


The Seattle Times

A star bartender from the Big Easy comes to Seattle — at The State Hotel's Ben Paris bar



 *Behind-the-bar rock star Abigail Gullo makes one of her signature cocktails, the Lazy Bluebird, at Ben Paris. (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)*

[The State Hotel](#) in downtown Seattle made a doozy of a hire to head its new bar program, Abigail Gullo, a star in the New Orleans cocktail scene.

The last spot Gullo slung drinks at, Compère Lapin in the Big Easy, was named finalist for best hotel bar in America two years running at the [Tales of the Cocktail's Spirited Awards](#), one of the [drink industry's highest honors](#).

You can find her now behind The State Hotel's [new Ben Paris bar](#) every Friday and Saturday.

With all the recent developments around town, hoteliers have fallen all over themselves outdoing one another in the food-and-drink game.

The “it” hotel bar at the moment is [The Mountaineering Club](#), inside The Graduate Hotel in the University District, where investors recruited the L.A. duo behind the hip cocktail den The Spare Room in Hollywood to design this rooftop bar.

In downtown, the swanky Palisociety in Los Angeles is trying to replicate its acclaimed bar restaurant on Melrose Avenue, [The Hart and the Hunter](#), with a version of that in downtown Seattle inside its Palihotel.

A block away, The State Hotel returned salvo with a splashy hire of its own in Gullo, who has collected numerous bartender-of-the-year accolades and has been featured in The New York Times among other national publications.

Gullo ran a theater group in New York before she turned to bartending after the economic crash of 2008, cutting her teeth at acclaimed bars such as Fort Defiance in Brooklyn and then landing at chef [Nina Compton's Compère Lapin](#) in the Warehouse District in 2015. A year later, she was promoted to run that bar program.

That drink list was a rum-centric, Creole-and-tropical-themed delight, inspired by the restaurant's Caribbean cuisine and the summer sauna that is [New Orleans](#).

For Seattle's Ben Paris bar, Gullo aims for a cocktail list “that represents flavors of the Pacific Rim and the Pacific Northwest.” Gullo doesn't know what that will entail yet. A native of Hide Park, New York, Gullo has never lived on the West Coast. She's exploring her new surroundings with her two terriers to get a better pulse of the city.

One inspiration so far after looking at 1920s-era buildings around downtown was to start the old-school tableside bar service in the dining room. She has trained her servers to make martinis and Spanish-style gin and tonics out of carts, complete with garnishes, herbs and berries sourced from Pike Place Market three blocks away.

She's also been sampling [local gins](#) for her menu and realizes Seattle "loves [whiskey](#)."

Her cocktail bar opened in late March. Three standout drinks on her menu to try:

First Salute: Her best drink is familiar territory for her. A smoky play on the daiquiri with mescal and rum, though still with a bracing tartness that you would expect from the rum classic, with some exotic notes of star anise and cinnamon cut with lime.

Lazy Bluebird: A hybrid of two refreshing drinks, [Moscow Mule](#) and [Paloma](#), this gussied-up libation has a base of wheat vodka and tequila. Instead of ginger beer, Gallo gives it a different texture with sparkling wine along with a ginger liqueur and grapefruit.

Stay & Play: I surmise the recent run on green-chili-inspired drinks has to do with bistros around town featuring Hatch and other green chilies on their menus now. But why do so many green-chili-inspired drinks suck? Here's one that doesn't. This pairs green-chili liqueur with the earthy notes of tequila and a gentian root liqueur to form this earthy, herbaceous concoction with an unctuousness from the pineapple-infused vermouth. The cucumber and lime smooth out the drinks.