

WHEN LIFE HANDS YOU ARMAGNAC ...

A FORT LAUDERDALE STEAK HOUSE EMBRACES BRUNCH IN THE NAME OF COCKTAILS

Simeon Humphreys always has enjoyed working the brunch shift. A veteran of the fine-dining scene, the **Steak 954** bar manager appreciates the slower, more-relaxed atmosphere on Sundays, between the hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. He channeled that energy when creating the beachfront steak house's first brunch cocktail menu, which debuted this spring.

"They're easy to drink," he says of the seven specialty cocktails. "I think about the stifling-hot summers we endure. The committed brunch person will still enjoy a cocktail, even if they're sitting in 98-degree weather. I wanted something that would be comfortable and go with that environment."

Eschewing mimosas and the like, Humphreys arrived at his menu with a deep regard for fresh ingredients, making use of fruit, herbs, spices and intriguing bitters. He says he's most proud of **Le Japonais** (pictured), an Armagnac-based cocktail that's a byproduct of a delivery error.

"I received a case of Armagnac by mistake," he explains. "What am I going to do with 12 bottles of Armagnac, right?"

Humphreys researched drinks he could make with the French brandy, which is earthier than its counterpart, cognac. He decided on a reinterpretation of the Japanese Cocktail, which is "a little sweet, so I wanted to make it more refined."

To do so, Humphreys replaced the base spirit with 2 ounces of Armagnac and added a half-ounce of orgeat, an almond syrup. He peppers "four healthy dashes" of Angostura bitters before it's stirred, strained and poured into a coupe glass. It's topped with Veuve Clicquot Champagne and edible flowers.

As with the dinner cocktail menu at Steak 954 (401 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd.), the brunch cocktails have an adjective typed next to their names, giving the guests a "winking reference to the overall effect of the cocktail," he says. Le Japonais was labeled "indulgent."

"Just one of these is good enough," he says. "It's potent but a little sweet and rich."

—ALYSSA FISHER



SECRET MENU

Guests may wonder why the brunch cocktails aren't offered at dinner. Psst: They are. "If someone wants The Layover [Sailor Jerry spiced rum, house cold-brewed coffee, ginger, lime] or a Thames Lemonade [Fords gin, Dolin genepy, basil, fresh blackberries, lemon bitters], they can order it," Humphreys assures.