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Posted at 12:10 PM ET, 12/12/2011

Got Plans? recap: Punches and parties

By Fritz Hahn



Taking a group out in Penn Quarter? The Boot Bar at Hill Country should have room for everyone. (Rebecca D'Angelo/For The Washington Post)

Boy, our readers like punches and fancy cocktails. Thankfully, our special chat guest Dan Searing — the owner of Room 11 and the vice president of the DC Craft Bartenders Guild — was around to take questions about low-alcohol cocktails, warm seasonal drinks and even a little hair of the dog for the morning after.

There were also questions about the best brownie sundaes, where to take your parents for New Year's Eve, the best boutiques for officewear and where to take a group of 20 on a Saturday night in Penn Quarter. Read highlights from the mammoth 90-minute chat below.

Join us next Thursday at 1 p.m. when our guests will be dating coaches Rita Colbert, the creator of the Singles in the Suburbs Meetup group, and Jess McCann, the author of the advice book "You Lost Him at Hello." You can also submit questions in advance.

Q: Hi Gurus and Dan, It's a Latin American tradition to make tamales around Christmas, and we're hosting our annual tamale-making party. I'm scratching my head for drinks. I'd prefer to keep lower in alcohol as it takes quite a while to assemble and steam the tamales. Thanks!

Dan Searing: Tamales, yum! How about Calimotxo (or calimochito), the mix of equal parts red wine and cola that's Spanish in origin but popular in many Latin American countries? You could sub a decaf cola if you don't want to get too wired. Or Micheladas, beer with lime and tomato juice plus Worcestershire and hot sauce, sometimes with a salted rim. A fun but maybe not so low in alcohol punch that would work is my Conquistador Punch, made with tequila, sherry and clementine juice, the recipe for which we'll post at the end of the chat. [Editors note: See the recipe at the end of this post.]

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Q: Can you guys please help me find a great brownie sundae that meets the following requirements: A warm brownie, NON-soft-serve ice cream, and hot fudge (not chocolate) sauce. The sundae I had at ACKK was great but failed to meet my fussy date's ice cream and hot fudge requirements. If I can get everything he's asking for in one sundae, I'll look like a hero. Thanks!

Stephanie Merry: This is going to sound absolutely insane, but the best brownie sundae I've had is at [Stoney's](#). I only know this because my roommate likes to test my willpower by ordering it as brain food during Wednesday night trivia. Better yet, it meets all of your requirements.

Q: I know you've answered this a million times, but a refresh would do wonders. I am looking for a bar/lounge that wouldn't be overrun by 15-20 people after a holiday dinner Saturday night at about 10-10:30. We will be eating near the convention center and don't want to travel too far but will likely cab. I know you often recommend Iron Horse, but am thinking something a little nicer. Happy holiday season!!

Fritz Hahn: For 20 people near the convention center, you need to go big: Maybe the [Capitol City Brewing Company](#) at 11th and H, maybe the basement "Boot Bar" under [Hill Country Barbecue](#), or, if you walk a few more blocks, you can get really classy in the bar at [Fiola](#), which is only open until midnight but has some of the best cocktails in D.C.

Q: Are there anywhere in the D.C. area that is skilled in serving absinthe that you could please recommend?

Dan Searing: [Wisdom](#) is known for their absinthe selection and service. They also specialize in absinthe at [Chinatown Coffee](#), believe it or not, and you'll find good service at many craft-focused bars like PS 7's (an absinthe fountain is a good clue but not a guarantee that they know what they're doing).

Q: I'm meeting some of my friends while our wives are at book club. We would like to meet in the Fairfax area, and the last few times we have met at Dogfish head in Fairfax. Any other suggestions for good beers and decent food? Bonus if it is not in Arlington, because we would rather not drive there.

Fritz Hahn: [Mad Fox](#) in Falls Church is a go-to for me for good beers and decent food. [Public House No. 7](#) in Falls Church has a great pub vibe and really good fish and chips, plus good English beers.

Q: What's a good drink/punch for the morning after the holiday night before brunches/recovery? Something beyond the usual bloody mary and mimosa options.

Dan Searing: A favorite of mine is the Corpse Reviver II, equal parts gin, Cointreau, lemon juice and Lillet or Cocchi Americano (an aromatized wine similar to Lillet when it still had the bitterness of cinchona bark - think tonic) and a dash of absinthe shaken with ice and strained. The story goes that after a few of these even the dead will walk again. Anything with bitters is great though, so try a basic champagne cocktail or a [Seelbach](#), which adds more bitters and bourbon to the sparkling wine.

Recipe: Conquistador Punch

Created by Dan Searing, published in "The Punch Bowl"

Makes 12 to 18 servings

Ingredients

- 1 750 ml bottle reposado tequila
- 1 375 ml bottle Pedro Ximenez Sherry
- 1 1/2 cups lime juice (about 12 limes)
- 1 1/2 cups clementine juice (about 12 clementines)
- 1 cup clementine zest syrup (recipe follows)
- 1 ice block

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2 clementines, peeled; peel cut into small coin shapes

Ingredients for clementine zest syrup

Zest from two clementines

1 cup cold simple syrup

Directions

1. Combine all liquid ingredients in a large pitcher, adding the clementine syrup last and to taste. Chill thoroughly. When ready to serve, place the ice block in a punch bowl, and pour the punch over it.

2. Float the clementine slices in the punch. Garnish each serving with small coins of clementine peel gently squeezed over the glass.

Directions for clementine zest syrup

1. Use a microplane grater to remove the zest from two clementines. Add the zest to cold simple syrup.

2. Cover and refrigerate overnight (up to 24 hours). Strain out the zest. Refrigerate any unused syrup.

By [Fritz Hahn](#) | 12:10 PM ET, 12/12/2011

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