



*The West Coast branch of the Museum of the American Cocktail back in March*

Courtesy Pacific Food &

## There's a Cocktail Museum in San Pedro—b Popping Up All Over Town

Finally, a museum devoted to booze

By **Andy Hermann** - October 24, 2018

Just off the corner of Hollywood and Vine, [Lost Property](#) is an unlikely outpost neighborhood chock-a-block with tacky souvenir shops and tackier nightclubs whiskey bar, with dark wood paneling, crystal decanter chandeliers, and shelved malt Scotches and small-batch bourbons behind the small bar. A sign near the away the Ed Hardy-clothed masses: “No, we don’t sell Red Bull.”

At a row of tables along the back wall, Lost Property proprietor Jeremy Lake, a bartender set out cocktail menus and tasting glasses. He seems unsatisfied with crammed together on the small tables, but Philip Dobard, director of the Museum of the American Cocktail, reassures him. “These aren’t tender souls,” he notes. “They

The [Museum of the American Cocktail](#)—MOTAC, for short—is headquartered in Orleans, Dobard's hometown. In March, MOTAC opened a West Coast branch alongside its sister organization, the Pacific Food and Beverage Museum. But then, [going back to April of 2014](#), MOTAC has been hosting tasting events all over the area, most of them free with RSVP. Each features the spirits of a specific brand but is presented less as a sales pitch and more as an opportunity to educate about the history and craft behind the booze.

At MOTAC's recent Wednesday night event at Lost Property, guests sample five from [John Drew Brands](#), a newcomer to the spirits world founded by a former Rob Amato, market manager for the company's western region, talks the small attendees through side-by-side tastings of two different rums, followed by two and something called Brixton Mash Destroyer, an iconoclastic whiskey/rum blend.

"In your second glass, what you have is the Dovetale Puerto Rico," he explains. "It's a year-old Puerto Rican rum, aged in ex-bourbon barrels, from Florida Everglades molasses."

Despite the abundance of booze on the tables, the atmosphere is as studious as a library. Many of those in attendance are cocktail professionals—bartenders, beverage writers, and journalists. There's discussion of tasting notes—one rum is a "vanilla bomb," says Amato—distillation techniques, ABVs, and production runs. Some debate over international rum labeling laws, and which of the two rums would make for a good base. (After sampling them neat, guests can try the spirits in cocktails fashioned for this occasion; the John Drew rye makes an especially flavorful, caramel-tinted Manhattan variation called a "Crawl of Fame.")

It's Amato's first MOTAC event, and he's impressed with the attendees' inquisitiveness. "Everybody here wants to learn and know the story," he says after his presentation. "It's a good mix of people, both consumer and industry."



That's the goal for every MOTAC event in L.A., to introduce aficionados and professionals alike to the latest developments in spirits and cocktail culture. "When New Orleans is tell the story of the history of the city," Amato explains. "Here will be more about the state of the industry. The idea that it's not frozen in time."

To that end, many MOTAC events spotlight pro



*Philip Dobard (left) at a MOTAC event at Bar Lubitsch in 2016*

likely unfamiliar to the less well-traveled boozel recent tasting, for example, featured genever an style gins; an upcoming [Day of the Dead-theme](#) October 27 will feature Mexican whiskeys. (“Yes thing!” MOTAC’s email newsletter declares.)

Dobard, a former conductor and opera singer, i presence presiding over most MOTAC events. His ex-wife, Tracey Mitchell—an accomplished opera singer—runs the Pacific Food and Beverage Museum (or l short), which hosts its own series of cooking demonstrations, author talks and dinners. Both grew up in New Orleans “deeply embedded in food and drink,” ; it. “Everybody in my family cooks,” says Mitchell. “You can’t grow up in New C be culinary-minded.”

Both museums also host events in their small, art-gallery-like space in San Pe now displays a modest set of special exhibits, including food photography, por known chefs showing off their tattoos, and a fascinating collection of Victorian and other restaurant ephemera. A window display of MOTAC artifacts—including rake-like tool once used to shave block ice and a kitschy ‘50s cocktail shaker sl extinguisher—represents “a 10th of one percent” of MOTAC’s permanent colle according to Dobard. More will be put on display as they continue to build out space in the coming months.



*The Museum of the American Cocktail and the Pacific Food & Beverage Museum's shared storefront in San Pedro*

COURTESY PACIFIC FOOD & BEVERAGE MUSEUM

Why San Pedro? Partially it was down to support from some area politicians, i City Councilmember Joe Buscaino and his predecessor, Janice Hahn, who's n County Supervisor. But more importantly, it was proximity to the nearby Port a historical hub for L.A.'s rich melting pot of cultures and cuisines. To this day it all here," Dobard notes, citing fine Italian, Japanese, Thai and regional Mex within blocks of MOTAC and PacFAB's space. "San Pedro is a center of culture he says. "It's just that most Angelenos don't know [about] it."

MOTAC's arrival in Los Angeles is well-timed. After decades of benign neglect cocktail scene is now thriving, with new temples of top-shelf spirits and creati springing up in every corner of town. This cocktail renaissance has given Doba canvas across which to sprinkle his events: [Hatchet Hall's Old Man Bar](#) in Cul [Palihouse](#) in WeHo, and the [Sassafras Saloon](#) in Hollywood have hosted past p and future events will continue to take place at Lost Property, as well as [the Ec DTLA](#). On November 4, MOTAC and PacFAB join forces for a "harvest festival Glassell Park that will feature locally sourced cuisine and the full line of Buellt Ascendant Spirits.

Through MOTAC's exhibits and events, Dobard hopes not only to document a

cocktail culture in Los Angeles, but to “expand the notion” of what a museum is. “In the past, museums became places of preciousness,” he says. “Yeah, [we have] artifacts, but they tell a story.”

*The Museum of the American Cocktail and the Pacific Food & Beverage Museum located at 731 S. Pacific Ave. in San Pedro. For hours and upcoming events, visit [the museum's website](#).*

***CORRECTION:*** This post has been updated to correctly identify the proper Property and to remove a reference to New Orleans as birthplace of cocktail.

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