



A row of 'carnivore' cocktails



Javier de las Muelas

A man on a quest to build the perfect ice cube might be the best way to describe Javier de las Muelas. A worldwide mixed drinks legend and the head of Barcelona's Dry Martini and Gimlet cocktail bars, he's constantly straddling the line between innovation and class.

For his mixed drinks, ice is as important as liquor. The cube should make a drink cold, not wet; most important, it should not affect the drink's flavour. Barcelona was the logical birthplace of his killer cube; the city's tap water is so chlorinated it can taste like a pool, and so calcified it renders the steam function of an iron useless after about three shirts. "Without good ice," says de las Muelas simply, "your drink is a disaster."

His aquatic solution included osmosis, decalcification and an American ice-making machine curiously named 'The Scotsman'. Javier de las Muelas also worked on finding and perfecting the form: cylindrical. Watching his white-suited barmen pour a trademark Dry Martini (splash of Martini vermouth, a spritz from a lemon peel, Bombay Sapphire gin and a solitary olive), it's clear something good is happening inside the mixer. Under a light, the drink gleams like liquid diamonds.

De las Muelas is a bit like a creative genius who runs an accounting firm – an innovator trapped in a classic field – yet he doesn't see the disconnect. Dry Martini, a Barcelona standard that he bought 14 years ago, is a quintessential cocktail bar. With a prohibition theme, mirrors, old bottles, wooden walls,

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Expert Spanish  
cocktail mixer Javier  
de las Muelas on the  
importance of ice

giant leather banquettes and drink-themed paintings that range from melancholy loners at a bar to naked ladies nestled into martini glasses, it's masculine to the core and enough to make a non-smoker want a drag.

Yet he uses the classic backdrop as a platform for his creativity, creating custom cooling machinery to turn high-proof alcohol into 'frappés' and coming up with drinks some call "third-generation cocktails", such as the tongue-tingling 'carnivore' that combines Sichuan button flowers, strawberry purée, lime, passion fruit and papaya juices with chilli-infused vodka and Peruvian pisco, served in a carnivorous pitcher plant.

That, however, is where he draws the line – well before flashing anything like a Tom Cruise 'Cocktail' smile – and veers back into the classics. His barmen may shake a mixer with classy flair, but anyone caught juggling bottles would be given their walking papers.

"I love the formal aspect and the form of a classic cocktail bar: serve the ladies first, serve from the right," he says. "My 'grand illusion' is to have Dry Martinis around the world," a project idea that he is entertaining, he divulges. "Hotels are like operas and a classic bar is like a church," de las Muelas adds, reiterating one of his trademark sayings. "When I bought Dry Martini 14 years ago, it was like buying the Vatican." While it's clear that de las Muelas is not the Pope, could he be something of a prophet? Perhaps, but the question is best pondered over a stiff drink.

Joe Ray