

The recently-opened Museum of International Brewmaster Art in Beijing was founded by world-renowned photographer Ning Xiaogang (aka Tiger Ning) and designed by Shao Weiyan.

In premises belonging to Dragon Seal, MIBA aims to promote Chinese wine culture, internationalization and passion.

The theme is Chinese liquor and production techniques for Yellow wine made from rice, the art form of Karesansui, and the untold story of how production evolved from scratch, recounted artistically. This beautiful, sensitively designed museum welcomed the participants of the Silk Route for an event dedicated to baijiu, the most popular spirit in China.

After a number of presentations on baijiu brewing techniques and a conference delivered by Derek Sandhaus and Christian Vergier on how to introduce baijiu to Western drinkers, mixology expert Ulric Nijs prepared a range of baijiu-inspired cocktails.





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One of the biggest difficulties working with the category besides from the language barrier, is that in the first instance, it is a completely new flavor profile to most westerners and secondly, the consumption pattern is very set in traditional Chinese customs.

These are tremendous barriers to overcome when it comes to introducing Baijiu -a very eastern spirit, to cocktails -a very western tradition. Most attempts at co-joining these two have been somewhat limited: Either the Baijiu was used in drops & dashes in cocktails rather than being the leading flavor, and/or the mixing attempts were kept within the confines of Chinese/Asian outlets.

My love for the category is a labor of love! I was originally interested in the category. My interest grew to affection and affection eventually turned to infatuation! In mixing with these wonderful spirits, I wanted to give each of them a key role in its respective cocktail, ensure that their organoleptic identity was highlighted rather than masked! Considering that I had a very mixed audience, I also had to ensure that I could please both eastern & western palates while demonstrating that Baijiu could play a role in the current cocktail revival. A Gordian knot, to be sure!

I decided to take five “classic” cocktails; twist and adapt them to accommodate this very powerful booze; A Margarita, a classic Pisco Sour, an Old Fashioned, a Julep and a Mojito. Each of these cocktails are simple classics which have endured the test of time, and each one of them gave me a canvas where I could showcase a Chinese Baijiu, as well as a personal challenge which I thoroughly enjoyed.

The Margarita... This was probably the most obvious choice; Tequila has similar characteristics to Baijiu... Both a bit of an acquired taste, both verging on the more savory side of the sensorial spectrum and both have a very profound national heritage. Using a sauce aroma Baijiu instead of tequila, was simply not enough to really give Baijiu the ability to shine... Adding some cucumber and a hint of Monosodium Glutamate all of a sudden transformed the cocktail and simply welcomed the assertive & powerful character of its base spirit.

Using Baijiu as a base for a classic sour happened very much by mistake... In my personal quest to please and impress one of the global experts on the category, Derek Sandhaus, I wanted to play with a citrus forward recipe, which did not naturally fit with my understanding of Baijiu... However, after tasting a particular light aroma baijiu, I thought the taste was quite reminiscent of a good Pisco... The drink then naturally came to be!

Strong aroma Baijiu was probably the hardest to mix... It does not completely dive into the savory/umami range the way a sauce aroma does, yet it boasts a full,

complex aroma that can be hard to use! Many of the drinks I have researched were using 5ml, or a dash of the product, but never really allowed the character of the Baijiu to be at the forefront, rather it was traditionally “hidden”... The cocktail did not naturally happen and the first tries were not particularly palatable; however, the two saving graces were ginger and tea. Two very eastern ingredients, which combined very well in a mojito-styled drink and enhanced some of the spicier character of strong aromas’ Baijiu... Combining them together yielded a complex drink. Complex enough to satisfy hardened Baijiu drinkers, but soft enough to introduce novices to the category.

The Long Hui Baijiu is a product of rare complexity! It boasts a strong Baijiu character and completely delves into full rancio aromas... While I initially wanted to venture more towards a flip-style drink, some of the ingredients were impossible to source locally, so I had to improvise quickly. Because Long-Hui is the first Baijiu to be matured in oak, this was a something I wanted to enhance and showcase... In either case, I knew that the drink I had in mind was never going to be fully commercial, but I truly wanted to create a drinker’s drink! A good oloroso Sherry highlighted the more savory/nutty character of the Baijiu; the bitters boosted the wooded notes with a touch of sugar to soften the entire drink. While I initially wanted it straight up, I needed a constant dilution for the cocktail to evolve! The cocktail opens very strongly with the complex, over-ripe (slightly rotten) exotic fruits aroma from the Long Hui, then expresses its more wood/spicy character with the bitters and the sherry... Excruciatingly complex, but ever so moreish!

The Julep created for Nuwa was probably the more “engineered” drink of the evening... and certainly the only tried & tested one; but as always, I had to tweak it a bit! Using plenty of fresh mint to freshen the Baijiu, sweetened with a touch of cherry jam gave me a very decent working base. Adding a touch of Szechuan-infused Campari gave a big spicy backbone to the whole drink and highlighted some of the stronger notes of the Baijiu and a small spray of vanilla carefully subdued the more umami notes which can be unpleasant to the western palate.

The thing I am particularly happy with is that each of these cocktails have been tailored specifically for a type of Baijiu, and they cannot be interchanged, as it simply won’t work! I know, I tried... A very obvious choice left in this list is the Bloody Mary... but somehow, it seemed too obvious and not enough of a personal challenge!

On this happy note, I wish you a great voyage of discovery for this wonderful spirit, and please do not hesitate to contact me for any further questions.

Ulric Nijs
Mixologist - B2B spirits consultant

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