

In search of the perfect
cocktail **THE BRESLIN BAR**

ACE Hotel lobby, Midtown Manhattan, New York

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY JONATHAN CANE



Josh Sontag, no relation of the famous New Yorker Susan Sontag, is the warm-hearted barman in the ACE Hotel lobby bar. He's a Brooklynite — some would say a hipster — but what he certainly isn't, he tells me, is a "mixologist". He's a barman, just like that, and he knows how to make a killer cocktail. A drink at the ACE Hotel in Manhattan is a hip way to end a day of shopping, MoMAing or as an adventure "in to town" from Brooklyn. As the day ends the dimly lit lounge gets dimmer, the iPads and MacBooks are packed away into vegan leather handbags and the DJs come out. International travellers drink artisanal beers alongside trendy New Yorkers, who, as they are wont to do, queue for drinks. The drinks are well worth queuing for. We tried three cocktails, some mescal, craft beers — all fabulous. Sontag talked with us about the speakeasy trend in New York, which is now on its last legs, passé, he says. Instead, he says, we should look out for handcrafted cocktails on draft, cold smoked cocktails, high-end punch and barrel-ageing.

Nostalgia, it seems, will continue to be the defining character of our moment — and the past tastes delicious.

What is your signature cocktail? The Spiced Pumpkin Negroni. Crop American Harvest spiced pumpkin vodka, Aperol and Dolin Dry Vermouth. The pumpkin aspect of this drink combined with spice bring back early memories of fall. Aperol also is one of my favourite Amaros to boot, the combo blends perfectly with the French vermouth stabilising the blend. **The most famous person you have ever served?** Before I was at the ACE I served Billy Joel and Elton John, who then

THE SPICED PUMPKIN NEGRONI

Crop American Harvest spiced pumpkin vodka
Aperol
Dolin Dry Vermouth

Combine ingredients in a mixing glass, stir 40-50 times. Strain cocktail over fresh ice with an orange peel garnish.

UPFRONT



proceed to battle it out on back-to-back pianos. **Strangest drink you have ever made?** White wine over ice with a couple dashes of Tabasco. The guest swore by it, so naturally I had to taste. Worst career decision of my life. **Best seller?** Best sellers in my opinion are directly adjunct to the amount of love and creativity we bring to the menu. If a cocktail isn't being ordered off the list by our guest that's a good indication we are not doing the right job. **Most ordered grub?** We serve food 24 hours a day and 365 days a year in the lobby. We are very well known for our burger. I have guests come in two to three days a week for their fix. **Barman's cocktail?** 9/10 The Negroni was excellent. A real classic, with the subtle autumnal pumpkin vodka to complement the blustery day outside. **Barman's personality?** 8/10 Josh is a gentleman — he has the temperament of a baker. The kind of guy you wished your sister would date.

The Breslin Bar, ACE Hotel lobby, 20 W 29th St, Midtown Manhattan, New York, www.acehotel.com/newyork

contributors



Natalia Keet began her career as a stylist almost 14 years ago after studying fashion design in SA and fashion journalism at Central St Martin's in London. She has worked on every facet of the industry from personal styling and shopping to lecturing, creative directing, fashion editing, writing, fashion marketing, trend forecasting, storyboarding and organising events.

A fashion designer whose work you admire? A lot of the designers featured in this story I have huge admiration for but I would say my all-time favourite is Chanel for the classics with an edge. My new admiration is Roksanđa Ilincić for her construction and femininity. **Which city could you spend the rest of your life living in?** Right now my home good feeling is in London. **Your ideal Sunday afternoon activity?** After a long lazy lunch I love going for a leisurely walk or relaxing in the park with some bubbles.



Filmmaker and photographer Nicholai Fischer was born and raised in SA but for the past 13 years has been living between Paris, London and NY. Having boned his

craft alongside some of the world's most successful photographers and directors, such as Ellen von Unwerth, Mario Testino and David Lynch, Fischer contributes to several international magazines and directs TV commercials and music videos.

The first camera you ever owned? A Minolta SRT 101, bought by my grandfather from an explorer who travelled to Antarctica. **A photographer whose work you admire?** Steven Klein (for his past collaborations with actors and Madonna). **Your dream shoot location?** Lake Tahoe, California, or Los Angeles.

RATINGS

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