

of those spirits and realized that history, math, and science all come together in a cocktail glass. “So much science comes up when speaking about booze,” she says. “History, too! I learned about alcoholic drinks created over 100 years ago and discovered how people lived and made whiskey and other spirits.”

Armed with new knowledge and new skills, she landed a job with the Black Restaurant Group. “There,” she says, “I had a boss who needed a vacation. He threw an apron at me and asked me to help in the kitchen.” That proved to be the next step in Weinstein’s education. “A lot of what I learned about bartending, I learned in the kitchen, like cleanliness and efficiency.” She also got a first-hand look at many new and unusual fruits, vegetables, and spices — which would come into play when she became a BRG bartender and started to create her own cocktails.

Three and a half years later...

... Weinstein interviewed for an AGM and bar manager job with Jamie Leeds, chef/owner of the JL Restaurant Group. “I googled how to run a bar because I really wanted to work for Jamie!” she exclaims. She got the job, and the next part of her adventure began. “I started reading more about spirits. I found experts and made them my mentors.” And she traveled to other markets far and wide to learn about and experience spirits in their original settings. In Guadalajara, for example, she experienced tequila at The Hacienda de Patrón. While visiting other parts of Mexico, she saw how various agave plants can be made into small batches of mezcal that never get bottled and are served only in small mountain tavernas. She has visited a Kentucky bourbon distillery and seen rum production in Puerto Rico. Last year, she harvested juniper berries, the primary botanical used in gin, in Wisconsin.

Jessica Weinstein’s creativity — once focused on art school — is now focused on her drink specialties, and she credits Jamie Leeds with supporting her growth. “Because



Photo: Rey Lopez

Jessica Weinstein, beverage director of the JL Restaurant Group, in mixologist mode



Jessica Weinstein (middle, black hat) with the bar team

of Jamie, I am able to fully express myself and really be who I am as a mixologist!” The newest member of the JL Restaurant Group family, Hank’s on the Wharf is the fourth location of Hank’s Oyster Bar, along with Hank’s Pasta Bar in Old Town, Alexandria, and Hank’s Cocktail Bar. The 3,390-square-foot space, which opened in October, is situated on the boardwalk facing the Potomac. It has a 64-seat patio, along with an outdoor bar and an inside 16-seat bar. As beverage director of the entire Hank’s group since April 2016, Weinstein and her team have overseen the opening of the bar at the new facility and have had great fun developing a whole new bar menu.

Her newest concoctions?

“I love everything pickled,” she notes. She created a savory martini with pickled red grapes that was inspired by a brussels sprout dish that her mom makes at Thanksgiving. “It’s the bomb!” she laughs. Another new drink, “You Had Me at Beef Jerky,” features Copper & King’s apple brandy, a house-made melon cordial made with real honeydew, and the poblano chili liqueur Ancho Reyes Verde, served on the rocks with a stick of peppered beef jerky and Hellfire bitters. “I also like getting weird in the spice aisle. It’s a place where I can do anything — try new ingredients, pepper, and spices, and things we see in the kitchen that we don’t usually connect with booze.” She says the best part of creating a new drink is to “pull flavors out of food dishes and connect great food with a great drink.”

For December...

... Weinstein has created a special Advent drink calendar, with a new “surprise” drink for each day, just like a children’s Advent calendar. FSM got a sneak peak. On December 8, for example, the surprise drink is called, *A Case of Tinseltitis* — with

Glendalough gin, Green Chartreuse liquor, pineapple, lime, and mint. Guests can also toast the first night of Hanukkah with a drink reflecting the signature flavors enjoyed around a Jewish table. Called *It’s A Membership to the Jelly of The Month Club*, this libation will feature plum reserves, allspice, Spring 44 gin, rum, cinnamon, and walnut bitters. If you want to know more December drink specials, you’ll have to show up and be surprised!

The best part...

... “life-long learning!” Jessica Weinstein says without hesitation. “I want to learn and grow within the spirits industry. I’ve been so lucky that I’ve found people I have connected with on a professional level that have allowed me to grow, and learn, and thrive!” Weinstein says it’s not a journey she expected, but it’s one she would not change for anything. Her story continues to be written, of course, but at this point, she says, “I’m the luckiest person in the world!”

FIND WEINSTEIN AND HER TEAM these days at Hank’s on the Wharf, 701 Wharf Street, SW, Washington, D.C., 202-817-3055, www.hanksoysterbar.com.