

SPEAK EASY

By Ashley South

Reece Suarez. If you are keen to enjoy an exceptional cocktail, remember the name. He “runs the room” of The Northcott Liqueur.

As you enter through the inconspicuous door with a nautical compass and no signage, you are greeted by Greg Warfield. He is your maître d’ for the evening. Thankfully he is also your guide, as the confusing all-black walls and black staircase do nothing to foreshadow the lovely experience Reece has in store for you at Naperville’s own speakeasy.

Lights are dim, and comfortable furniture is arranged in different seating areas to accommodate both couples on a date or groups of friends. Bottles of liquor line the wall behind the bar. Bartenders use mallets to pound ice in a Louis Bag, and dry ice is on hand to keep things super cold (or for effect) when needed. Large-format cocktails are served in tea pots (a Prohibition-era trick to disguise the contents). Music is a bit of everything. Smells range from smoking wood to fresh-cut strawberries. The Northcott vibe is relaxed. You’ll want to hang out there.

We talked with Reece before the hullabaloo of a Friday night. Prep was in full swing. A bartender walked up to us and presented Reece with an elegant glass with amber frothy liquid. Reece sipped and informed us it has cornsilk tea in it. What is that? He tells us it’s the long, silky fibers that

grow inside the husks of ears of corn. These fibers are steeped, and a mild tasting tea is made. Cornsilk tea is said to remove toxins from the body. We are humored by the irony of it mixed with bourbon. While sipping the new concoction, Reece is inspired and names the cocktail, “Tori Amos!” We get the reference, Cornflake Girl, of course.

quality producers. Pappy Van Winkle, Basil Hayden, Makers Mark, Macallan, to name a few. The menu is a twist on the traditional with a balance between making tinctures and other specialty items.

Reece hails from South Florida. In his 20s, he moved to the Florida Keys after



Reece Suarez
The Northcott Liqueur,
50 W Chicago Avenue

© Emily Cummings

Don’t ask for a beer or a house wine, Northcott doesn’t even stock them. Ask for whatever specialty Reece has been tinkering with over the last month. In addition to the Tori Amos, the new fall menu includes a version of a penicillin cocktail (scotch based), a stirred mescal, and an old fashioned. There’ll be a French 75 with sparkling wine, a John the Baptist (we had to look this up: Whiskey, pineapple syrup, pistachio syrup, half and half, crème de coco, and absinthe—um, sign us up), and a blood orange bee’s knees. His focus is on quality items by

visiting friends and being asked to tend bar at the friend’s place. He worked in beach bars and late-night punk bars and delved deeper into his craft. He met his now wife of 14 years down there, and together they moved to Chicago where Reece wanted to learn and expand his skill set.

Over the years, Reece met and collaborated with people older, younger, experienced, and inexperienced. He told us that he learned something from each person he worked with. “I need to soak up as much as possible,” he said.

“We are in a renaissance of bartending. With good spirits and fresh ingredients, you will end up with a nice drink.”

When the Empire Restaurant Group was setting up Northcott Liqueur, the General Manager knew exactly who to call to set up the cocktail program. “We are in a renaissance of bartending. With good spirits and fresh ingredients, you will end up with a nice drink.” Reece, thank you.

Open Fridays and Saturdays only.



The Northcott Liqueur,
50 W Chicago Avenue
www.thenorthcott.com



The Bar

© Emily Cummings