



## The River Grill

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### **The Inspiration Behind the Cocktails**

NEWBURGH, NY – Every day, mixologist and bar director, Steven Aigner, goes into work two hours before the restaurant opens to make fresh purees and freshly squeezed lime and lemon juice for his handcrafted cocktails. He works long hours to make sure that each cocktail that the customer drinks is perfected, and he has been doing this for five years.

Aigner had his start in the restaurant business when he was just 15 years old. He started out as busboy at The River Grill, and from there, he worked his way up to a Server. The summer he finally turned 21, he decided to learn how to bartend and he has not looked back since. At the time, Aigner was studying

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Economics at Frostburg State University in Maryland. He had such a passion for bartending and the restaurant atmosphere that just before his last semester of college he told his parents that he will not be returning to school and that he will be pursuing his passion of bartending full time. “They had their doubts of course,” Aigner stated, “but I presented to them a full 10-year plan of where I want to be in life and they knew that I wanted to pursue this as a serious profession.”

Aigner knew that he didn’t just want to be a regular bartender that just pours classic cocktails and simple drinks that were created by someone else. He creates handcrafted, originals cocktails that he creates himself. Each season, he comes up with a new cocktail list for the restaurant. “I find inspiration from the things around me, sometimes I do a twist on a classic cocktail or I create a whole new cocktail that I know the ingredients would work well together” Aigner stated.

He enjoys making cocktails that ‘wow’ the crowd. Last fall, he created a cocktail that was smoking when it arrived to the customer. It was an apple margarita that, once poured into the glass, was then put into a smoker that burnt Applewood chips and made the drink smoke and smell of wood. “That was one of my best-sellers during the fall season,” stated Aigner, “not only was it perfect for the cold weather, but once people saw other table ordering a drink that came out smoking, then they wanted one as well.”

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Each cocktail that Aigner creates is made with fresh ingredients that are made in-house. Each day he squeezes limes and lemons for fresh juices as well as fresh purees. One of the cocktails on the list this summer include jalapeno, mango and cucumber. Each day, Aigner has to puree each of those to have enough for the cocktails needed to be made that day. He even makes his own simple syrups as well as flavored simple syrups when needed. “I don’t believe in artificial, store bought flavoring. Each cocktail that I present has my name on it, I want to make sure that each ingredient is as fresh and delicious as it can be” Aigner stated.



Aigner posing in front of his bar at The River Grill, one in which he designed

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Aigner's recipes have been recognized by others; some of his cocktails have been published. Two years ago, *Hudson Valley Magazine* published his cocktail called "The Hudson." This drink includes gin, cucumber puree, lemon juice, ginger and green chartreuse. This cocktail was Aigner's first published one because of its unique, but rememberable flavor. Since then, Aigner has gotten 2 more recipes published.

Along with being published, Aigner has also had many other accomplishments since becoming a mixologist full time. In 2018, he was named Best Bartender of the Hudson Valley by *Hudson Valley Magazine* and is currently in the running for the same title again in 2019. This is one of his biggest accomplishments as the Hudson Valley covers a large number of towns and cities and therefore a mass amount of restaurants. Aigner has also shaken his cocktails for the James Beard Foundation at the James Beard House, which is a prestigious organization that honors only the bests of the restaurant industry.

"All of this wouldn't be possible if I hadn't gotten my start at The River Grill" stated Aigner. This is his 11<sup>th</sup> year working there and owner Mark Malia could not be prouder of what Aigner has done to his bar program. "Before Steven was here, we weren't been known for our cocktails, now people come in just because of his name and it's great to see how far he has come" said Malia.

As for Aigner's plans for his future, he plans on opening a restaurant of

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his own. “My goal by 30 is to have my own restaurant in New York City, I have four years left to make that happen” stated Aigner. Although having a time crunch on his goals, Aigner knows that this is only the start of his career and he knows that pursuing his passion full time five years ago has been the best decision that he has made.

To taste Steven Aigner’s crafted cocktails yourself visit The River Grill or for more information call (845) 561-9444.

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**About The River Grill**

The River Grill is a restaurant that overlooks the picturesque Hudson River. It serves fine dining in a casual setting so guests can enjoy a delicious dining experience while relaxing with friends and family.