

The Last Call

The Fig Martini at The Bookstore & Restaurant

By Larry Egan | Photos by Cori Egan



Joe Parlante with some of his popular creations.

While I am perusing a martini list, the term “house-infused” always raises an eyebrow and a corner of my mouth. There is something intriguing about the process of imparting flavors to a spirit. The Bookstore & Restaurant in Wellfleet is home to some of the most beguiling infused martinis and cocktails to be found anywhere. The man behind the cocktail menu is Joe Parlante, a creator, tinkerer and visionary within the world of mixology, and he has come up with many original concoctions, including one that he says some of his regulars would be “willing to walk barefoot over broken glass” to enjoy.

The martini that started Parlante on his cocktail quest is still on the menu: the Fig Martini. “I go to New York a lot,” Parlante explains. “I was in the Fairway Market in Harlem, and they had this huge container of nothing but figs.” Joe grabbed handfuls of the sweet fruit and began his experimenting. His research quickly expanded to lesser-known or -used ingredients. “I was in Chinatown in Boston years ago and this one market had all of

these different juices and I just grabbed one of each,” he remembers. Just how he infuses the spirits will always remain a secret. “I’ll never tell how I do it,” he proudly states. A magician worth his salt would never give up his tricks, after all.

The Fig Martini is a blend of fig-infused vodka and passion fruit juice. While many flavored vodkas can have a cloying sweetness to them, the fig-infused vodka is far craftier. The passion fruit juice is the perfect mate to deliver a lavish flavor that reminds one of caramel. The rich shade of ochre adds to the appeal. It hits a



The one that started it all: The Fig Martini.

balance that is light and refreshing enough to enjoy on a hot summer day, and also satisfying enough to knock a Cape Cod spring chill off of you. Nibbling on the fig garnish only prolongs the pleasure long after the last sip.

Working in his laboratory behind the bar where the original counter was located when Joe’s parents opened the restaurant as a diner in

1964, Joe is always on the hunt for the next great creation. You can never be too sure what Joe’s got up his sleeve, and there are bound to be additions to the drink list at any given time. There are some favorites, however, that he doesn’t dare remove for fear of bodily harm from his extremely loyal following.

The Parlante family has created a local legend in The Bookstore & Restaurant and accompanying Bomb Shelter Pub. It has become a three-generation business as Joe’s son, Dash, has joined the ranks to bus tables. He joins Joe’s sister Carol running the kitchen, brother Steve overseeing the Bomb Shelter Pub, and mom Caroline who still arrives every morning to roll up her sleeves and get to work. The views of the glistening harbor are stunning. The fare is loaded with the freshest of local seafood and much more, and there are pitchers of refreshing Aperol Spritzers, Tuscan Iced Teas, Mimosas and Sangrias to savor throughout the long summer season. However, it is the martinis for which Joe is known and which make The Bookstore & Restaurant a much sought-after destination for so many. “People will say, ‘I’ve waited all year for this,’” Joe says of the yearly guests returning to Wellfleet. The tarragon-infused vodka with Meyer lemons is a favorite, and it’s the lemongrass and ginger martini, according to Joe, that has people willing to crawl across broken glass. In the meantime, why not try a taste of where it all began and enjoy a Fig Martini from Joe at The Bookstore & Restaurant? It’s a little magic in a martini glass. ★

The Bookstore & Restaurant
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