

LIFESTYLE

Southside Wars

Who makes the best version of Baltimore's favorite country club drink?

BY JESS BLUMBERG

It's among the greatest rivalries in history: Hamilton vs. Burr, Army vs. Navy, Tom vs. Jerry and . . . Southside vs. Southside?

Yes, this popular country club drink—commonly made with rum, lemon and lime juice, sugar, mint, and crushed ice—has been pitted against itself. Depending on who you talk to, the drink is best at the Elkridge Club or the Green Spring Valley Hunt Club.

"The clubs each have their own take on the drink," says Jamison Hodges, a 29-year-old Fells Point resident. "Baltimore is really big on tradition and exclusivity, so everyone has their favorite."

Ironically, the origin of the Southside isn't even local. As lore has it (and as NPR reported in 2004), the drink was created in Prohibition-era Chicago where gang leaders added citrus and sugar to disguise the hooch's bad taste. Somehow, the drink migrated over to Long Island and became popular with the South Hampton set before, eventually, landing in Baltimore County country clubs.

"I had my first Southside about 45 years ago," says Donnell "Beetle" Smith, 59, a commercial real estate broker. "The closest to the original you'll find is at Green Spring."

Green Spring's drink has a sweet, citrus flavor (they use the recipe of former, and beloved, bartender George Lee). Elkridge's bartender Andy Ervin—who has been at the



club nearly 50 years—makes a deep green, very minty version of the cocktail. ("It should look like swamp water," one member said.)

"I like them both," says Greg Barnhill, 56, a partner of Brown Advisory, who belongs to Green Spring. "You can't say one is better because they both have unique attributes."

Last year, this rivalry was put to the test at the Legacy Chase, Barnhill says, where they had a Southside taste-off. The competition was friendly and no real winner was determined, so the debate rages on.

"I would say most people prefer Green Spring's version," says one Elkridge member, who, quite understandably, chose to remain anonymous.

"I like Andy's [Elkridge's] drink better," says Hodges, whose girlfriend is an Elkridge member. "I like the bartender serving it, and he makes them pretty stiff."

Hodges attributes the stiffness to a "rum floater," which is rum that sits on top of the crushed ice, strengthening the first couple sips. Historically, and still in Long Island today, the drink is made with gin. But in Baltimore, the Southside is usually rum-based.

"Any liquor works," says Smith, who prefers making his Southsides at home now. "I like vodka, but you can use anything. As long as you don't use too much mix."

Smith explains he uses fresh mint from a patch in his backyard, something Hodges remembers his mother doing. An important rule of the Southside is that it's best consumed between Hunt Cup (April) and Labor Day, when the mint is fresh.

"It's associated with horse racing and warm weather," says Barnhill. "A Southside means the rebirth of a new season."

how to make A SOUTHSIDE

There are many different Southside recipes (some secret) and the mixes can be bought at both country clubs. You can also purchase Graul's

own mix, called Mr. Harold's, at its stores. But if you want to make your own, the key is using fresh fruit and mint. Here's a recipe we liked:

- ✓ 3 oz. dark rum (Mount Gay or Myer's)
- ✓ 2 oz. fresh-squeezed lime juice
- ✓ 1 oz. fresh-squeezed lemon juice

- ✓ 3 oz. club soda
- ✓ granulated sugar to taste
- ✓ pulverized mint
- Serve over crushed ice. Add a "rum floater," if desired.