

# Raise a Glass to the Future

Three cocktails for climate heroes

by CLAIRE SPROUSE



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Claire Sprouse is a bartender and the owner of Hunky Dory in Brooklyn, New York. She also founded Outlook Good, which addresses climate change and climate justice in the hospitality industry.

## “Human beings don’t have a pollution problem. They have a design problem,”

write William McDonough and Michael Braungart in their 2013 book *The Upcycle*. Choosing to be inspired by the challenge of sustainability has been my guiding star behind the bar for the last decade. I have redesigned my cocktails to be climate-smarter by using resources more efficiently. Through advocacy and education, I encourage my industry to examine its role in climate change.

I am a bartender and a child of the Gulf Coast. When I look into the future, there is no way to talk about cocktails without talking about climate change. And there is no way to talk about climate change without centering Black lives. In our country, Black people and communities suffer the most from the effects of climate change. Despite and because of this, they are the first to fight on the frontlines. This is especially true in the South.

The three cocktail recipes that follow honor Southern Black women and men whose work builds resilience and awareness around issues of climate change and sustainability. One or fifty years from now, I hope that all Southerners will know their names and remember their work.

PAULETTE RICHARDSON and Valencia Gunder are longtime residents of Miami, Florida. Miami is considered the most vulnerable city in the world to rising sea levels caused by climate change, projected to lose twelve to eighteen inches of land elevation over the next fifty years.

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Homes will be ruined, and residents will be displaced. Richardson lives in Liberty City and Gunder in Little Haiti. Both neighborhoods are historically low-income and predominately Black. These populations have been generationally marginalized by redlining and segregation, which have moved them farther and farther from the beachfront. However, climate change-related issues are disrupting these dynamics. While increased hurricane activity has hammered down on more affluent properties with a view of the water, Richardson’s and Gunder’s neighborhoods are relatively well-protected by their inland locations and high elevations. Likewise, these geographical features win out flood zone projections. In recent years, this has drawn the attention of real estate developers, who are moving in to purchase and develop more elevated, inland neighborhoods, including Little Haiti and Liberty City.

Richardson calls this phenomenon “climate gentrification.” She and Gunder have helped create land trusts to protect the home and dignity of their neighbors. Gunder’s nonprofit organization, The Smile Trust, collaborates with The Miami Climate Alliance and The Black Collective to elevate consciousness of climate change and provide mutual aid in response to associated issues.

Watching the rising waters compels awareness of water conservation. Even as Miami faces rising tides, the city reckons with the need to conserve fresh water to

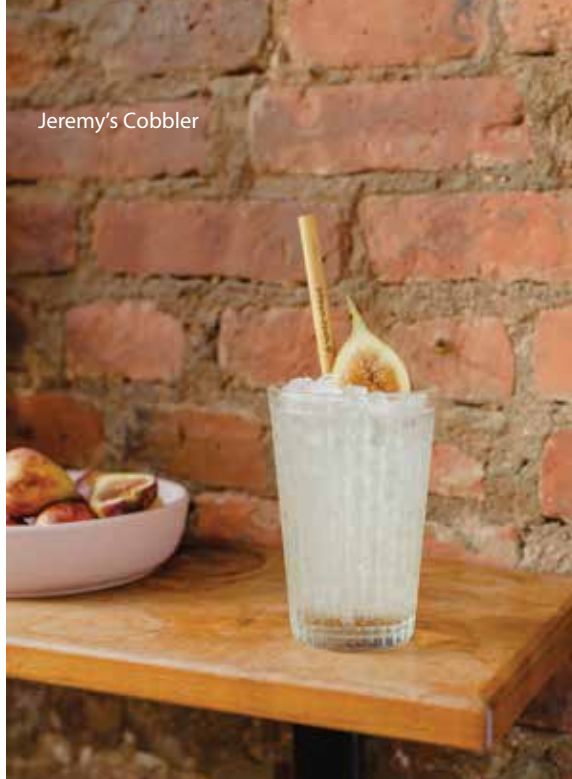
protect its aquifers and minimize reliance on resource-intensive water processing.

I am an advocate for addressing climate change. I am also an advocate for well-made martinis. A cocktail of this nature can traditionally use up to one full liter (33.81 ounces) of water. This happens through the production and use of ice, which chills and dilutes a martini to optimal temperature and taste, as well as the washing of tools and vessels to make it. Over the years, I have redesigned my recipes to balance my values with the principles of a great-tasting drink. By pre-batching and pre-diluting cocktails in the martini family, I can eliminate almost a full liter of fresh drinking water per serving. These savings add up, even at your home, but especially in a bar that serves hundreds or thousands of drinks a night. The accompanying Gibson recipe outlines this very simple method of conservation. It substitutes Haitian pikliz for the traditional Gibson garnish of a pickled onion, in honor of Valencia's Little Haiti neighborhood.

COLETTE PICHON BATTLE'S work stretches from Florida to Texas. As the executive director of the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy, she addresses climate change in the region using a multi-pronged approach.

Pichon Battle's work draws connections between racism and climate justice. In her home state of Louisiana, the area between Baton Rouge and New Orleans is nicknamed "Cancer Alley," due to the large presence of petrochemical plants and the byproducts of their processes.

Their proximity to Black communities is not coincidence; there is a long history of environmental racism across the country, which has led to Black-populated areas being exposed as "sacrifice zones"—a term coined by Dr. Robert



Jeremy's Cobbler

Bullard in 1993 and defined as the discriminatory practice of choosing BIPOC communities as sites of toxic dumping.

In a recent talk for The Movement for Black Lives, Pichon Battle said, "We are part of this ecology. It is our duty to maintain the natural resources around us." She asked, "How can we individually and as a community develop to economically survive climate change?"

Agriculture, which accounts for 10 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, will be part of the answer. Can we reimagine a system of food that relies on and celebrates the crops and food sources that help us in this fight?

Like Pichon Battle, the red mulberry tree is a native of Louisiana, and its potential as a delicious ingredient in food and cocktails is matched by its ability to positively impact the environment. They typically grow wild in hardwood forests, though some orchardists cultivate them. Their bright red fruit is edible and mature

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enough to pick from April to June. The mulberry is a highly efficient carbon sink, meaning that it absorbs more carbon dioxide from the air than it produces, helping to lower the concentration of this greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. It also absorbs other toxic pollutants from the air, and its roots absorb carbon and heavy metals from the soil.

When we use mulberries, we celebrate plants that do their part to help us work against climate change.

I'VE LIVED IN cities and towns along the Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida, but Houston is where I lived the longest and where I am most proud to be from. It is also where Jeremy Peaches founded Fresh Life Organic (FLO) in 2016. His mission is to provide fresh produce and agricultural consulting. Only 2 percent of our nation's farmers are Black. Twenty-eight-year-old Peaches is one of them.

FLO focuses on aquaponics and hydroponics and on regenerative and organic practices. Organic is an ideal that ultimately emphasizes land and water protection, as well as food security. To begin to think about a future fifty years from now, I believe we must prioritize organic farming, along with investing in Black and Indigenous farmers' stewardship of our lands.

BIPOC have historically not had the privilege to view land as disposable or food as something to waste. They also know that such unsustainable thinking leads to lost flavors and lost opportunities to learn. In the nonalcoholic cocktail featured here, I heed these lessons and look to organic fig orchards. These fruit-bearing trees grow well in Texas. Often overlooked are their leaves, which go unplucked and unused. They lend a grassy coconut profile to this drink and are a perfect example of what we can do

by reexamining our relationship to the land while questioning what so many of us don't typically value as flavorful or "worthy" of our plates and glasses.

I LOOK AT everything I do behind the bar through the lens of sustainability, and I challenge my peers to do the same. I believe in the productive power of visioning to work toward transformative changes in the hospitality industry. In doing so, we also acknowledge that there are some changes that cannot wait to be gradually addressed. We have to start holding ourselves accountable to make these changes now. The authors of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement declared 2020 to 2030—right now—as the "critical decade" for mitigating climate change. Meanwhile, we now confront other long-needed changes at the intersection of race, gender, hospitality, labor, and agriculture. Let us center the needs and experiences of Black people and other marginalized communities as a necessity to redesign our present and look toward a truly sustainable future. 🍷

## THE MENU

**Paulette and Valencia's Gibson**  
A twist on the traditional Gibson, made with Bristow gin or Cathead vodka and garnished with spicy Haitian pikliz.

**Colette's Julep**  
Maker's Mark bourbon tempered with a sweet-tart syrup of red mulberries.

**Jeremy's Cobbler**  
A refreshing, nonalcoholic fig leaf soda.

\*See insert for recipes