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THE SPIRIT REALM: STYLISH SIPS IN THE JUNGLE

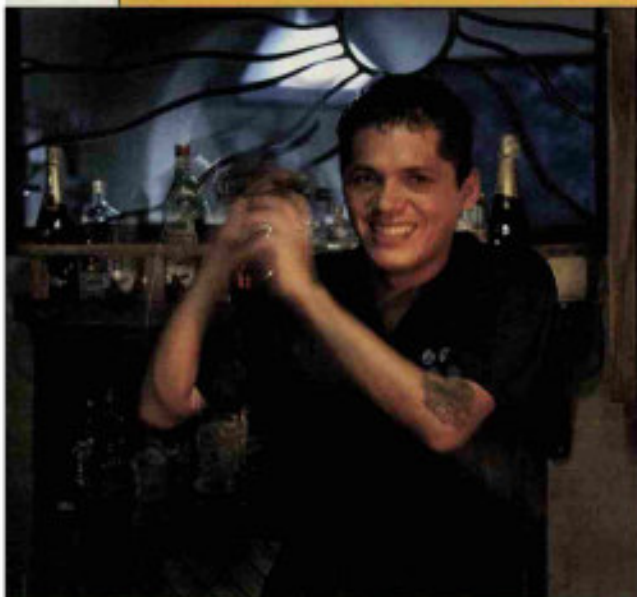
In the heart of the Costa Rican rainforest, amid the sounds of chattering spider monkeys and crashing surf, the staccato riff of a slicing knife keeps a steady beat. Imagination conjures exotic scenes of indigenous repasts, of tables bearing dishes of hearts of palm, star fruit, coconut. But at the source is a scene more *Sex in the City* than Tarzan. Bartender Jonathan Gonzales Araya is preparing limes for a popular cocktail, the

Caipirum, in the Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge's stylish tree house lounge.

Though a self-described "simple barman," the San Jose-born Gonzales Araya does not convince: like an artist at work with a palette, he positions ingredients around him in a tidy, colorful display. Piles of fresh mint, plump, perfectly sliced fruit and vibrant pink flowers . . . ingredients are sourced from the jungle an arm's length away. The options, ranging from a simple Tico Sour to the more luridly named Exotica, are a welcome surprise in this impassable swath of nature gone wild.

"I always use fresh fruit, never canned," says Gonzales Araya, a purist. "Canned fruit and pre-made mixers always tend to be too sweet, and the sweetness overpowers the real flavors of the fruit." Premium rums, vodkas and gins add to the clean appeal.

The studious barman puts the finishing touches—an artfully draped lime curl and delicate rainforest flower—on the Caipirum, and smiles. "Just because a recipe is known doesn't mean it can't be yours," he says. "By adding your own touch, it becomes a personal creation." For information, go to www.playanicuesa.com —SUSAN KOSTRZEWA



COCKTAIL OF THE MONTH

CAIPIRUM

Melding lively lime citrus and the mellow spiciness of Centenario rum, this Latin American refresher is an ideal apéritif in both cool and balmy weather. *Recipe adapted by Jonathan Gonzales Araya, Playa Nicuesa Rainforest Lodge.*

1½ limes sliced

3 teaspoons unrefined sugar

2 ounces Costa Rican Centenario rum

2 mint leaves

Curled lime rind, for garnish

Fill a pint glass with lime slices, sugar, rum and mint leaves, and muddle. Add well-crushed ice to top of glass, filling glass, and stir. Garnish with lime curl.

