

Kaitlyn Stewart, Katie Ingram, Lauren Mote and Sabrine Dhaliwal take a break in L'Abattoir in Gastown

In Good Spirits

Raise a glass to four bartenders who are shaking up the local cocktail scene **BY SHERI RADFORD + PHOTOS BY KK LAW**



Sabrina Dhaliwal
Uva Wine & Cocktail Bar
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Katie Ingram
L'Abattoir
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Lauren Mote
Bittered Sling Bitters
(www.bitteredsling.com)



Kaitlyn Stewart
Royal Dinette
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"Sweetheart, do you know how to make an Old Fashioned?"

Female bartenders hear a variation of this question every day—proof that there's still a long way to go when it comes to gender assumptions. But Vancouver has a bevy of fierce females who are defying stereotypes and shattering glass ceilings.

The first woman to win the Diageo World Class Canada bartending competition, and *Vancouver* magazine's Bartender of the Year for 2015, Lauren Mote has revamped the cocktail lists at Yew, Café Medina and Burdock & Co. and spent years behind the pine at Uva. She's also the co-founder of Bittered Sling Bitters, which makes award-winning bitters and extracts.

When Mote moved on from Uva, she left some very big (and very stylish) shoes to fill. Fortunately, Sabrina Dhaliwal was ready for the task. After learning the industry at popular spots such as Reflections and West, Dhaliwal is now the bar manager at Uva and *Vancouver* magazine's Bartender of the Year for 2017.

Katie Ingram also did a stint at Uva, plus she worked at the Donnelly Group of restaurants. Now the head bartender at L'Abattoir, she's racked up several honours in her relatively short career, including winning the Jameson Barrelman Bar Battle in 2015.

Kaitlyn Stewart earned her chops at Vancouver hot spots such as Cactus Club, Black + Blue and Boulevard, and she's now the bar manager at Royal Dinette. A frequent competitor in bartending challenges, she recently scored her biggest win of all, triumphing over competitors from around the planet to nab the title of World Class Bartender of the Year.

Stewart has just returned from the Diageo World Class Global Final in Mexico City on the day *Where* sits down to chat with these formidable women. All four are almost giddy at Stewart's big win, even occasionally bursting into song, while Stewart herself still seems stunned. "I got myself to World Class," she says, "and supposedly I won it. It happened. It's a strange, strange thing." She expresses annoyance at the misconception that women in the business are catty and don't want each other to succeed, because that hasn't been her experience at all.

Ingram chimes in, "Vancouver is very lucky to have a supportive bartending community. We are a family and we all care and love and support each other."

Dhaliwal adds, "We're all in it together." This elicits a raucous chorus of "Amen!" from around at the table.

But the job does have its challenges. First and foremost, the long hours and late nights. "We're open until 2 a.m. every single night of the week. You make sacrifices. Sometimes I miss my nephew's birthday party," Dhaliwal says, adding, "I miss my family at times."

Mote mentions how bartending is emotionally demanding, almost like a stage performance, requiring them to be "on" at all times. It's no surprise, then, that Mote, Stewart and Ingram have all studied theatre and seem entirely comfortable in the spotlight.

And the most annoying thing about their chosen profession? Stewart says, "I'd say the worst part is having people look at you and say, but what's your real job? What do you want to do after this?"

After devoting years to studying and improving upon their craft, these master mixologists don't view it as a temporary position to be abandoned when husbands or children come along. "We no longer have to choose between career and family," Mote says. "We can have it all."

The best part of the job, all four agree, is the people: talking to their co-workers and customers, finding out what each person feels passionate about, making connections between them. According to Mote, "It's always creative, it's ever-changing, it's evolving, it's worldly, and we will touch more people on a daily basis than maybe even the barista at your local coffee shop."

"Being a bartender is so much more than what we're putting in a glass in front of somebody," says Dhaliwal. "What we do is we create the experience." "Every day is completely different," says Stewart. "And it's fun," adds Ingram.

When it's time to take a seat on the other side of the pine, as customers, they all agree on one favourite destination: "Dive bars!" The casual, unpretentious nature of dive bars appeals far more than the atmosphere in overly chic places where folks go just to see and be seen. Though, as Stewart points out, "It's Vancouver, so you could go anywhere in sweatpants, if you wanted to."

Then, once again, the topic of long hours comes up. "I never get to go out," Stewart says with a laugh. "After work usually things are closing down, so I'm at home drinking chocolate milk."

When pressed to name some of the best cocktail spots in town—places that in no way resemble those beloved dive bars—a list of mixology hot spots quickly emerges: The Diamond, Juniper, Grapes & Soda. The women are more reluctant to share their favourite drinks. "I love overly complicated, complex, insane cocktails, but I love to make them more than I love to

drink them on a regular basis," Mote admits, adding, "I like drinking everything, to be honest, but I like people over bars." Everyone else chimes in to say they're the same, seeking out specific bartenders over specific drinks or bars. They go to places where they can visit—and sample the latest creations of—other noted Vancouver mixologists such as Danielle Tatarin (The Keefer Bar), Jay Jones (Vij's) and David Wolowidnyk (Botanist).

"I go to see bartenders, I don't go to bars," Mote says, prompting nods around the table.

"It's about seeing people," Dhaliwal agrees.

Mote sums it up perfectly: "We talk about life, and all of a sudden a cocktail just shows up."

We'll drink to that. 🍸



Katie Ingram crafts a Rosita using tequila, Campari, vermouth and bitters from Bittered Sling