

ON-PREMISE PATTERN

Steve Olson's Newest Dream Bar

THE WINEGEEK'S EAST VILLAGE
RESTAURANT INCORPORATES
MANY LESSONS LEARNED
ALONG THE WAY

by Timothy Moriarty / photos by Doug Young

In October, Steve Olson opened **Apartment 13** in New York City's East Village, with former tennis champion Lorrae Doig as partner, Chef John Keller driving the kitchen and Leo DeGroff reinforcing the bar.

Olson is equal parts mixologist, author, educator and consultant. Through his company, aka wine geek, he has helped design the food and beverage programs for such clients as Relais & Châteaux, Mayflower Inn, Gramercy Tavern, the Borgata Hotel and Casino and Aqua in Cancun, Mexico.

So Apartment 13 is decidedly *not* Olson's first time at the rodeo. But many of the fine points of hospitality, menu design and bar design are incorporated. For example: "Anytime we design a bar and an architect doesn't, it's a dream bar," he says.

Steve Olson at his new East Village
bar and restaurant, Apartment 13,
in Manhattan.



Lower East Side vibe: The entrance to Apartment 13 is deceptively unassuming.



The bar is zinc-topped, with two pouring stations, left and right. Each has three types of ice (standard, crushed and BFIC—“big friggin’ ice cubes”) and commonly used spirits (there are no well spirits, as such). The syrups, garnishes, tinctures, infusion and bitters are in the center, on the top of the bar, behind the beer taps. The center area is meant to serve as a third station during rushes. Within easy reach are sherries, sakés, shochus and mezcals, considered ideal oyster pairings: The restaurant’s raw bar is adjacent to the cocktail bar. “We wanted to show how food and cocktails work together,” says Olson, who credits DeGroff with much of the design.

“We wanted this to feel like you were having a dinner party in our home,” says Olson. “We named it Apartment 13 for that reason.”

Every item on Keller’s food menu has at least three suggested pairings, designated by icons: saké, beer, cocktails, wine. “Everything I do is about making the food taste better,” says Olson, and create “a memorable dining experience. It’s elevated food, but dressed down, to help make the place more warm, inviting, fun.”

Other lessons Olson applies include working with “genius” chefs; minimizing waste through cross-utilizing ingredients and centralizing paperwork; (“All the purchasing goes through one guy.”); screening potential employees (“You can teach a person how to serve, bartend, cook, but you can’t teach them to be nice.”) and, lastly, the all-important first step: “The first mistake that many operators make is that they’re so eager to get into a space they’re not working with the proper people. The first step is signing a good lease. All the other stuff doesn’t matter if you’re in a bad lease.” ■■



The Vida Buena Cocktail

Leo DeGroff and Steve Olson’s take on a Negroni, starring mezcal.

- ▀ 1½ oz. Del Maguey Single Village Mezcal VIDA
- ▀ ¾ oz. Aperol
- ▀ ¾ oz. Carpano Antica
- ▀ 2 dashes Regan’s Orange Bitters

- ▀ Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass. Stir well over large ice cubes. Strain into a double Old Fashioned glass over a single large ice cube (2x2). Garnish with a long orange peel.