming out of New England. People don't realize that.

Alie: Rum was coming out of New England?

Matthew: Yeah! We had rum-runner boats...

Aside: Matthew got a first-hand look at some of this New England rum in a very weird place.

Matthew: I remember a random thing—I had been scuba diving for years, but I had to go get my license, because now they required that. Along with my girlfriend at the time there, we ended up getting certified out at JFK.

Alie: WHAT??

Matthew: Like, you would go down, there's no visibility, there was this cage, he's sitting there and he's doing your signals... But then we went on a night dive in Coney Island, and there were all these rum-runner boats. You could still find, in the wreck, bottles of rum that had been there in the 30s that people were smuggling. So, it's little things like that that I held onto that I loved, and that were interesting to me.

Aside: Matthew's general vibe of course, involves fresh ingredients and he does a lot of foraging for mushrooms, green walnut, purple sage, edible flowers, and thistles even. I just imagine he must trek out during misty mornings with a satchel, gathering herbs for tinctures, and man, I'm like, "Whoa! This dude's livin' the life." But also, before you grow a beard and start digging up roots, make sure that you have permission, because some foraging is technically illegal, and this whole fantasy would be a real buzzkill if you got arrested.

So, if you're looking for locally grown fruit, say from strangers' yards, you can check out FallingFruit.org, which maps overlaid shrubs and trees all over the world. Usually, if it hangs over a fence, it's fair game. I just zoomed in on my neighborhood and I found some bitter citrus. Then, I was surprised to see one tree in a parking lot, and I zoomed in and read that it was just the dumpster behind Trader Joe's, and there was a warning that there was razor wire surrounding it. Some people who map FallingFruit.org have very liberal definitions of foraging, but that's obviously not the kind of foraging Matthew is doing. He's got all kinds of cactus fruit and bay leaf and more growing wild nearby and on his property, plus what he's got in his restaurant gardens.

Matthew: It's a huge part of what I do, no question about it. I tell people, "I grow things, I go to the farmer's market, and I forage." That makes up the elements of what I do.

Alie: And you do a lot of infusions, too.

Matthew: Big time. It's still that way. I mean, if you look at the bar, it's escalated to other things. I'm doing a Parmesan vermouth. I was working on this liquid cheese board.

Alie: I read about this!

Matthew: You did?

Alie: Yeah, where you baked your own bread, made it into croutons, and then soaked it in an alcohol. You're Willy Wonka! You're the Willy Wonka of alcohol!

Matthew: *[laughs]* It's just how my mind thinks.

Alie: What kind of tips would you give to someone who wants to start infusing at home?

Matthew: The tip that I always give somebody is: take one ingredient that you love and do five or six different things with it. Let's say you grab basil. Do an infusion with it, make an oil out of it, muddle it, make a beer with it, whatever that is. Just take that and see how many things you can do with that one flavor, and that opens up your mind to everything. Infusing is very simple, by the way, you never have to worry about measurements. Take whatever empty glass jar you have, fill it three-quarters of the way with ingredients, and then cover it with alcohol. You never have to worry about a proportion. The basic rule is that most of that stuff will never over-infuse, although two weeks is perfect. But when you deal with tea or spice, that's literally two hours. You don't ever want to go over that. Those are the general rules, but it works for people.

Alie: What's been your favorite infusion you've ever done, or surprising like, "Oh, hot damn that worked!"

Matthew: I would say, no question about it, the sea moss from Saint Lucia.

Alie: The sea moss!

Matthew: It's not here right now, but it was actually my favorite drink of the menu as well here. I went to Saint Lucia about three years ago, and this sea moss is magical. It's just this briny, salty, ocean-y thing. I mixed it with mezcal, white balsamic vinegar, and huacatay, which is a black Peruvian mint, and I garnished it with peacock feathers. It's one of my favorite things. That infusion is just golden. I also love infusions where you're like, "What the hell is that? That's disgusting!" But then when you mix it, it's great. My favorite infusion to drink on its own is the white guava. It's like gold.

Alie: How do you do that?

Matthew: Take white guava, not the pink. The pink, people think that is gonna be more flavorful. There's so much flavor coming off of the skin, I just put them in whole. You don't have to cut them up. Take a jar, fill 'em up three-quarters of the way, and then I fill it with tequila.

Alie: Oh, dang!

Matthew: One of my favorite things.

Alie: Give it a couple weeks?

Matthew: Couple of weeks and then strain it out. It's this beautiful yellow, and the smell and taste... That's how I booked a \$12 million wedding.

Alie: Oh my god!

Matthew: Someone hired me just because they heard about me, right? And I went and did her bridal shower at Soho House. She was like, "Eh," all night with my drinks, "Eh." But she tried that [white guava-infused tequila] and goes, "You're doing my wedding."

Alie: Oh my god!

Matthew: And I didn't realize it was a \$12 million wedding. I mean, it was crazy.

Alie: [*incredulously*] 12 million dollars!?

Matthew: They had John Legend there and John Mayer... They hired and fired me twice.

Alie: [*laughs*] So, when you're making a cocktail or when you're thinking about 'The Perfect Cocktail', what kind of balance between sweet and bitter and sour do you think makes a good cocktail?

Matthew: It's not about bitter, sweet, or anything; it's all about balance. You can make anything great if you balance it. I truly believe that everything goes with everything. It's just about balance. Later on in life, I looked at this book called *The Flavor Bible*. They write about things that go well together, and then they write about things that *don't* go well together. And of course what I would do is, take those things and say, "I'm gonna show you how lavender and coffee can go together." You know what I mean?

Alie: Can they?

Matthew: Yeah, why not? But it's all about balance. If you're just starting off with the simple formula that I told you about, that's where you would start.

Aside: Okay, so remember, it's just math. Essentially, two to one to one. Two parts liquor, one part sweet, one part tart citrus. You can tweak it a little if it needs it.

Matthew: That's where you start with everything if it's bitter, sweet, whatever. Start with that formula and then adjust from there. That daiquiri formula is never gonna let you down, just in very simple terms.

Where I broke the rule is when I did the Last Tango in Modena, which is why that was such an iconic drink for me for a lot of different reasons. It had balsamic vinegar and strawberry, but that drink represented so much for me because it was the first time I broke the rules of not doing the three-quarter, three-quarter, and not using lime juice or sweetener. I used just that balsamic, and I used an ounce of it.

But that is the drink that made me also get rid of a menu for the rest of my life, because a woman came in and she said, "Could you make me something sweet but not too sweet?" So, I made her that and she goes, "Oh my god, this is the best drink I've ever had. What's in it?" I go, "Well, it's got strawberries and gin and balsamic vinegar," and she goes, "Balsamic vinegar? I *hate* balsamic vinegar! [*Alie laughs*] Can you make me something else?" I said, "You just told me it's the best drink you've ever had!" She goes, "I know, but I *hate* balsamic vinegar."

What I realized is how much people taste in their head, but also how much they associate the things they don't like with food, and it's very different in liquid form. It's happened even during the last four weeks of service here at Mon Li. People are like, "Okay, I don't like that." I'm like, "Can you just try it in this form?" Then they're like, "Oh my god, that's great," and it's because the texture's taken out of it, or things are taken out of it that's not associated with the food element, so they can actually love it in the liquid form.

Which is what I love because I do believe that the liquid form is the most powerful form. When I was doing a lot of dinners with Roberto Cortez, this amazing chef, he would say, "The juice of a steak is so much more powerful than the actual steak." And he's right! The flavor that gets trapped in there is incredible, and I realized that's what was happening. When you have alcohol, the reason why the infusions are so great is that it's adding a layer that you just can't do in food to that extent, where you can have something layered but then add all these other things. It's difficult.

Aside: At one point, Matthew made a Bloody Mary with beet horseradish and then started using that in other drinks, like his borage flower-topped gin and cucumber drink called the Breeder's Cup.

Matthew: And I made that drink and here's the thing that's funny: I didn't try that drink for a month and a half.

Alie: Why not?

Matthew: Because I knew it was great, [*quietly*] but I don't like horseradish. [*laughter*] That's the other thing I try to tell people. I actually can make drinks for people that I would never drink, flavor-wise. I don't know where all this came from, how I think and the culinary aspect of it, because I got to the point where I was tasting so much in my head, I didn't even need to try it.

Alie: You could just figure it out.

Matthew: One of my famous bites here was a sea urchin bite that I did with a vanilla-infused Akvavit, smoked soy sauce, and then I juiced the cactus fruit and made granita out of it, on top, so it's like an uni snow cone. I didn't try that for the first month. People were like, "I don't understand." I'm like, "I know it's good."

Aside: His bar still has this array of jars filled with booze and fruit, kind of like a very stylish museum of natural history, but the specimen jars are vastly more edible than rubbery sharks in formaldehyde. I can see why he just comes here to tinker, even when the place is temporarily shuttered.

Matthew: I turned 50 this year and on my 50th birthday, nobody knew I was here the whole day by myself. I didn't tell anybody. I cooked for myself and it was the greatest day of my life.

Alie: Oh, that's great! [*laughs*] And I notice, you look at your bar, and your bar does not have shelves of alcohol. It has jars infusing.

Matthew: I'm a distributor's nightmare. Like, "What do you mean? Where's my Grey Goose? Where's this?!"

Alie: Yeah, you don't see any bottles of alcohol.

Matthew: What I always wanted was, when someone would ask me, "What would be your ideal bar?" I'd say, "Well, it'd be Italian farm kitchen meets Japanese sushi bar."

Aside: So, if you wanna entertain folks but you don't happen to own a bar, what do you do? You do math!

Alie: What do you tell people who, let's say, are having holiday parties. How do they stock for a party? How much booze do you get if you're throwing a dinner party?

Matthew: Depends on the people. Each bottle is about 12 cocktails, because it's two ounces, right? And I always figure it'll be two or three drinks per person, at least. If you have 50 people, then I know I have to have about 150 cocktails to be safe. 150 into 12 is approximately 12 bottles. You could do different things. 12 times 12 is 144, so you're very close to that.

Aside: Of course, adjust this down for smaller parties. I do not have 50 friends. And if you don't want to be shaking drinks in the kitchen all night...

Matthew: The other thing is, you could make a killer punch, which is a very simple recipe. I learned this a long time ago. The rhyme is, "Four strong, four weak, one sour, one sweet." Four strong would be the alcohol. Four weak would be some kind of juice like pomegranate or blood orange. One sweet is one cup of agave syrup or sugar syrup, and then one cup of citrus.

Aside: Tart citrus, like lemon or lime juice, not just a glug of Sunny Delight.

Matthew: If you follow that, you're always gonna go right. I'll make a big punch with that, put a big block in there, and that's really great to do and easy. If you're doing infusions, it's a great way to add flavor to that without having to mix that, and all of a sudden you have all this flavor because you infused it.

Alie: Ahhhhh, that's smart!

Matthew: That's what I love about infusions: you add one more layer without doing any work. The work is all done beforehand, really.

Alie: It's done in a jar while you're sleeping.

Matthew: So much of what I do is so labor intensive that you love it when you find a new infusion that's dynamite, because it just saved me a step.

Aside: So, cram some peaches in a jar! Fill it with bourbon! Or make some basil gin, or cherry mezcal, maybe cram some pineapple and rum in a jar, rosemary whisky, what have you. It's none of my business! You do what you want. You really can't do it wrong. But what would Matthew like to correct?

Alie: What flimflam would you like to debunk, or what myth about cocktails are you over?

Matthew: That's a good question. [*Jeopardy theme starts*] God, I haven't even thought about that, I don't even know. Throw some myths at me, I don't even know any myths right now. [*Jeopardy theme stops with record scratch*] Oh, you know what I always tell people? A big thing that people always say to me, "Can I mix these alcohols?" It has nothing to do with the alcohol. It has to do with all the crap that goes in there. What you don't want to mix is the sugars, the artificial coloring, that's the stuff that's gonna give you a hangover the next day. It's not because you had scotch, then you went to mezcal, then you went to gin.

Aside: Side note, I looked this up, and it is indeed a myth! If you're used to the, "Beer before liquor, never been sicker. Liquor before beer, in the clear," as an incantation against evil, that's mostly because if you start drinking higher alcohol by volume drinks at the *end* of the night, you're likely to get more drunk than intended because your judgment is already whack. You're probably going to drink too much.

So, what contributes to hangovers is the total amount of ethanol or alcohol that you consume. Also, some studies show that certain alcohols have more toxic hangover-y compounds called congeners. Darker spirits like whisky and cognac and tequila and especially bourbon, have high congener content, while vodka and gin and light rum have lower levels of 'em. So, pace yourself. Drink a lot of water and don't drive. Killing people: Not cute. Very serious.

Okay, let's have some Patreon questions.

Alie: I have questions from listeners. Are you ready?

Matthew: Yeah!

Alie: I'm just gonna fire 'em off at you. A few people— Lisa Elizabeth, Kallie Moore and Karen Burnham all wanted to know: What are the best mocktails for non-drinkers?

Matthew: I'll tell you what's amazing is there's a new non-alcoholic distillate called Seedlip. It's out of England. And you would think it's a gimmick, right? But I've tasted it, it's made from peas, and it is *unbelievable*. You can use that with the same formula as a daiquiri, so two ounces of that, three-quarter of lime or lemon juice, and three-quarter of some kind of syrup or agave syrup. It's incredible. Then you can put whatever you want in it. My arugula drink, I did that as a virgin cocktail. It's unbelievable with it. Now, instead of using two ounces of spirit, I used to use two ounces of Pellegrino or two ounces of whatever it was, but using two ounces of Seedlip really is incredible. You literally can do almost any cocktail and use that instead, and because it's not alcohol, you can order it on Amazon. You wouldn't be able to do that if it was alcohol.

Alie: Boom! Done.

Aside: So, I looked this up and yes, it's called Seedlip. It's named after an old basket that was used for sowing seeds and it comes in a few varieties. They have an herbal flavor called Garden, a clove-y option called Spice. Some people love that they can enjoy zero-proof cocktails with it. Others are like, "Mmm, I dunno." Either way, it will not leave you hungover or asking your stepdad to post bail.

Alie: Lisa Elizabeth wants to know: What's your best, 'tossing a patron' story?

Matthew: A what?

Alie: Have you ever had to toss someone?

Matthew: Oh, toss someone. [*long pause*] I have two really great patron stories, but...

Alie: Let's hear it.

Matthew: I'll tell you this patron story. It's not a toss, but I'm gonna say it because it has to do with a patron. This is unbelievable. So, this woman came in with her girlfriend. I made her a drink and she's like, "Oh my god, this is incredible!" So then, she's still there and I make

her another, and she's like, "Eh." She does this for the next three drinks, "Eh," "Eh." I'm like, fuck am I pissed. And I'm like, "Okay, here's the deal. It's not you, but I'm very upset that I can't please you right now, so I'm going to go take a walk." And I really needed to take a walk. So, she's looking at me funny, right? I literally go down into the freezer and I go, "What the hell was that first cocktail?" A huge lightbulb went off. I ran upstairs and I made her a drink. She goes, "Now *that's* a drink!" If it didn't have ginger in it, she didn't like it. It was that simple.

Alie: Oh my god! *[laughs]*

Matthew: So, a couple of weeks go by and I get a phone call from her because she asked for my card. She's like, "Oh, I want you to do a party for me," and inside I was like, "Really? I didn't even know you liked my stuff." And I said, "How many people?" She said, "Listen, I love what you do, just bring a bunch of stuff." I show up at her house, it was actually here in Malibu, and I said, "Oh, what time is everybody coming?" She goes, "Well, it's just me." *[dun dun duuuun!]* And the first thing I thought is, "Okay, someone's playing a joke on me. There's cameras here. They want to see what I do, all this stuff, right?" *[Ashton Kutcher: "You just got punk'd."]*

So, I really played it cool, but halfway through I knew it wasn't a joke. I made nine drinks for her in 11 hours. All she wanted to do was to be taken care of. Every drink I had an hour to prepare, so I did my 17-step Bloody Mary, I grilled every vegetable on her grill, right? She just had an incredible time, she said, "Thank you." I never heard from her again, and then about two years later, I'm in Maui, *[laughs]* okay?

Aside: Okay, this gets weird... weirder. So, Matthew's in Maui, he's working. He has some coconuts and cacao nibs, because he's Matthew. He goes to put them in his hotel room and realizes he forgot his key, but hotel staff just unlocks the door for him.

Matthew: I'm starting to put the coconut milk away, and I see all these sodas. I'm like, "Huh, that's funny. We didn't have these sodas." And I go put something else down and I'm like, "Oh my god, I'm in the wrong room! Oh my god, I better get out of here before I totally freak somebody out." I ran out of there and I call the guy up and say that I realized I was the next one over. I didn't know the room number, I just thought by sight. So, he let me in. What I did is I grabbed everything quickly when I ran out, and when I woke up the next morning, I'm like, "Oh no, I forgot those cacao nibs."

Alie: Oh no!

Matthew: I have to go knock on there, you know? So I went around, I knocked on the door, and who comes up but the woman I did those drinks for.

Alie: No. No!

Matthew: I mean, unbelievable. I got the chills again. *[eerie sci-fi theremin sounds]* She didn't recognize me before I told her, but once I did she goes, "Oh my god! Yeah, we were

wondering what these cacao nibs were doing on the table here.” I said, “I’m so sorry.” I told her the story, we started laughing and that was it. But what a story!

Alie: Oh my god. In Maui?!

Matthew: Yeah, in Maui, and that was two or three years after I did the thing for her and I never heard from her.

Alie: That is *sooo* weird.

Matthew: I know. Unbelievable. [*robotic voice: “Life is a simulation.”*]

Alie: Christopher Brewer and Lily Masa both want to know: What’s the drink that most bartenders hate to make when they’re asked for it?

Matthew: [*Jeopardy theme followed by record scratch*] I don’t know about most bartenders, but I think the drink that people don’t want to make is the drink that someone tells them *how* to make. [*Alie laughs*] Do you know what I mean? And I’m not an obnoxious person, don’t get me wrong, but they’ll be like, “Yeah, but can you do it like this,” or “Can you make sure it has this?” I don’t know if there’s a specific drink. I remember when I was working at The Library Bar, and I had this guy working with me, I realized how much he hated muddling and everything I do is mostly muddling. He was like, “I hate when people ask me to make mojitos.” I realized this must be a bartending thing. They just don’t want to muddle, probably because it takes too long. It’s a pain in the ass. So I thought about that, but I think it’s more someone telling you how they want you to make the drink.

Alie: Just supervising over your shoulder? Get outta heeere! Ashley Burgamy and Caitlin Kaspar both want to know: Is it true that drinking different liquors can change your behavior? Why does tequila make some people’s clothes fall off? [*DUUUN!*]

Matthew: I’m going to speak from personal experience that I do have different feelings. I drink tequila because of that reason, it just makes me feel cleaner and better for some reason. I don’t know why that is, though. I don’t know what that’s about.

Alie: I don’t know. I gotta look into it.

Matthew: It’s a great, great point, because I don’t know how much of the science is behind that, but I do know that people have those reactions to gin or different things like that, where tequila people don’t seem as cuckoo.

Aside: Okay, so ol’ Ward investigated this a little for ya, and there may be some chemistry behind this. People who sip red wine: usually not out to rage and dance on tabletops. But, red wine actually contains high levels of melatonin, which is also known scientifically as sleepy-time brain juice. Now, beer may also be relaxing because of the high carb load, kinda like doing body shots of mashed potatoes. And remember those congeners that affect hangovers? Well, they may well tweak your behavior a little depending on the individual and what you’re sensitive to.

But I found one very nerdy study called, *Differential alcohol expectancies based on type of alcoholic beverage consumed*, which basically said: whatever you think an alcohol will do to you, it will do to you. So, if you think tequila is rocket fuel for rebounds and then you drink it, chances are you're gonna get your groove back because you're looking for that kind of experience anyway. So you could drink a Diet Sprite and be like, "This shit makes me craaaazy!" And then you'd probably act a li'l bananas. So, you know, just act bananas when you need to. Just cut bangs. Text your crush. We're all gonna die. Just make sure nobody gets hurt.

Alie: I thought this was a great question. Juan Pedro Martinez, Frédéric Roy, and Mike Monikowski all want to know: What are the essentials for a home bar? What kind of things should you have at home?

Matthew: I think having a gin, a tequila, a mezcal, a scotch, definitely a bourbon... But have something that's good for just sipping. So, maybe the scotch is something that's a little bit nicer that you just sip on. Have a couple things that might be great to sip on, and then things that are great to just mix with. Obviously, having a vermouth... Just remember, vermouth, if you open it, has to be refrigerated because you have to treat it like a wine. I love Dolin Blanc vermouth. It's a cross between a sweet and a dry. I feel like if you had that, if you had a nice amaro like Cynar...

Aside: Amaro, by the by, is a sweet herbal Italian liqueur and it's great for post-dinner sipping. It tastes like if port wine and cough medicine made a mixtape, but it's really good.

Matthew: Also, you probably would want some bitters so that you could do an old fashioned with that. Yeah, I think that's pretty essential.

Alie: That's a good roundup.

Matthew: Yeah, that's pretty simple and not that expensive.

Alie: Dave Miller and Lily Masa both want to know: Is there a difference between shaken and stirred? Which is better?

Matthew: It's not which is better, it's what happens; the chemistry that happens. So, typically, the rule is, anything that has citrus you shake, and anything that is just spirit-driven you stir. I mean, James Bond really was the one who ruined this.

[clip from Goldfinger]

Mi-Lee: Can I do something for you, Mr. Bond?

James Bond: Just a drink. A martini. Shaken, not stirred.

Matthew: He took the martini, he switched it from gin to vodka, and then he said, "Shaken, not stirred." If you take a martini, which doesn't have any citrus, and you shake it, now it's

cloudy, it's watery. If you're someone who wants pure alcohol or that straight smoothness, you want that fullness in it. When you shake it, you kinda kill that. I think people did that because they wanted to loosen it up, they wanted the ice chips and all those things, but it's not really the classic way of enjoying that. Whereas with citrus, you really do need to shake. The only difference is that the Bloody Mary is a drink that you roll. You take it in one tin and you roll it back and forth. Don't shake a Bloody Mary even though it has citrus. That's a golden rule, too. You roll it back and forth.

Alie: Why is that?

Matthew: Because that can get very frothy and kinda gross.

Alie: Oh yeah, I guess frothy tomato, not what we're lookin' for.

Matthew: You don't want that.

Aside: So, if it has citrus, shake it up, unless it's carbonated or a Bloody Mary. Now, if all the components are alcohol, like a manhattan, old fashioned, martini, or Sazerac, it just gets stirred. In the case of a gin martini, if you shake it you can aerate and dissipate the juniper and coriander notes, and it leaves the drink tasting really dull. That's called bruising. When I looked up, 'bruising and alcohol', to get my brain around this, I found a lot of search returns of people asking why, after a night out, they wake up with bruises. And it turns out, it could just be clumsiness or a liver damage issue. So, go easy on your gin and your internal organs.

Alie: Anna Thompson wants to know: Is there an Instagram drink trend that you hate?

Matthew: That I hate? The only trend I don't like is those things that tend to look kinda Pinterest, does that make sense? Where it's this kinda staged thing that doesn't really seem to go together with what is being made. It's more like this thing's laid out to look nice.

Alie: Like, there's a cocktail and a cutting board and a knife but nothing is cut, and you're like, "What are these props?!"

Matthew: That's what it is. It's things that are used that just don't make any sense. It's almost like filling in something that's not really there.

Alie: That makes sense. Bree Bridget wants to know: Why do I always forget every drink I've ever had and enjoyed before when I go up to a bar and someone asks me what I would like?

Matthew: I think you're getting to a point where there's so many better drinks being made today with so many different ingredients—there's no way you're going to remember them. This is impossible. And I think there's just so many more ingredients being used, so many more different types of things and names. It's impossible, if you're not doing it, to remember that. Impossible.

Alie: It's like when you go to a bookstore and you're like, "I'm so excited!" and then you get there and you're like, "What book was I going to buy?! I don't remember! There's too many books! I want them all but I can't remember!"

Matthew: There's too many choices. I guess people have that fear, too, of ordering the wrong thing. But I think what's great about bars is if you don't like it, they'll make you something else.

Alie: If they're not dicks!

Matthew: Yeah, if they're not dicks.

Alie: Actually, this kind dovetails into Heather M. Densmore's question: Why do you think classic cocktails like manhattans and martinis have survived, especially with so many creative new cocktails out there?

Matthew: I think they are just classics and they take a spirit and accentuate it in its best way. It's in its simplest form without having the spirit on its own. There aren't enough new versions of those that have been extremely popular and have stayed. I think that's the reason why. I think it's also the reason everyone starts learning those. It's more of a vocabulary that they use more often, so that's gonna stand out because that is how people learn to make drinks. It's how they learn to stir things, learn formulas, all of that.

Alie: It's kinda like your daiquiri. It's like you can then expound on that.

Matthew: Yeah, absolutely! And remember, daiquiris weren't blended. That came later on. I don't think people realize that. Most people go, "I don't want a daiquiri, it's this blended thing!" It's cool because one of the drinks I did was a blended drink and I tell people, "I never blend drinks, but I'm gonna do this." Because it had mezcal, passion fruit, and wild bay leaf. And I told them, "It's because when you put ice in it, the mezcal will hold up. The passion fruit will hold up and the wild bay leaf, being such strong flavors, the ice won't dilute the taste of it." Where daiquiris, I think that's what people associate with it. They don't realize that was a cocktail that was created in the 1930s in Cuba, and it is to me the mother of drinks because of what it represents and what it is.

Alie: It's not just a slushie machine full of Everclear and grape Kool-Aid and stuff. *[laughter]*

Matthew: Everclear needs to go away *forever!* *[Yosemite Sam: "You'rrrrrrre OUT!"]*

Alie: Mama_Awesome wants to know: Best margarita recipes with a premade mixer? Is that even possible?

Matthew: That's a good question. The thing is, you don't need a premade mixer because all a straight margarita is, is two ounces of tequila, one ounce of lime juice, and three-quarter ounce of agave syrup, which is a 1:1 ratio of agave to water, and you don't even have to heat that, you just stir it. You literally can make that mix in two seconds. But that is the greatest recipe ever. I think it's called a Tommy's Margarita, and I always do it with the #2 Tequila, of the Uno Dos Tres line.

Alie: And blended or on the rocks?

Matthew: On the rocks. No salt. If you wanna blend it, though, do it with mezcal. It will hold up with the ice a little bit more. And then you won't feel like it's a lost flavor. That's what happens, the ice makes it into a lost flavor. But not with mezcal.

Alie: Oh, got it. More robust. Lucia Hunting had a great question: What's up with all the different cocktail glasses? Does the shape really matter for certain drinks?

Matthew: I think with cocktail glasses, it's just another expression of eating with your eyes. If someone's going to do a tequila tasting with you, most real tequila people would love to put it in a wine glass, because they really feel like the aromas can come out better. I think when there's glasses that are intended for certain ways, they want you to experience the aroma of things more, where others are more of a visual aesthetic. That's the thing, you don't have the opportunity to really show everything when it's in a liquid form, but that's where the glass comes in. It's almost like using a really cool fork or plate.

Alie: So, maybe drinking an old fashioned with a heavy bottomed glass is...

Matthew: Yeah, and also that's different. There's something about that, same with a scotch. There's something nice about the heaviness of that and sipping on it. It's not too high. You wouldn't want to put a high glass with just a few ounces of something. That seems weird.

Alie: The idea of drinking an old fashioned out of a red silo cup makes me wanna just *[laughter]* walk into traffic. It sounds like the worst.

Matthew: What do you like to drink?

Alie: I was a Negroni person for a while. I don't drink much myself anymore. Back when I was covering cocktails, of course, that was part of my job. I have been more on a mezcal margarita tip.

Matthew: Yeah, that's the way to go.

Alie: Something smoky with a little bit of spice to it.

Matthew: You have the same thing as me, yeah. That's great.

Alie: But I've been doing kombucha margaritas a lot.

Matthew: Yeah! Love it!

Alie: It's pretty good.

Aside: I meant red Solo cup, please forgive me. Also, kombucha cocktails. Hear me out. Kombucha as a mixer, lil' lime, lil' tequila, lil' cayenne on top... And you can leave out the tequila, still delicious.

Alie: Carrie Weber wants to know: When you go somewhere, what's your cocktail order when someone else is making it?

Matthew: It's usually just an amaro on the rocks.

Alie: Just a sipper.

Matthew: Yeah, just a sipper, bitter.

Alie: Then the last questions I always ask. What is a thing about your job that you hate the most, or the thing about making cocktails?

Matthew: Making cocktails or just the job?

Alie: Everything.

Matthew: I think the thing I've always hated is I've never been behind a bar that has suited me with what I do. So, it always just seems like it's a pain in the ass. I have shit everywhere. I hate the lack of organization that comes with what I do, even though I can be very organized. Most bars can't accommodate the type of roughage and slush that I have, and it's just a pain in the ass. It's a pain in the ass.

Alie: A lot of cleaning?

Matthew: A *lot* of cleaning. It's very heavy on the cleaning.

Alie: What's your favorite thing about cocktails?

Matthew: I love creating them. I think my favorite thing is just coming up with something new that surprises me. That's what it is. Also, I love that light that goes off in people's faces when they really love something. One of the nights just the week before service, that kid came in from *Breaking Bad*, what's his name? Aaron Paul. I'd never met him, right? [*Jesse Pinkman: "Yo, yo, yo! Jesse Pinkman in the house!"*] His wife surprised him and he sat right in front of me. Every course he looked up and he goes, "Dude, what the FUCK?!" He just was blown away, I loved it.

He goes, "What the FUCK?" you know? [*Alie laughs*] I just love that! When people experience me for the first time and I get that reaction, I love that. You know what I mean? I just wanna pour everything into them like, "Take this home! Try this!" That's what I love. When I get somebody who really is into what I'm doing, they're gonna be so bombarded with stuff that they're not gonna know what to do. That's what I love.

Alie: Do you keep a journal of sketches of ideas that you've got?

Matthew: No, that's the thing, I'm a big memory guy. I should write more stuff down [*laughs*] but I'm such a guy of memory. It's just there.

Alie: Where can people find you?

Matthew: Well, I dunno if I should release this yet, but maybe I should. Let's just do this. Mon Li is probably not gonna reopen until anywhere between probably March and May, is my guess.

Aside: So, while Mon Li in Malibu is getting rehabbed for the post-fire reopen— and this is a big fun announcement— I got the scoop.

Matthew: But I'm gonna tell you this first, but it hasn't been finalized. [*Alie gasps*] I'm returning to the Library Bar one night a week for three months starting the end of January, probably. I can't wait.

Alie: No way! Is that okay to release?

Matthew: I'll do it for you.

Alie: Okay. [*Matthew laughs*] Oh, that's so exciting! Are they freaking out?

Matthew: I'm excited! I can't wait to get back in there.

Alie: You really are Willy Wonka. [*Matthew laughs*] It's ridiculous. Thank you so much for being on!

Matthew: Thank you so much. So great to see you after all this time!

Alie: I know! This was great.

Matthew: You're awesome!

Alie: Thank you for being on. *You're awesome!*

[*ambient sounds of ocean waves and seagulls*] We're both awesome. What can I say?

Okay, so you can see photos of all of Matthew's really gorgeous creations and also some of the fire damage at [EatYourDrink](#) on Instagram. His beverage photos are truly stunning. They're so beautiful. His book is called *Eat Your Drink: Culinary Cocktails*, and he'll be at the Library Bar at the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood for the next few months, one day a week, until Mon Li reopens this spring. All very exciting. You can find Ologies @Ologies on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). I'm [@AlieWard](#) on [both](#) and there's more links up at [AlieWard.com](#). Thank you to webmaster Kelly Dwyer for the beautiful site updates. She just did 'em. Looks great! You can join the [Ologies Podcast Facebook group](#). It's adminned by Erin Talbert and birthday lady Hannah Lipow. Love you girl! Merch is available at [OlogiesMerch.com](#). Thank you, Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch for managing that.

Thank you, as always, to the ever-spirited Steven Ray Morris for all of his stellar editing. He also hosts *The Purrrcast*, which is about kitties, and *See Jurassic Right*, which is his love letter podcast to dinosaurs. Special editing help this week also from the lovely Jarrett Sleeper of the mental health podcast *My Good Bad Brain*. Check that out, too.

Now, if you stick around until the end of the show, you know I tell you a secret. Today's secret is that I have this yellow sweater. I feel like this yellow sweater has me, really. It's the most comfortable article of clothing I've ever owned. I wear it every day, and it's become... a problem. It's become embarrassing, like, I can't wear this again. I have pictures on my Instagram. I'm in this yellow sweater in all of them. So, just don't judge your ol' Dad. You find something you like, you stick with it and you wash it when you can. You wash it when you can!

Okay. Stay warm. Merry holidays.

Berbye.

Transcribed by Florence Yuan, your old-soul medical student friend who is happy to proofread your writing as her own weird form of procrastination!

Some links that you might possibly enjoy:

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