

# San Francisco Chronicle

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## WINE

# BAR STARS

The  
Chronicle  
honors  
bartenders  
who are  
defining  
Bay Area  
cocktail  
culture

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**B**ay Area drinkers have a center stool to witness cocktails' new golden age.

A mixological renaissance has taken root here over the last half-decade, with a critical mass of sorts arriving about a year ago: 2007, we were told endlessly, was to be the year of the cocktail. So last summer we started to think about how to honor the creativity of the women and men who always give us a reason to cheer.

Today's Bar Stars is the result. Consider it a cocktailian equivalent to The Chronicle's annual Rising Star Chefs. Whether they want to be called mixologists, bar chefs or simply outlandishly talented bartenders, our six honorees are essential in defining cocktail culture here and across the country.

Cities from New York to Seattle are rediscovering spirits, but our group has helped put San Francisco at the front of a thirsty pack. They hunt farmers' markets for obscure citrus, brew up their own bitters, spend hours trying to track down unheard-of liqueurs and tinctures, and even commandeer corners of the restaurant

kitchen — all to stock their bars.

And like great chefs, they all understand that consistency is as important as quality. Even when they're taking a night off, their cocktails taste exactly as they should because they understand that measurements and solid technique are more important than flash.

Too many people have contributed to this very welcome trend for us to honor them all, but because it's the first year for Bar Stars, we look at some of the others who have paved the way (see "Trendsetters," Page F5). And for perspective, we turned to some folks who were manning the stick in the days before the Cosmopolitan was more than a magazine (see "The Old Masters," Page F6).

Raise a glass to them all for preserving San Francisco as the country's pre-eminent bar town. From the Barbary Coast and pisco punch to Professor Jerry Thomas and "Cocktail Bill" Boothby, this has always been a great city to belly up to the bar. Now's a chance to pay tribute to some of those who are keeping the glorious legacy very much alive.

— Jon Bonné

### CAMBER LAY



# BAR STARS: THE BAY AREA'S MOVERS AND SHAKERS

## CAMBER LAY

By Laura Compton

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Camber Lay left behind her “snowboard bum” life in Colorado to attend culinary school and become a pastry chef in San Francisco.

Instead, she has become one of the city's elite cocktail consultants, having worked at Frisson, Range, Laiola, and now Pat Kuleto's brand-new Epic Roasthouse, where she will be shaking up both classics and Epic originals, each with her unique twists.

Her first San Francisco job was at the pastry station of Zero Degrees, the dessert bar offshoot of MC2. She started “playing around” behind the bar at MC2, but her formal cocktail career started when she helped open the sleek restaurant-lounge Frisson in 2004, along with Duggan McDonnell.

“He was doing essences, oils and all that stuff,” she says of McDonnell, now the owner of the bar Cantina. (See “The trendsetters,” F5). “That's when I really started.”

While at Frisson, she also started pulling shifts at Range, whose popular bar rotates classics with seasonal cocktails.

Eventually, Frisson owners Joe Hargrave and Andrew McCormack tapped Lay to create the cocktails at their latest venture, Laiola, which opened last July. Lay's cocktails go beyond the typical infusions of fruit or mint and use more subtle or unexpected ingredients. “I like to use other elements, bring them into cocktails and change their structure,” she says.

For a cocktail at Range, she made a margarita with red pepper vinegar, and finished it with a pink peppercorn and sea salt rim. White vanilla tea stands in for water in some of her simple syrups. Ingredients like nuts and vegetables make their way into drinks as garnishes — dehydrated fennel in a fennel gimlet, for example.

As “bar chef” at Epic, she's working with the lead bartender and chef Jan Birnbaum to play off the steakhouse theme. She's de-

**Age:** 31

**Current gig:** Bar chef, Epic Roasthouse, 369 The Embarcadero (between Folsom and Harrison streets), San Francisco; (415) 369-9955 or [epicroasthousesf.com](http://epicroasthousesf.com)

**Backstory:** Since 2000, she's worked behind the bar at MC2, Frisson, Range and Laiola

**Can't work without:** Her food dehydrator

**Ask her for:** The Conservos

signed a list with classics such as a sidecar with a Key lime sugar rim, and the Aviation, with a candied Cara Cara orange peel.

One of her originals, the Copper Pot, combines Tequila, Calvados, organic apple juice, lemon and a pecan “dust” rim of nutmeg, cinnamon and sugar.

Her signature cocktail, the Conservos (see recipe), draws on a locally produced green tea to infuse the gin and adds another of her favored elements, Lillet Blanc to soften the drink.

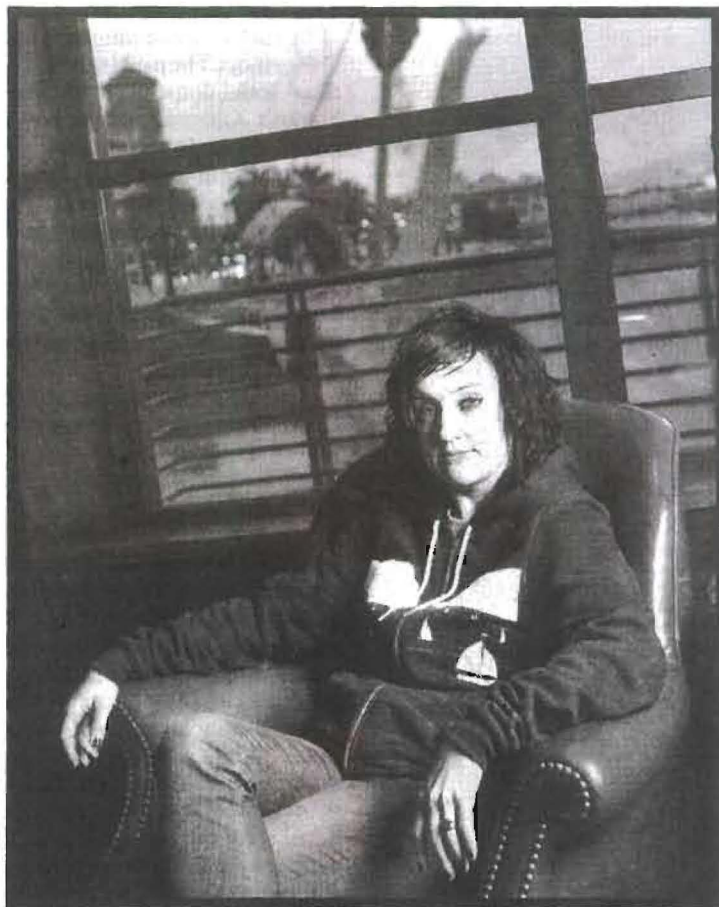
Lay also has yet another consulting project in the works: cocktails for Uva Enoteca, a wine bar her husband, chef Ben Henzel, is opening this spring in the Lower Haight.

“We always work really well together at coming up with flavor profiles,” she says. “About a year ago, we started to put a lot of flavors on paper.” The challenge: Uva will only have a beer and wine license. So far, Lay is planning seasonal Bellinis and some drinks using wine-based simple syrups.

She draws inspiration from the city's many restaurants, and places they've visited around the globe. “Italy's definitely a passion for us.” The couple spent a monthlong honeymoon traveling in Bali, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur. “We like traveling all over the world, tasting different flavors,” she says.

And, of course, bringing them home and translating them into savory cocktails.

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### The Conservos

#### Makes 1 drink

Camber Lay created this drink to showcase gin and Chartreuse. “So many people out there don't like to drink gin, much less Chartreuse. I'm trying to convert them.”

#### The infusion

**David Rio La France Pear green tea (See Note)**

**1 bottle Broker's gin**

#### The drink

**2 ounces infused Broker's gin**

**1 ounce Lillet Blanc**

**½ ounce lemon juice**

**½ ounce simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water)**

**Dash of Chartreuse**

**Lemon twist, tied into a knot**

**Instructions:** To infuse the gin, place tea bags in bottle of gin and let steep for 5 hours.

**For the drink:** Pour all ingredients, except the garnish, into a pint glass. Top with ice, shake vigorously, then strain into a martini glass. Garnish with a lemon twist.

**Note:** David Rio green tea is available at Falletti Foods in San Francisco.

