



# MORE THAN MOONS HI NE

In Kentucky, Anna Bogle crafts cocktails with a sense of place

by Lora Smith

THE MUSICIANS FROM THE CAJUN COUNTRY REVIVAL, up for the night from Louisiana, seem to be getting a kick out of drinking bourbon in its native habitat. Their faces are flushed from slow pulls of Bulleit, a favorite at Summit City Lounge in downtown Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Housed in a historic building that once served as the office of the late lawyer, author, and mountain people's advocate Harry Caudill, the bar has become a landmark for another reason. Summit was the first bar to open five years ago when the city voted to legalize the sale of alcohol by restaurants, something referred to in the rapidly disappearing dry counties of eastern Kentucky as "going moist."

Joel Savoy, flicking his fiddle bow, motions to the backlit bar. "Anna, come dance a little with us." A lovesick waltz starts. And Summit's dark-haired bartender, thirty-four-year-old Anna Bogle, momentarily sways in the arms of a handsome young man in a red-checked shirt. The crowd swells to a sweaty mix of flatfooting and two-stepping bodies.

WHITESBURG, set at the base of Pine Mountain, Kentucky's second highest peak, straddles the crossroads of a complicated social history and an uncertain economic future, based on the region's dependence on a declining coal industry. Since the 1960s, Whitesburg has largely been synonymous with Appalshop, a multimedia arts center. Conceived as a War on Poverty program for local youth, it continues to attract national acclaim for producing award-winning documentary films. Despite the best efforts of that program, Whitesburg, like most of Appalachia, still struggles with persistent poverty and inordinately high unemployment.

But tonight, with the rowdy crowd of miners, politicians, and artists, drinking and dancing under star-shaped paper lanterns, Whitesburg feels like the most carefree place on Earth.

During the band's second set, the drinkers draw a bead on Anna's cocktails, including a wild mountain grape-infused take on a Ramos gin fizz, shaken with egg whites, cream, orange flower water, simple syrup, and lime juice. Those same wild grapes undergird a grape-and-lavender-infused vodka tonic with a splash of Saint Germain that tastes like a country cousin of the cosmopolitan.

Anna talks me through her creative process, equal parts improvisation and something out of a field guide to wild edibles of the Southern Appalachians: “I was up hiking on Little Shepherd’s Trail and came across a ton of wild grapes—the seedy kind, not good for jelly, so I made some infusions.”

My pick for the night’s star is a frothy, nameless wonder with a delicate beige color that Anna hands me in a champagne coupe. “I’m really horrible with naming things,” she admits, “but I’ve been wanting to figure out a sorghum cocktail.”

Discovering a pear tree on a friend’s property, she found her inspiration. The result is something I took to calling the “Winter Pear,” a riff on a White Russian that features heirloom pear-infused vodka and a dab of pear butter, with local sorghum instead of Kahlua.

ANNA IS QUICK TO SAY that it would be hard to live in Whitesburg and not be influenced by place. “The physical landscape here is unmistakable, all around, holding you. You’re always encircled by these mountains,” she says. But her approach is also a natural expression of her experience as a young Appalachian.

Raised in a small community outside Maryville, Tennessee, Anna’s earliest memories are of bringing her family’s surroundings to the table. “We always had a big garden, cows, chickens and goats,” she recalls. “Our neighbors hunted game and raised hogs. As kids, we’d go down and help with the hog killing.”

After moving north for college, Anna returned to the region to work as a chef, including stints in Asheville and Greensboro, North Carolina, before eventually settling closer to home in Knoxville, Tennessee.

The call to eastern Kentucky came when Amelia Kirby, a childhood friend of Anna’s and the owner of Summit City, asked Anna to help redesign a bar menu focused on local ingredients and regional tastes. Anna’s approach to bar food and spirits is to call forward the overlooked multicultural and ethnic influences that shape the mountain experience, making it clear that eastern Kentucky offers more than just moonshine, soup beans, and chow chow.

This playful treatment of Appalachian identity translates to a menu of cocktails like The Stone Mason, a liquid homage to the city’s Italian immigrant ancestors who cut distinctive stone buildings and bridges.

As the night comes to a close, Anna’s mind is on the black walnuts awaiting transformation in her apartment, steps away from the bar. She tells me a black walnut liqueur is in the works and, if successful, will make an appearance in some as-yet-unnamed cocktail. I suggest a walnut bitters, and Anna’s eyes light up. 🍷

Lora Smith splits her time between a day job in Greensboro, North Carolina, and weekend work in Egypt, Kentucky, where she and her husband are developing 120 acres at the head of a holler into an organic farm and heirloom cider orchard.

PHOTOS by Brett Marshall.

## The Stone Mason

Whitesburg’s stone buildings and bridges were built by stone masons from the Calabria region of Italy. A drink honoring their contribution to the community—with a Kentucky twist.

1.5 oz bourbon  
5 oz Campari  
1 oz freshly made sour mix

Shake vigorously and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with a lime or lemon twist.

