

## Cooking Channel's Darryl Robinson toasts special occasions with his own concoctions

By Mary Constantine

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When Darryl Robinson's parents designated him as bartender for their dinner parties it was so they could keep an eye on him.

Never did they consider that creating drinks would become his profession or land him a gig as host of "Drink Up!" a new Scripps Networks Cooking Channel production.

After all, young Darryl had declared an interest in medicine, which is initially what he pursued while attending the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va.

"I decided midway through school that the passion to become a doctor wasn't there. Instead I wanted to become an actor or entertainer ... that's when my father went into cardiac arrest," Robinson said.

Like many college students he found he could earn pretty good money bartending while in college.

A stint at Kings Arms Tavern at Colonial Williamsburg, where he learned to make grogs and hot toddies, led to his interest in mixology.

"That's where I first started to see the possibilities of making something other than rum and coke or a vodka cranberry," he said.

After graduating from college with a bachelor of arts degree in theater and a minor in psychology, Robinson moved to New York to pursue acting.

In between acting jobs he tended bar to help pay the bills.

"Every actor needs a survival gig so I would walk into some of the trendier bars and give them my best every day."

It didn't take long for his creative side to take over.

"I'm the kind of person that bores very easily if there's not some kind of change," he said.

So Robinson began to study the assortment of liquors behind the bar and experiment

with ways to use them.

"I would play with the things that sat in the back and had dust on them, and found out that there is a reason that a lot of them had dust on them," he said.

He also discovered that his theater skills were an asset behind the bar.

"There is a certain level of performance when you are tending a bar. That is my stage, and I love having the audience. Some days you are performing for one or two, and sometimes you are playing to a crowd," he said.

Robinson worked at various bars in New York City before landing a job five years ago at the trendy Hudson Bar in midtown Manhattan.

He also offers private party services through his company DR Mixologist.

When asked to describe the difference between a bartender and mixologist, Robinson explained it this way.

"A bartender goes to bartending school, follows a recipe and makes classic drinks. A mixologist can do everything a bartender can do, but takes it a step further ... you stay within the confines of what the drink is, but add an extra spin or twist on it," Robinson said.

For example, if he received a request for a not-too-sweet fruity drink he would create his own.

"The first think I would do is look at what type of fresh fruit and purees are behind the bar. I would probably reach for mango, blackberries or strawberries, muddle and then maybe mix with a flavored vodka. I would add a citrus, because that would brighten the sweetness of the fruit ... mix that with maybe a club soda or splash of pineapple juice," he said.

When hired to do private parties Robinson said he takes the setting and theme of the event into consideration before deciding on what cocktails to serve.

"To give a client more premium service I will come in with my own infused liquors, like jalapeno tequila or cucumber gin," he said.

Or, if he knows that the host has given guests a dress code, he tweaks his cocktails accordingly.

"If I'm at a party where everyone is wearing white, or dressed in clothes that may stain relatively easy, I will strain out the fruits that could fall out of a drink or maybe serve a white cranberry cosmopolitan, to help prevent accidents," he said.

He's excited over his new venture as host of "Drink Up!" and said the main goal of the show is to "demystify the whole bar/lounge nightlife culture."

“The days of the velvet ropes and being allowed to come in only if you are buying a \$400 vodka for a party of six is over,” he said.

The show’s venue changes each week as he travels to areas like Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New Jersey to highlight cocktail trends.

The show debuts May 31.

Here is a selection of Robinson’s creations that pair well with grilled foods, including the Michelini, named after first lady Michelle Obama.

### **Jalepeno margarita**

1/2 ounce lime juice

1/2 ounce agave nectar

2 ounces tequila (jalepeno flavored preferred)

Splash of orange juice

Shake all ingredients, serve in a rocks glass, and garnish with a slice of lime.

### **Watermelon cooler**

2-3 watermelon slices

1/4 ounce lemon juice

1/2 ounce simple syrup (1/2 water & 1/2 sugar)

2 ounces melon flavored rum

Club soda, optional

Pour ingredients into shaker. Shake and serve in a Collins glass. Garnish with a watermelon slice.

### **Michelini**

Cinnamon sugar mixture

3 ounces sparkling cider

1 ounce Calvados apple brandy

Nectar champagne

Chill Calvados, add cider, strain into a champagne flute with a cinnamon-sugared rim, and top with nectar champagne.

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