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Wine & Spirits with  
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Las Vegas Getting The Cocktail Fest It Deserves!

Las Vegas has its share of serious cocktail mixology destinations; it's home to the Nightclub & Bar Show, WSWA (bi-annually) and Nth [Universal Whiskey Experience](#) and more than a few competitions. But for some reason, it still doesn't feel as if it receives the level of respect it ought to in the world of spirits and libations.

So I'm happy to see it finally getting the cocktail fest it deserves with the return of [For The Love Of Cocktails](#) this month.



Tony Abou-Ganim with last year's crew (many of the same faces coming this year, though I think Chris Hopkins is still on his round-the-world jaunt).

While it won't rival Tales of the Cocktail, the Manhattan Cocktail Classic or even California's self-spawning Golden State of Cocktails, the three day event over Valentine's Day weekend, organized by Back Bar USA is definitely gathering together serious local and (inter-)national talent, including the estimable Dale DeGroff, Tony Abou-Ganim, Julio Bermejo, Bridget Albert and Vegas' own Francesco Lafranconi, Mariena Mercer, Max Solano, Nectaly Mendoza, Ricardo Murcia, Raul Faria, Patricia Richards and more. Don't know all those names? You seriously should.



The official teaser (above).

Events take place at the Vegas Strip's new Delano hotel and sister Mandalay Bay, starting on Thursday 2/12 with a Meet the Masters dinner at Charlie Palmer's Aureole restaurant, with Champagne and wine cocktails by Abou-Ganim, DeGroff and Lafranconi, followed by Sommelier wine pairings from Bellagio's Jason Smith, Charlie Palmer's Steven Geddes and ARIA's Nick Hetzel. That night will also feature a don't-miss midnight meet up at the somewhat legendary Herbs and Rye where you'll have a chance to get behind the stick with some of the local USBG's best.



Tony Abou-Ganim makes a cocktail he learned from Dale DeGroff (above).

On Friday, five seminars will be held by DeGroff, Bermejo, Abou-Ganim, Lafranconi, and Albert with Debbi Peek, all of which seem like solid choices--topics including bitters, rum, tequila and natural ingredients (Abou-Ganim's, interestingly enough, is "ladies only," so I'm hoping my friend will allow me to bar back for him...or I might have to resort to some dangerous measures!). Later that same night

comes the Grand Gala at the Mix restaurant atop Delano, featuring 30 cocktail stations (better get a room!), cigars, rare spirits and food by Mix chef Bernard Riou. "Be on the lookout for some amazing and unique surprises" says sponsor Absolut Elyx. Knowing their Ambassador Kristen Schaffer, that's no hype. Saturday morning will wrap things up with a hangover--ahem, Bloody Mary-brunch at Delia's Kitchen, a new local/organic-focused spot I've been meaning to try out (here's to good excuses).



Tony A-G and some guy who likes to drink.

And speaking of good excuses, the weekend will benefit Abou-Ganim's charity, the Helen David Relief Fund for bartenders affected by breast cancer. So that just gives you another reason to have a warm feeling after all the booze.

Pricing on the events is fairly reasonable--and some are free with purchase of others. So [take a look!](#)  
[For the Love of Cocktails official site](#)