

# Secret Stash



## A Manhattan cocktail bar's forward-thinking beverage program comes with an underground aesthetic.

BY LAURA ITZKOWITZ

At just 575 square feet, the newest cocktail lounge by design firm Avroko has ambitions that far exceed its size, not to mention its location on the fringe of New York's Little Italy. All the visual cues—the flashing neon sign pointing down to the basement, curtain made of plastic flaps, vinyl floor, retail shelving, and self-serve refrigerators—signify a seedy dive full of cheap booze. Yet this subterranean spot hidden under Genuine Superette, a California-style burger joint Avroko launched in April, contains one of the most innovative cocktail concepts in New York and perhaps, by extension, the world. “We like to try to find the high-low line in a lot of our projects, both in the design and also in terms of the programming,” Adam Farmerie, one of the partners, says. “The space is made up of the cheapest retail fixtures money can buy, thrown up against walls that are just existing, and yet they’re

lit with the perfect temperature LED bulbs so all the bottles glow in a marvelous way that celebrates the juxtaposition.”

The team collaborated with Eben Freeman, who earned a reputation for cocktail creativity at Wylie Dufresne's defunct WD-50 and heads the beverage development for all of Avroko's projects, to conceptualize Liguorette's drink program and optimize the design to function seamlessly with it. “The inspiration came from thinking about what kind of bar we want to sit in,” Farmerie says. “Some of our favorite experiences stem from feeling a sense of ownership, when the psychological barrier between the customer and the bartender is broken down.”

How do you execute that vision? Give the public full access. Thus the bar's self-serve, pay-by-the-weight model was born. Grab beer or wine from the Quickie Mart-grade cooler, or a bottle of spirits off the shelves, and if you've taken Freeman's class, mix craft cocktails using the tools behind the bar. Of course, the pros on hand can shake up any concoction a patron desires. The most envelope-pushing aspect is the bartender's challenge. Each month, Freeman will choose a spurned liquor from the misfits wall—which might be apricot brandy or neon-blue Hpnotiq—and task bartenders from all over the country to create a drink worthy of the

most refined palate. This three-fold program represents a radical departure from the status quo. Farmerie affirms: “We sort of open up the curtains to let you behind to see the stage set, which I don't think anybody's ever done.”

What drove Avroko to pair a high-end cocktail program with a downmarket look? “Once we started with that idea, the notion of a '70s California bodega liquor store that's a little bit run down became the perfect muse for celebrating that access.” The partners, who are self-described history nerds, did extensive research while brainstorming the design: combing through old *Time* and *Life* magazines, browsing books at the indie-driven Strand in the East Village, and watching retro TV shows like *Charlie's Angels*. They puzzled over every detail, from the black lacquer tables built to store 12-packs of beer to the convex security mirrors in the corners. Even the bathroom is plastered with images of Farrah Fawcett, one of which once hung on Farmerie's wall. The result is larger than the sum of its parts, but it's also simply—and most importantly for a depiction of a grab-and-go—a place you don't want to leave.



## Cocktail by Eben Freeman

### INSPIRED BY LIQUORETTE

What do you get when you marry bulldog-style cocktails and all-things-mini together? A Cha-Chunker cocktail. I came up with the idea to do these all-in-one cocktails with small-scale ingredients, but when it came to fitting everything into the mouth of the can, we realized it needed to be widened. That's when I created the machine affectionately known as the Cha-Chunker. It's an arbor press that we tricked out a bit, and when lowered into the mouth of a can of juice or soda, it widens it. Then I insert a miniature bottle of booze, straw, and a garnish or two, and voila. To do this at home, a citrus reamer mimics the action of the Cha-Chunker, and you still use all the ingredients found in a piña colada; instead, they're all contained in the mini can of pineapple juice. Once mastered, you can do this with all your favorite mixed drinks, like a gin and tonic, a whiskey and ginger, and more.

5½ oz	can of pineapple juice
50 oz	bottle Malibu Coconut Rum
¼ oz	lime juice
	pineapple leaf

Open pineapple juice can. Use citrus reamer to extend the mouth of the can. Pour out ¼ of juice in can. Insert straw and inverted bottle of Malibu Coconut Rum. Garnish with a pineapple leaf on the side of the can.

*Eben Freeman is head of bar operations and beverage development for Avroko.*

