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University of California
Berkeley, California

West Coast Cocktails Oral History Project

David Wondrich
A Historian's Perspective on Contemporary Cocktail Culture

Interviews conducted by
Shanna Farrell
in 2014

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David Wondrich, June 2013
Photograph by Doron Gild

David Wondrich is a writer and cocktail historian. He has written several books, including Stomp and Swerve, Imbibe!, and Punch, and contributes to *Esquire* and the *Whiskey Advocate*, among many others. He co-founded the bartender training program Beverage Alcohol Resources and has worked collaboratively to produce spirits with companies including Ransom and the New York Distilling Company. In this interview, Wondrich reflects on his childhood in Pittsburg, Chicago, and New York, his early education and upbringing, his time spent playing the bass in punk bands, early jobs, his college education at New York University, and teaching at St. John's University. He talks about writing his first book, making the transition from teaching to writing, and getting involved with the cocktail industry. He discusses his work writing, educating, and growing the bar industry, as well as his work with spirit producers, penchant for history, and hopes for the future.

Table of Contents—David Wondrich

Interview #1: May 1, 2014

[Begin Audio File 1]

Farrell: All right, this is Shanna Farrell with David Wondrich on Thursday, May 1. This is our first interview and this is tape one.

01-00:00:14

Wondrich: All right.

Farrell: So, I figured that we would start by talking about your early life.

01-00:00:19

Wondrich: Okay.

Farrell: Can you tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:22

Wondrich: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on April 15, 1961. My father was a professor at Carnegie Mellon and my mother was a housewife, basically, at the time (she later became a librarian). My father came over here from Italy in 1955 and went to M.I.T. He had come over earlier on a Fulbright and he returned to Italy, then came back and went to M.I.T and got his PhD there in blood-flow Engineering and wrote an early computer language; he was an interesting man. He was half-Sicilian. His father had been an army doctor stationed in Trieste during world War I and his mother was Croatian/Italian/Czech; it was the Austrian-Hungarian Empire—people who were pretty jumbled up. My full name is Federico David Bugliarello Wondrich. I used Bugliarello until I was eighteen and left the house; nobody could ever pronounce it so I just dropped it and used Wondrich ever since. The Bugliarello was the Sicilian part and the Wondrich was the Triestino part.

We spent a lot of time in Italy when I was kid. We had family in Trieste, we had family in Sicily; we used to spend summers in Sicily. My brother and I—I have a brother two years younger, Nick—we would just be sent out to play with the local kids so I understood Sicilian and spoke Sicilian at the time. I can still understand it but I can't speak it anymore. That was interesting and fun and all; it was very weird when we got back to America. You know, this was the '60s and Italy was very different then. It was right after the war and Sicily was very poor but also very old; it was a very old, old part of the world and we kind of got infected by this love of old things and that really helped.

My mother's family was—her mother was from Maine. She was a DAR, you know, old Revolutionary stock. We had an ancestor that fought at Bunker Hill and so on and so forth. Her father was born in

Matamoros, Mexico but he was actually Welsh—his father was a mining engineer there on a contract and they got chased out by Poncho Villa and settled in the Southwest. So all four of my grandparents had completely different backgrounds; it's really an "only in America" thing.

So we lived in Pittsburgh until I was about eight and then my father got a job in Chicago—University of Illinois, Chicago—circle campus. He was the Dean of Engineering there and we lived in Evanston, Illinois for four years. I really liked it there. But then he got a job in New York at Brooklyn Polytechnic, which was a small but well-regarded engineering school, and he was the president. He did that for many years. At first we lived for three months in Brooklyn Heights, which I liked very much, and then we moved out to the suburbs, which I didn't like at all, to Port Washington, New York. It's a fine town, but coming from Evanston, Illinois, where we lived in Chicago, which is all built up and pretty urban and Brooklyn, I wanted something more urban at that age; it would have been nice.

I went to high school there. I went to Phillips Exeter Academy for a year. I got kicked out at the end of the year, so that was the end of that, and went back to high school. I was mostly into smoking pot and listening to the Grateful Dead and punk rock, which were two kinds of different things. Punk rock was my secret obsession and I picked up at that bad habit up at Exeter where everybody was into Lou Reed and they were all very sophisticated New York City kids. In the suburbs the Grateful Dead thing was protective coloring and a way of having some actual friends. My oldest friend, Kenneth Goldsmith, who is now a very well-known artist—he's been at the White House and on TV shows, etc.—he's a real character. He and I were basically ragtag hippies with patches on our jeans and smoking dope all of the time in high school; it's funny we're both pretty secure and happy these days. As a result of that, I don't know.

But anyway, that was the late '70s at that point and cocktails, my future career, and even when I was a kid in Italy I had a cocktail set for my G.I. Joe's. They had these, every Thursday in my teeny little town in Sicily where I would stay, had a Thursday market where vendors would come in from out of town and set up so you could buy some consumer goods. There was a G.I. Joe-sized cocktail set that I bought once just because there was nothing to buy—there were no toys for American kids. So my brother and I set up a little cocktail bar with a shaker and pyramids of all of the glasses like it showed on the thing. That was kind of funny. That must have been, you know, 1971 or something when I was ten or nine.

But in the suburbs—well actually, I think the first cocktails I remember, or what were regarded as cocktails, that I remember drinking was my friend John Tarbox at Exeter was from Texas and he knew about Tequila Sunrises. We used to make them in an army canteen and go out in the woods and drink Tequila Sunrises and get high and blow off steam. That was 1975-76. That was highly illegal and we were very underage. But later, in high school on Long Island, it was the north shore of Long Island, and people drank gin. Even the kids drank gin. Audrey Saunders, the great bartender and pioneer of the craft cocktail movement, was in my class in high school. I didn't know her really but she has the same—we're both gin drinkers forever because of high school on Long Island. By the time I graduated I knew at least something about real drinks, not to say that I didn't have all these dumb '70s drinks too.

I went to college and lived in the city. That was a big priority for me, to stay in the city. Around the time that I graduated from high school, so that was 1979, it was the punk explosion and I started a band with my friends in Port Washington. I'd never really played music before; I'd taken a few bass lessons because it looked easy, but it wasn't for me, at least at first. But we had the first punk band in my town in Port Washington and we'd play at parties and people would pull the plug and throw things at us and stuff—they hated us. They'd have the fusion jazz band come after us and we'd just roll our eyes and go back into the city. [Laughs]

Farrell: So, we'll get to that but I just want to move back a little bit to some of your—growing up, essentially.

01-00:07:59
Wondrich: Yeah, yeah.

Farrell: You have a large, diverse cultural background and basically how did that manifest when you were growing up? What kind of music was playing? What kind of food did you eat?

01-00:08:11
Wondrich: Okay. Oh yeah, absolutely.

Farrell: Maybe some of the things that your parents were reading?

01-00:08:14
Wondrich: Well, we always had a house full of books, right, and it was all kinds of books. My mom and dad liked to read mystery stories and there were just stacks of paperbacks. But they were also very cultured people and my father read all kinds of history and technical books and things like that. My mom read history books, too. So we always had this house full of books. It was a bilingual household; I speak Italian,

like I said. I didn't read a lot of Italian books but when I was in Italy I read whatever I could get my hands on. My grandmother—my father's mother from Trieste—came from a very literate family. Her father had founded a literary journal in Trieste around 1900 that had Italo Svevo and people like writing for it—really serious people. She knew James Joyce, at least just to say hello to on the street, because he lived there. She spoke about eight languages. My father spoke about eight languages. So her house in Trieste—my grandfather had died before I was born. He'd been, like I said, a doctor and made his own radiation equipment, which turned out to be a mistake. So he died fairly young of cancer.

But in Trieste and in Sicily my grandmother was a religious subscriber to *TIME* Magazine and all throughout the '50s, '60s, and '70s. We'd be stuck there in Sicily—you know, I'm an American kid stuck in Sicily for two months in the summer—and I read every single issue, because she saved the back issues, cover to cover. I knew all American culture, at least everything worth getting into *TIME* Magazine. I knew every word; I was bored out of my skull. So that was kind of funny.

But in our house, music—my father wasn't particular musical. My mother was; she must have liked opera and thought most pop music was crap and had no interest in it. My brother and I kind of rebelled against that and listed to a lot of rock and roll and things like that.

We traveled a lot also as a kid, both in America and abroad, all over Europe. We went to Russia in 1975 and Romania. We went to Yucatan and Taiwan and Hong Kong—all over the place, which was always interesting. Sometimes when you're a teenager a bit of an imposition, but on the whole pretty great.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your brother Nick?

01-00:11:10

Wondrich: Yeah, my brother Nick is a metallurgical engineer so he followed the technical side and I did the literary side. He lives outside of Chicago and runs a very large heat-treating plant. He used to own his own heat-treating plant here in New Jersey—in Northern New Jersey—but it was always hard to do business there. It was an old plant that he kind of inherited. He bought it from the old guy that ran it forever. Now he's working for a big company; he's the manager of this huge operation there.

Farrell: Did you have a—did you spend a lot of time together when you were growing up?

01-00:11:47
Wondrich: Well, when we were traveling we certainly did. You know, we're pretty different but we mostly got along. Two boys two years apart, we didn't always get along but we mostly got along. When we were abroad I was very glad to have him and you know, he was glad to have me there; at least we had somebody we could talk to and we did travel a lot.

Farrell: When you moved from Evanston to Port Washington what were some of the biggest—well, I guess how old were you?

01-00:12:17
Wondrich: I was twelve and you know, I had friends and I kind of fit in Evanston, and in Port Washington I was the new kid. It was awkward and I didn't like the culture there so much; it was much more suburban and much more clannish. I eventually had friends, I made my friends, but it was not fun. I didn't like being [construction noise]—Gowanus—I didn't like being so dependent, you know.

Fortunately, on the other hand, the plus side is that Port Washington is a thirty-five minute train ride from Manhattan. The minute I was able to go my friends and I would disappear into the Village. You could drink in bars when you were fifteen; nobody gave a damn. In the suburbs you'd get carded, but in New York City, whatever, if you're old enough to look over the bar. So we had our first experiences with that. My friend Kenny, whom I mentioned, were really into old blues, like 1930s blues. We thought that was really cool and weird. We found record stores in the Village that had all these old LPs of that and so we would really just go music hunting and walking around, smoking joints in Washington Square and all that kind of stuff. So that was a big plus and that really kind of got me into the city and got me comfortable there. By the time I went to NYU I didn't feel like it was an alien place.

Farrell: So I'm curious about Exeter and I guess why you went to boarding school for a year and also why you got kicked out.

01-00:14:02
Wondrich: I went because it was interesting, you know, it sounded cool. I was of an age when I was fighting with my parents, as many teenagers did. My father was pretty autocratic and wanted things just so and I didn't want to do it that way. So I went but I really wasn't ready for it. I've always been this sort of person—now a days it's diagnosed as ADD but then there was no such thing. It's just if I'm interested in something I want to do it and if I'm not I won't do it. Some of those classes I had no interest in and there was no one there to make me go. Eventually the cutting classes caught up with me at the end. Plus they knew I was getting high, along with half the student body, but

nonetheless it was highly illegal. Eventually it caught up with me and at the end of the year they said, “Don’t come back.” I didn’t do anything egregious.

Farrell: What was your parent’s reaction to that?

01-00:15:14
Wondrich: They were not happy about that, obviously, but you know at that point my brother and I had both been getting into trouble and they realized that this was what was happening. They tried to figure it out and eventually things got much better between us and them.

Farrell: What was the transition like coming from boarding school back to living with your parents?

01-00:15:39
Wondrich: Well I’d only been there for a year so it wasn’t so bad. When I came back, you know, I was more into music and I had friends when I came back and so that was fine. I did two years in public high school, but it was a good public high school. Again, I was disappearing into the city as often as possible then.

Farrell: When you were in high school, or even middle school, what was your favorite subject and why?

01-00:16:09
Wondrich: My favorite subject—I well in history and I did well in English. In English I didn’t do that well either; occasionally I’d get A’s. I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a writer but my writing was pretty bad. I was reading a lot; I’ve always read just tons. I was reading Thomas Pynchon; I was reading [Louis-Ferdinand] Celine. By the time I was fourteen I was reading that stuff—fourteen or fifteen. By the time you’re fourteen, fifteen you’re really on the path to what you’re going to end up as a person. I have an almost seventeen-year old daughter now and I’ve watched the whole transition. So I had pretty advanced taste in literature but I didn’t really know how to turn that into good writing at the time. I guess I was kind of adrift at the time. When I went to college I basically failed a bunch of classes also and didn’t finish a bunch of classes but I did well in the English classes and things like that. So that further cemented that. But then I dropped for a couple of years. I don’t know if we’re up to that yet.

Farrell: Yup. Yeah, that’s good.

01-00:17:33
Wondrich: So I went to NYU. I applied to a bunch of colleges but didn’t get into most of them because my grades were very spotty. My SATs were

good. But I ended up at NYU, one of two I got into. The other was St. John's College in Maryland where you have the Great Books Program. It looked very interesting but I didn't want to be in Annapolis for four years; I couldn't have faced it at the time. NYU was right in Greenwich Village and I was like, "This is great; I'm going there." I started as an English major because I didn't know what else to do.

At the time I had started this band and I started playing in more bands once I was at NYU. I was a terrible bass player but I looked right; I was all skinny and rock and roll and into jumping up and down. I got better and I played in more bands. I played at CBGBs a bunch of times in different bands. You know, anyone could play at CBGBs at the time; they had practically open mic nights. But every once in a while the band that I was in got asked back and that was a big deal. So I played there.

After a couple of years of NYU and a very spotty performance—so now we're talking like 1980, '81—I dropped out. I had a day job. I was working for lawyers. I went to the NYU job board and picked the first and called them up and went in. They hired me as a clerk and messenger at this firm called LaRossa, Brownstein, and Mitchell, of which James LaRossa was one of the top mob lawyers in the city. That job was a real education. Just crazy shit. So that was my day job and at night I was playing in bands.

I had moved over to Jersey because it was very affordable. I lived in Jersey City and I paid $135 in rent for this roach-infested house that I shared with my friend Bruce. We had so many roaches that we would get four cans of roach spray and sit in chairs in our living room at night, we'd put the cans next to us, we'd turn the lights off, make ourselves a drink, fire a joint up and pass it back and forth, and sit there in the dark drinking and waiting for the roaches to come out. After a half an hour we'd turn all of the lights on and there'd be roaches everywhere. We'd just go mad with the cans and then go down to the corner bar and shoot pool all night. We'd leave all of the windows open so that it would air out. We didn't have anything to steal so it didn't really matter about that. But that was crazy. That was Jersey City—Jersey City in 1981 was a strange place to live.

But because I was living there I met this guy on the PATH train, who was the only other rock and roll person that I saw, and his wife. I was like, "What, there are other hipsters here?" only they didn't call them hipsters then. "There are other punks here?" He was always carrying this saxophone case and I had the bass. We started talking and became friend, this guy Rob Durstewitz. He was in the house band at Club 57 at St. Mark's Place. Club 57 was the East Village Social Club. The punk scene in New York was like hardcore loud punk rock but it also

had a big cabaret influence too because of the arty weird people who moved to New York. A lot of them kind of lived in the same neighborhood and did things together. This guy was more on the cabaret side and he got me a job in his house band. We used to do this thing called the Beat Cocktail Lounge once a week at Club 57.

Club 57 was where Madonna got her start and she used to come in. This was towards the end of its run. In the late '70s it had been even wilder and super creative. Ann Magnuson was there. It was really kind of coalescing this East Village culture. But it was also run by these junkies and they weren't really good at long-term business management. We'd come in one night and the manager had carefully punched himself in the face and said, "Somebody came in and punched me and took all of the receipts." We knew exactly what had happened; he'd shot it up. There was a lot of stuff like that.

But on the other hand it wasn't this straight jacket "punk rock, punk rock"—it wasn't hardcore. It was a very creative and underground space. They had this thing Perry Homo; he did this thing where he'd do Perry Cuomo songs in a sweater and we'd play behind him fake jazz and we'd do all this stuff like that and he'd camp up the Perry Cuomo songs and write new lyrics for them. I ended up playing in a bunch of bands out of there.

I played all of the big clubs in New York. I was just a bass player, but it was still very fun. I was still a very straight-laced suburban kid but I learned very quickly to just shut your mouth and watch, you know? You don't have to participate in some of this stuff, but it's not your place to judge either. Just play your bass; that's what you're here for.

It was a real education, between that and the mob lawyer. I was going and serving subpoenas in the East Village and going up to the South Bronx, which was terrifying, and looking for some client who had gone missing. That's on one part of the job. Another part of the job, there's the guy who had just been written up in *TIME* and *Newsweek* as the General Motors of the cocaine trade and my boss had just gotten him sprung. The guys in my office, this pale, nasty looking Columbian guy, and my boss gives a bag with $35,000 cash that this guy had just paid his legal fees in cash, and tells me to go take it to the bank. [Laughs] You know? I'm like twenty-one years old, twenty years old and the bank was on 42nd Street next to this thing, the airline ticket office. It was before the internet. If you wanted to book a ticket you either went through a travel agent or you went to the ticket office. All of the airlines had booths there. I'm airline ticket office, $35,000? Bank? Airline ticket office? Bank? And I just didn't want to get killed by the mob, you know. This guy, he was kind of scary.

Farrell: When you had to go find people how did you do that?

01-00:24:19
Wondrich: Ah, put on my leather jacket and walked around and I asked. I spoke a little bit of Spanish, or at least could understand it. You know, this was the far East Village—but it was always during the day, too so it wasn't as dangerous. But I'd ask around. I'd go to the bodegas. I knew how the city worked and say, "Diga a Cano que llama su abogado:" Tell Cano—the guy's street name—to call his laywer. I'd asked my boss the guy's nickname and you know, whatever they knew, and then off I'd go. This was for their pro-bono clients and they had a few. These guys obviously weren't paying their bills because they were so sketchy you couldn't even find them.

But I did other stuff for them. They had me transcribing FBI surveillance tapes, you know, like from wires, from body mics basically from New Jersey Trade Waste Association. You can only imagine. I wish I had saved those transcripts because it was like "The Sopranos," though even more so. You know, they had all these guys going all over New Jersey and the FBI had a mole in there with a tape recorder. They had stacks of these tapes. I had gotten my musician friends jobs transcribing them too because I told my boss, "I know musicians; they've got good ears. They know how to listen." [Laughs] It was very funny. We all got some money out of that.

Farrell: Did those experiences make their way into your music at all?

01-00:25:51
Wondrich: Not so much. You know, I played in a number of different kinds of bands. I did my best anyway. I played in funk bands; I played in fake jazz bands; I played in this and that. Finally in 1983 I joined this band with this very weird and stupid name Blind Dog Stares, but they had a record out, an EP, that had gone to the top of the charts. They were all NYU people mostly—that's not how I met them, through the *Village Voice*—and they seemed serious and I thought that they were good. I was the replacement bass player. We had a strategy rather than spend our time gigging around New York where you'd get a gig every couple of weeks, let's practice really hard—and our drummer was very good with the telephone and he booked us on tours. They'd done one tour before I'd joined them and so that was their strategy: let's play all around the country and try to get a record contract instead of just gigs. We'll go all around, we'll work hard in that aspect, and we'll get our experience that way and get our name out.

We toured in 1983. We did the first tour, which was fairly disastrous because we went and bought a van that broke down all over the country and cost us all of our money. We had to cancel the whole mid-

Western part of the tour but we'd already been through the South and Texas and California and so on and so forth. Then we did it again in 1984 –twice in '84. We did demos for several of the record companies in '84 and '85 and almost got signed to Chrysalis records but finally packed it in.

Farrell: When you were on tour where were some of the cities you went and maybe what was your favorite?

01-00:27:54

Wondrich: Oh, we went everywhere. We went down to Philadelphia, D.C., Richmond, down to the Carolinas. We never made it to New Orleans because they were too sensible to like our ridiculous music. It was sort of this twangy spaghetti western punk stuff, not unlike U2 I suppose, who are our contemporaries. That was kind of what was in the air, this post-punk.

We loved Memphis. Memphis was really our home away from home on tour. We had friends there, we had a great club we used to play there—the Antenna Club, a legendary punk club. We had a really good time there. That was one of our favorites.

We liked Dallas, which although is a fairly uninspiring city, our drummer's sister had a condo there and when we were in town she'd move in with her boyfriend and we'd get the condo with the pool. We enjoyed that. We enjoyed swimming in the pool. We played big gigs there in big clubs. I mean, I could go on with tour stories for the next three hours, but that seems kind of pointless.

But it was definitely fun and I got to see a lot of the country. The country was in fairly bad shape then. The cities were terrible, in terrible shape. We all saw the worst of them because the punk clubs were in the most decaying parts. They were not doing well. They had been semi-abandoned. There was a lot of crime and feelings really of abandonment. Nobody was paying attention to them. They were not fashionable. Nobody thought it was kind of cool to be in Denver. Denver was just bums and a place to get out of. In many of the places we went we got that feeling, that you know, people didn't really want to be there at the time. It's changed greatly now, thank god, but it was pretty weird; you really saw the underbelly of America.

Farrell: One question that I forgot to ask before that I think is definitely culturally significant and historically significant is going to CBGB, can you tell me about the first time you went there and about some of your memories?

01-00:30:20
Wondrich: Yeah. I think the first time that I went there I went there to see the Plasmatics. The Plasmatics were this sensational group led by Wendy Williams who was a porn star that went punk, right? She was pretty disgusting, deliberately. She was like flinging secretions all over the audience and stuff like that. They were famous because they chain-sawed a guitar in half and they were these theatrical punks. Once I saw them I was like, "Okay, this is kind of funny but it's more humorous than the Sex Pistols," although they were legitimately marginal people in the band; they weren't posers. But it was sensationalistic. That was the first time I went to CBGB; I must have been like seventeen. After that I saw the Ramones there. They would still play there at the time. I'd go for that.

Then I started playing there, first on open mic nights basically. Not quite open; you'd have to come in and play them a tape of your band and they'd just say okay. They had a minimum standard of competence and then they'd put a bill together of all the audition bands and see what happened. Basically they were seeing who had friends who would come to the gig. Some of the bands did and some of the bands didn't or who weren't competent enough to do it; they were all beginners. But then eventually I got in better bands and we started playing there every once in a while.

CBGBs was such a trip. It was absolutely a pit. I mean, the men's room you would stand in the door and piss into the floor rather than go in. That's how CBGBs was. Graffiti all over everything of course, famously. But they had a really good sound system, always, even though it got broken into and got stolen a lot. They would always replace it and it was always really good, so your band sounded as good as it was going to sound. The club had the right size for that; you always sounded good. So we liked CBGBs for that. That was very fun.

I mean, I remember once, it was probably 1980, 1981 and I had been playing in bands for a couple of years, and I got a bunch of people to come in from Port Washington. They were like, "Oh my gosh, you're a rock and roll star!" That was the beginning of "okay, this might actually work." For a couple of years there I was pretty serious about it, about playing in bands. I gave up a lot to do it. I dropped out of college, kept giving up apartments to go out on tour and stuff like that. But at the same time there's a little part of me that said, "You know, just look at what's going on." I realized that if you're not a rock and roll star, or well on your way, by the time you're twenty-five the chances go way down because it really is a youth thing; it's a culture thing.

So, I'm twenty-four and we move out to L.A. and I'm already getting less engaged. At the end of 1985 we're living in L.A. and we're doing demos and I'm not really liking what we're doing. I met this girl at a party—actually she came to a rehearsal—and she was a blind date for the singer and he was being a jerk. Karen and I got to talking and we hit it off. Within like two weeks I had quit my band and moved in with her at the end of 1985. Now we're married and have a daughter and we're still together.

But that was the L.A. punk scene. We liked the scene out there but we tried to get the record companies—and this was the trough between '70s rock and grunge, you know. This was the time that the record companies were trying to get it right. They were saying, "We're going to get that one band that's going to make us a lot of money and we're going to be really careful about who we sign." Later they figured out that there's no predicting, you just sign a bunch and throw them out and see what happens. But we were at the time, with Chrysalis, they were going to sign one band that year. It was either my band or this heavy metal band. We auditioned all the way up the company, numerous times, but they finally went with Armored Saint, this heavy metal band, which you've never heard of unless you're really into metal. To us, Armored Saint was just another stupid heavy metal band. I mean, we were just another stupid new wave band; I'm not saying we would have been huge rock stars, but we probably would have been a better bet for them—Armored Saint ended up doing, like, three semi-successful albums before Chrysalis dropped them. But anyway they went metal that year, and that was their choice. The music business has always been really frustrating and that was a frustrating time to be in it. The record companies felt like they were losing control and they were trying to reassert it rather than doing something creative.

So then I lived in L.A. for a year, halfway through I quit my band and worked as a paralegal. Then Karen and I came back to New York and moved into the house we're living in now in Brooklyn.

Farrell: Where in L.A. were you living at the time?

01-00:35:56

Wondrich: We were living on Sierra Bonita Avenue in Hollywood, just off of Sunset—I mean off of Santa Monica—in a Russian neighborhood. It's still kind of Russian over there.

Farrell: What went into your decision to move back to New York?

01-00:36:11

Wondrich: Karen was an actress. She always wanted to be in New York. She was born in Southern California but not really a California girl. She's kind

of—not the tan beach type; she's definitely not beachy. She always liked New York and that culture so we moved back here. Of course she burst into tears when she saw the house that we were moving into blind in Brooklyn when we came back here because that it was a scary neighborhood at the time.

Farrell: Had you spent much time in Brooklyn before you moved?

01-00:36:49

Wondrich: Well, my dad's university was here and so we would go in for events there and walk around the Italian neighborhood, Carroll Gardens. We would go down there and eat Italian food and stuff. I'd explored a little bit but this was further out in Brooklyn than I'd ever been myself, and it's only really barely Park Slope where I am. We really just been in Brooklyn Heights and the immediate vicinity part that I knew at all well. Park Slope was an island of safety and central Brooklyn or downtown Brooklyn area. Brooklyn Heights was always pretty safe and Cobble Hill, but the rest was pretty sketchy. There were a lot of muggings and a lot of danger there at the time.

Farrell: At what point did you decide to go back to school and finish your undergraduate degree?

01-00:37:47

Wondrich: So we moved back to New York in 1986 and I think in January 1987 is when I started. I was being a temp paralegal and I said, "Alright, I better do this and finish it up," and it took me no time at all. Everything I thought was difficult was easy after being a little more mature. Not smoking so much damn pot helped and just being much more settled. I breezed through it got top grades.

Suddenly it's early 1988 and I have BA and there's nothing to do with it. [Laughs] There was no internet then and no jobs for English majors then—you've got to be kidding. So I thought I would get a quick Master's in Political Science. I wasn't so interested in English anymore, I was really interested in international politics at the time. I always read the paper and all my early traveling as a kid kind of came back. I spoke languages and I thought that would be kind of interesting.

So I went to NYU and it was too late to apply for the program. I went to talk to them and they said, "Well, we'll let you take the classes and if you do well we'll admit you to the program." So I did a semester of Political Science and by the end I realized that I had done quite well but I hated it because I hated the books. They were really boring books written with the absolute lack of readability and style and I couldn't see myself having to read stuff like that for the rest of my life.

Out of nowhere basically I walked over to the Comparative Literature Department at NYU. You know, this is 1988, ’89—I guess ’89—and I sat and talked to this professor, who seemed nice, and he asked about myself and what I was into. I had started taking Latin while I was doing Political Science, which probably shows I wasn’t so committed to Political Science but I was in school and I wanted to know Latin because I liked all of the books and things like that. All of my ancestors knew Latin and it seemed wrong that I didn’t know it. So I told him all of this and then at the end of the hour that I’d been sitting and talking with him he leans over and says, “Well, we can’t give you a lot of money.” I was like, “Wait, you’re going to give me money?” That’s basically what happened. I went into this fairly esoteric department, comparative literature, and my whole education was paid for by NYU because that’s how it worked back then.

Farrell: And your focus was Latin scientific poetry?

01-00:40:41

Wondrich: That was what I finally ended up doing. I started off doing—I wanted to 18th century literature. That was another reason I wanted to do Latin because in my years off from school I kept reading and I had really gotten into Henry Fielding and Tom Jones and that stuff. All of those guys knew Latin and it was killing me that I didn’t. Greek, okay, they didn’t all know Greek; I could give that a pass. But Latin—a gentleman should know Latin. That was my thinking.

So I started in grad school in comparative literature and then I did this thing at City University, the Summer Latin Institute where you do complete and total immersion where you come out in six or eight weeks knowing Latin, or Greek. They have a Greek Institute too. It was hell on my girlfriend and hell on our relationship because it was literally I’d be there all day and I’d study all night. Weekends, study. But at the end I was taking graduate level Latin courses and that I really enjoyed. I really liked Latin poetry and that became my focus.

I also studied Arabic because they were paying for my education and I didn’t want it go to waste and I didn’t want to take courses that I could study myself. I was walking around the NYU library and I was thinking about taking Greek but then I walked through this whole section of Arabic books and none of them were translated. I said, “Let me do this. This sounds interesting.” So I did that for four years. Unfortunately I’ve forgotten all it because it’s really hard and it takes a really long time to learn the vocabulary. You have to really live with it and I didn’t really get to that point. But I did good graduate work in Arabic and that fed into some of my other interests for my PhD. My minor study topics were travel literature and the Mediterranean.

But this scientific poetry thing came about because I had one absolute genius professor and I will never use the term "genius" the same way after studying with this guy. This guy Seth Benardete; he's legendary. He was the reining expert on Plato, basically. Also a genius in every way; he knew everything. I took his courses. In a graduate courses there would be six or eight people sitting around a table. We met at six o'clock and usually they were scheduled one time a week six to nine. But the first day of the first course I took with him he said, "Well, this is scheduled for six to nine, but we're not going to finish at nine. That's just not enough time. We'll probably go to eleven or twelve each week." And we did. There was no argument; it was just like okay, this is what we do.

The other advantage of doing small departments in esoteric subjects is I got to study one-on-one with him. So every Friday one semester we read Lucretius, you know, *De rerum naturae, The Nature of Things*, a long poem about the nature of the universe and the meaning of things. Lots of physics in Latin verse. That was fascinating because Benardete knew all of physics; he knew them contemporarily and the ancient ones as well. I know nothing about that, particularly the modern stuff. You know, he was numerate, he was literate, he knew everything about history. A line here would led to a vast digression on Napoleon and what a revolutionary politician he was. Anything that came up he knew things. It was utterly fascinating. It taught me that I wasn't a genius and never would be one because I could never come close to what this guy was doing. But at the same time it was inspiring and I learned some cool stuff and I wanted to do more with it. So I did my dissertation on this weird genre that's in between—it's supposedly just science and verse and just very dull, but some of the best poets who ever lived took it and wrote in it and used it as an excuse to make a higher level of poetry, because poetry was always under attack as fiction. They said, "Well, this is science," and they brought in all their fiction kind of through the backdoor. That's what I talked about.

Farrell: Who were some of those poets?

01-00:45:05

Wondrich: Virgil, Lucretius, there were a lot of Medieval poets; Renaissance poets, eighteenth-century poets—lots. Dante has parts of it. Boethius in the late middle ages. There was a pretty long roster; Ovid wrote in the genre. Some of these really great heavy-hitters of the poetical world. They all found something different in it.

That was interesting but that also wasn't something that would do me much good on the job market because I couldn't go into a classics department because I didn't have the advanced Greek or German; you needed German for that. The comp lit departments at the time were

mostly just devoted to theory. I'd done the previous kind of comp lit, which was comparative literature in different languages and looking at different commonalities and differences.

Farrell: What was the process like for you of writing your dissertation?

01-00:46:08
Wondrich: Oh, it was horrible. It took a long time. I hated it. I hated it so much that I taught myself how to play jazz guitar. I was playing Miles Davis on electric guitar. Really, I was spending hours a day learning how to play "So What" by Miles Davis rather than write my dissertation. The minute I finished my dissertation, I have not picked up that guitar since. Right now I'd be lucky to play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" but back then I was playing "Freddie the Freeloader," you know, "How High the Moon" and stuff like that. The avoidance was just so strong. It was very hard. You know, the first half took two years and the last half took two months, as usual with these things. But I got it done, you know, and it did well. I had a good degree and I went on to get a teaching position in New York City, which was amazing.

Now at this point we're talking like 1996, so I'd spent a number of years in grad school. During that time though I'd started to get into the cocktail thing. When I was a musician, even in the early days when I was playing in bands, I was drinking martinis; the gin martini was my drink. I was very poor and I could really only afford dives and old man bars. You'd go to an old man bar and you'd order a teenage drink like a Cape Codder or something and they'd just roll their eyes. I didn't want to be that guy so I watched what the other people were drinking. I found it acceptable to drink a martini and they would make you a martini. If you'd ask for a dry martini, you'll get a dry martini. They'll roll their eyes that it's some punk kid ordering it, but on the other hand they won't just really hate you. It's a respectable order. Like a scotch and soda at a place that's really not mixing drinks or a dry martini. Those were my two main drinks. Every once in a while I'd have something else, but the martini was really it. It was also the most alcohol you could get in a glass. That was important too, because again, I was poor.

Karen also liked martinis. We'd go have martinis before our dinners. Karen, when I met her, she was working at one of the top restaurants in L.A., the Border Grill. It was a little place on Melrose that became very famous. She had been the perfume girl at Georgio of Beverly Hills when that blew up, when Georgio the fragrance blew up. She did that until she got absolutely sick of it and then she went on to be a waitress. She was still acting at the time and studying with Jose Quintero, a great actor, director, and teacher. So we came to New York and we still liked to drink our cocktails. Every once in a while we'd

save our money and go to the Bemelmans Bar. We'd go up to the Met and go over to the Bemelmans Bar, the Carlyle. I'd put on one of my thrift store jackets and wear a collared shirt. We'd go walk around and look at art until we were good and thirsty and then go have Stingers at the Bemelmans Bar at, like, $10 or $12 a pop—astronomical prices. That was always fun for us in the '90.

In I think 1991 Barnaby Conrad wrote this book on absinthe. Karen and I had just gotten back from two months in Europe. Because she had a good job and NYU kept giving me scholarship money, in 1990 – I guess this was 1990—we took it and spent two months in Europe. I was going to write a book following this author Tobias Smollet and his travels in Europe, but that never really happened. Nevertheless, we kind of followed this eccentric path through France and down into Italy and back up into England. There we discovered that some Europeans were still into cocktails and we saw a few cocktail lists; I'd never seen a cocktail list before. We didn't have those in America anymore but Europe still had this barman culture with a person in a little jacket and every town had a fancy cocktail bar. I remember we were at Ferrara once and looking at all these drinks we'd seen in books and saying, "Let's try a French 75; that sounds so cool."

Yeah, I guess that was 1990, and we knew something about this stuff. I had a bartender's guide that I had bought out in L.A. and we made the occasional drink from it. I always made Bloody Marys before and I knew how to make Martinis so I made those sometimes, but Europe and that Barnaby Conrad book about absinthe kind of got us really more interested. And then William Grimes came out with a book, *Straight Up or on the Rocks*, the next year and it was a history of cocktails in America. We thought that was a revolutionary book but we couldn't make the drinks in the book that we were most interested in. We couldn't make Sazeracs because we couldn't find Peychaud's Bitters. I went to every fancy grocery store in Manhattan, literally, and every one of them –this was before the internet; you couldn't look anything up, you had to go. So we got the phone book and I made a list of all the fancy groceries and I went to everyone of them and they said, "Oh yeah, we used to have those. I think there might be a bottle in the back." I'd go and look and there was not. That was kind of a low point. All of the traditional bars had closed, the traditional cocktail culture had died off, and the new one hadn't started yet.

At the same time, early '90s, I started making my own absinthe. I went to the library at NYU and went to the distillation section and got a French distillation book that had a list of all the ingredients. Of course I didn't have a still so we omitted that part. We just threw all of the ingredients in Everclear; I went up to New Jersey and bought some Everclear and shook it up and tried to drink it. It was just insanely

bitter and absolutely horrible to drink, but on the other hand, quite psychoactive mostly because it was made with Everclear, a strong alcohol, that has this weird effect. But also, distillation burns off most of the thujone, which is the supposedly active ingredient in absinthe; nobody realized that then. I'd have this party where'd we make absinthe smoothies in the blender and I'd pour this horribly bitter stuff in and a pound of sugar and a bunch of ice and I'd grind it all up and people would choke it down. Everybody got quite lit and it was very funny. I did that and got written up in the *Village Voice*, one of the parties; one of my friends was there and he wrote for them.

So that was just fun, really. There was no idea that this could ever be a profession. I collected drink books a little bit. My friend Cary Berger, who'd been in my first band—now he's a lawyer in L.A.—he gave me, this must have been around 1993 or '94 or something like that, he gave me this book *The Gentleman's Companion* by Charles Baker. He said, "I've got this book and you have to get it; it's so cool." Cary and I had always liked to drink cocktails. I remember once he had his parents' convertible, a Chrysler Lebaron—and this was in the early '80s—and we drove into New York and we had Martinis in the backseat as we were driving though town. The driver wasn't drinking, but drunk driving was kind of different then—you could have an open container. The guys in the backseat had a little Martini bar and we were making Martinis and just being real idiots. But, it was part of the culture from the Beat Cocktail Lounge and that whole East Village culture. There was an element of cocktail culture in there and it was part of sort of being New York City punk rock is that you're a little bit sophisticated. It's not just, you know, pounding cheap beer—that was L.A. I'd go to the Zero One Club in L.A.—that was a famous after hours club—and you'd pay $5 at the door and you'd get a generic beer. They had generic beer back then, the little yellow can that just said "beer." You'd get all of the generic beer you could drink and shots of Early Times. [Laughs] That was it. That was L.A. style, very much. New York, it was like, we're a little fancy, you know. There was the L.A. punk song "New York is All Right if You Like Saxophones." You know, New York punks always had that saxophone element and that was the wing that I was in because of doing Club 57. So that was the cocktail culture part; we were always kind of into that. In the '90s there started to be a little more interest and people started to talk about it.

At that point I was finishing up my dissertation and I was little bit conflicted about it. I didn't really want to be a college professor but you know, it was worth a try. I managed to get a job at St. John's University, the Catholic school, at their Staten Island campus. When I got the job they sent me to talk to this old priest. I'd basically been a medievalist and I'd talked at great length about the great Catholic

thinkers. He was like, “Okay. You’re okay. You’re not Catholic but you’ll do.” I got the job and I kind of kicked myself when I got it because I really didn’t enjoy it. I started writing about music for the *Village Voice*. First for a ‘zine that my friend Lee Foust, who had written for the Voice—his girlfriend was Evelyn McDonnell who was one of the top music writers at the time, and she started this little ‘zine and I wrote a thing for it.

Now, at that point I hated rock music. I hated contemporary music. I was embittered by not being a rock star, which would have been fun for me, but what can you do. I was kind of being silly, but I kind of lost interest also. I realized that I didn’t have a dog in the fight about rock music and I’d moved on. I was like, “You know, this is for kids. I’m not that interested.” I got into listening to some classical music for a while and then I really got into jazz. I had never really listened to much jazz, but I got into specifically older jazz. I’d always like blues and liked hillbilly music and I’d kind of filled in the trilogy there. I got really into like Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong and all that kind of stuff. I started writing this column for Evelyn’s magazine—or her ‘zine—writing about these old jazz records, reissues of these old jazz records, as if they were modern rock and roll. So it was like modern rock criticism about old jazz. That kind of amused me and that got me a job at the *Village Voice* doing the same thing. For about four years I guess, I was their second-string jazz critic, doing the stuff that Gary Giddins didn’t want to do. He was much more into the future of jazz. I just wanted to do this fun old music. I did that, I wrote about hillbilly music, I wrote about old jazz. I covered bands who were doing those kinds of things. That was very fun and it led to a book contract, which eventually came out in 2003, a book called Stomp and Swerve, a book about how American music got hot. I dug more into it and went further and further back and it ended up being about the transition from minstrel shows and the minstrel scene to ragtime, to early jazz. I’d meant to write it all the way up to rock and roll but I ran out of time. They called it the contract dues and they were like, “Finish it up now.”

[Begin Audio File 2]

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell back with David Wondrich on Thursday, May 1. This is tape two for interview session number one. Okay, so when we left off we were talking about your transition out of grad school and into working.

02-00:00:20
Wondrich: Yeah.

Farrell: I've read that when you went into academia that you were prepared to lead a quieter life and had referred to writing as dull. I'm wondering how that kind of, when you started at St. John's, how that either reinforced that notion or challenged that notion.

02-00:00:44

Wondrich: Okay, well I thought that the academic life was interesting and I loved the research part, always, and I liked reading these esoteric and, in some cases, these long-forgotten texts. One of my fondest memories was studying for my oral exams at NYU for my PhD and one of my topics was epic poetry. And I sat down, over the course of a month, and read Homer—I had to read that in English so that sort of doesn't count—but then I read the *Aeneid* in Latin, I read Lucan's *Civil War* in Latin I read the *Metamorphosis* in Latin, and these are big huge books, you know? Then I went on and I read Dante, all three, in Italian. And this was in a month. I was like hours and hours just powering through this stuff. I read *Paradise Lost*. There were a couple others on my list, like really massive, major works. *The Fairy Queene* by Spencer, which is insanely huge, dense, crazy renaissance English. But it was a real, real effort and really rewarding at the end. It was super heavy intellectual lifting and muscle building but I really felt like it was fun, too, because I'm just burning through these things. "Look, Virgil down! On to Ovid." That part of academia I really liked.

Then I got my teaching job, which was as an English professor, not a comp lit professor at a fairly mediocre school. Suddenly I had a four course a semester course load and I was teaching freshman Comp and I was miserable. The only good class that I really liked, they made me teach Shakespeare and I hadn't really read much Shakespeare. I was going on the market as Medieval Renaissance but I hadn't done much with English because I was comp lit. I did Italian poetry and stuff like that. I had read a few Shakespeare plays along the way, but I'd never really focused on him. The course was at 8am twice a week on Staten Island. I said "Why is the course at 8am? Can I do it another time?" And they said, "Oh, that's how Father So-and-So always did it. He needed to come in from Queens and that let him beat traffic. We can't change it; it's in the schedule. Maybe in a couple of years we'll change." And I was like, "Okay, if that's how it's going to be. If Father So-and-So did it it's going to stay that way." And that course was brutal at first, you know, to show up. I'd have to get up at 6 and take a ferry and take a cab up to the hill on Staten Island where the St. John's Staten Island campus was and the class would all be sleepy. But by the end of the class everyone was completely engaged because Shakespeare is engaged. All you have to do really is to translate it into modern English and suddenly they are following along like it's a soap opera, which it is. And that was great; I really liked that class. The rest I just found really hard work. Thankless, underpaid.

At the end of my first year there we had our daughter, Marina, so suddenly small baby in the house and this job. Suddenly it was just like, "Ugh." I started writing about music. I was writing screenplays with my friend David Goldsmith. Once a week I would go over to 28th Street in Manhattan just as a way of getting out of this. I was just to figure out okay, how do I get out of this? I can't do this. This job is just huge amounts of work and all the bureaucratic infighting and all of the administrative stuff that I hated. Very frustrating, especially for someone who doesn't like being told what to do; the whole job was people telling me what to do and I really, really don't like that and don't handle it well.

I started trying to work my way out of it. I started writing about music and I did that for a couple of years. I started writing for the Sunday [*New York*] *Times*; I had maybe two or three articles for that, including a really big one on minstrelsy. It was assigned at 1500 words and came in at something like 3000. My editor said, "We're going to run this, actually." I used the word "nigger" in it, which in the New York Times you cannot do but it was essential to the topic of minstrelsy. I had to go all the way up to the top and they said, "Yes, this is important here." It was a really big deal. It made it onto the front of the Arts & Leisure section. I was like, "Okay, you know, this is actually much more interesting to me than doing freshman comp and writing books that no one will ever read."

That was the real frustrating part for me is I'm a very slow writer and I have a hard time concentrating and I tend to be a perfectionist and I wander off and it takes me a long time to finish something. And if I'm going to spend all that time writing something I didn't want it to be read by four professors, two of whom have competing theories and are going to trash it rather than give it a fair hearing. I got increasingly worried about that. It's like, I'm going to spend all this time and I want to read it. So I pitched this music book and I got St. John's to allow me to work on it a little bit.

I got a leave of absence there—I'm actually sort of getting ahead of the story because by the time that had happened in December of—I think it was early December 1999—I got a phone call from my friend Josh Mack, who is lovely guy who was at that time the Director of New Media at Hearst Magazines. So that was pretty new; magazines were just starting to have websites. They had a website—Hearst had a bunch of websites for the various magazines and Josh was in charge of that, just making sure that they worked. He says, "*Esquire* has a project for one of their websites that I think you might be good at. We need somebody to take this old cocktail book that they published in 1949 and adapt it for the web," because somebody else had reprinted it and *Esquire* didn't own the rights; they were a little pissed. It's like,

we don't want them using our stuff, we're *Esquire*. Let's take our content back from 1949. So they had had somebody transcribe the book—you know, turn it into a typescript—and it was unruly. They said, "Okay, we need somebody to edit this and make sense of it."

Josh knew that I liked to write and that I was a poor academic with a child at home and knew that I liked cocktails because we made cocktails for our friends occasionally. We had the *Savoy Cocktail Book* and we had a few bottles of obscure liquor at the time. Karen and I were not full-time cocktail geeks by any means; it was just one of the things that we did, but he knew that I was familiar with it. So I got this project and said, "Well okay, this looks like a lot of work." He said, "Well, we'll pay you $3000." For an academic with a small child at home it was like, $3000—I can do this!

So I got this typescript and I sat down and I started going through it. I was like, "Wow, this is organized strangely; let me reorganize everything. We'll take a few of the cocktails and we'll make those the master drinks and put the others as variations under that category." And some of these master drinks, they were all well-known like the Old Fashioned. If you liked the Old Fashioned I figured here are the drinks from the Old Fashioned family. I had six or seven drinks families that I pulled out of this. Most of the head drinks from the families had these little paragraphs that *Esquire* writers had written in the '30s and '40s when they drew on all of this stuff. Some of them didn't, so I wrote my own in the *Esquire* style for those.

So I went and presented them to the web editor at *Esquire*, Brendan Vaughan, and Brendan goes, "Yeah, this is good. This works for me. I really like those essays; can we do more of them? Can we do one for each drink?" And I said, "Well, I can't do them now." And he said, "No, we'll do them as a drink of the week." So I said, "Yeah, I can do this."

At the time there was something similar on *Wired* that this guy Paul Harrington was doing. I was aware of it; I had come across it from time to time. This was the age that the internet was just coming up but once I started doing it I avoided it; I didn't want to copy him, you know? I want to do my own thing. Later I went back and saw how really pioneering he was for doing that, but at the time I was like, "No, I'm going to do my own version and make it very *Esquire*-y." I also started doing some of my own research on these drinks because that was what how I knew how to do. I did some rudimentary internet research, I had some cocktail books, I did some more, they gave me some money to buy books. I said, "You know, if I'm going to do this every week I'll have expenses." They said fine. They didn't pay me very much; I think it was like $175 a week. But still, that was money,

you know? That worked out okay. I found that much more interesting than my academic job, though it didn't pay benefits and paid much less. But it was actually fun.

At first I didn't know anything about the actual mixology of these things. I set out to try to do a good job, but I was pretty naïve; I shook everything. It's still up online because I haven't been paid to re-edit it and it's a huge job. I still get a little cringe when I see "Shake the Manhattan." No, no—don't shake the Manhattan! But it's still up there. It went down for a couple of years and but then they brought it back; we can talk about that later. So this starts going up, they put up this drinks database, the *Esquire* Drinks Database, with a few of these essays. Each week I take another drink from it and write an essay for it. I started enjoying that immensely. I was really writing these things.

After a few months it was pretty successful and I went to Brendan and said, "You think I could get something in the magazine?" He said, "Well, I don't know; we have a drinks writer." They had Andrea Immer, who was very knowledgeable, but maybe not interested in writing in Esquire style. Eventually I got a drinks feature in the magazine—this is late 2000 or something like that. And I got a couple more and the Drink of the Week thing kept going. In maybe early early 2001 I arranged a meeting with David Granger, the Editor in Chief and Brendan, my immediate editor, and pitched them on doing a book. I said, "*Esquire* used to do these drink books and they haven't done one in twenty years and the last one they did was terrible. I think we should do one. Cocktails are coming back." I said that very much like pitching it, because cocktails weren't necessarily coming back. They were coming back a little bit; there was a little internet thing and there were a couple of bars that had opened by then. In 2000 I think was Milk & Honey, which opened in New York. That was a big deal. That was the first New York bar that was run like a rock and roll band. The bartenders were cool and it was a cool thing. There was that and there had been Dale DeGroff and his towering magnificence up at the Rainbow Room. We'd go off and have his drinks there because that was the thing you did in New York, and that was absolutely fantastic. Karen and I were like, "This is so cool. Why can't we do this more?" We went to the Twenty-One Club maybe once because it was so expensive. We'd go to these old places—we always like that, Karen and I—like the Bemelmans Bar. There was some appreciation for this and you'd see some places that were doing it and people were talking about it. There was the *Wired* thing. There were a couple others.

So, I was really enthusiastic and Granger said, "Yeah, let's do it. Fine." And we did it. I took the columns, wrote some things, wrote some introductory matter that was all kind of snarky and *Esquire*-y and put it together. The publisher sat on it for another year and said,

"We're not ready to release it this year." And then the company was sold and they cut my royalties in half according to some weird contractual thing and that was the end of that book. It came out in I guess 2002. It must have been in late 2000 that I pitched it, finished it in 2001, and it came out in late 2002.

By that point I had met my mentor and all time ideal—I met Dale DeGroff. That really changed my life hugely. It came about because the columnist for *Esquire*, the English edition, they had a drink column, with this guy Jonathan Downey in Charge. Jonathan owned a string of bars in London, he was a lawyer and a bit of an all-around maniac—he still is. Anyway, he was a fan of my column, so he brought me over there to check out the London Milk & Honey that he was opening, with Dale training the staff. So I got to spend, like, a week ping-ponging around London drinking with Dale and Jonathan and that was pretty spectacular. I also spent a lot of time hanging around while Dale was behind the bar and I realized that I had to learn to mix drinks better, you know, watching him—because I was really pretty crappy at it. I said, "If I'm going to write about this I don't want to call Dale up every five minutes and go, 'Dale, how do you make this?" If I'm going to do seriously—and I was already seeing that this was a great job; I had just spent a week in London with Dale DeGroff—what a great job is that? This was on my year off from academia. I said, "Alright, I've got to learn how to mix drinks." I taught myself and practiced and practiced and practiced. Writing the *Esquire* book really helped with that but also doing the column each week I'd have to research a new drink. I used to spend a lot of time on them. I'd prepare every recipe that I had and try them against each other. Nowadays I don't really have to do that because I have a much better feel for it; I know what's going to work and what's not but that's only because I did that then.

So that really was a real commitment. I spent a lot of time on it and went and bought bar gear. Instead of using the three-piece home cocktail shaker I learned how to use the Boston shaker with the glass. At first it was terrible. Dale had to teach me how to do and roll his eyes and go, "What kind of yutz am I working with here?" But finally I figured it out. That really helped me a lot and that's really something I'm very glad I did.

I think that that comes from being a musician—it's hands on. You want to be hands on, you're not afraid of that. I'm not afraid of doing that kind of stuff and I wasn't intimidated. I love mixing drinks for the public, for instance, because it's fun. It's not thinking, it's doing stuff like a musician. You know you're doing well when you are autopilot. You know that you are doing well when you're off thinking about, "Maybe I'll make pasta carbonara tomorrow night for dinner," when

you're in the middle of the song. Then you're great because you're subconscious is taking care of it. That's why I like bartending now because you've got this flow space where you're just doing it and you're almost subconscious about it.

Farrell: So when you were originally writing and doing the Drink of the Week column, I know that you said that you had collected a few cocktail books.

02-00:17:22
Wondrich: Yeah, absolutely.

Farrell: This was the early days of the internet. How did you find recipes that you were working with and then when you realized that you didn't have a whole lot of information how did you go and find it?

02-00:17:32
Wondrich: Well, I went to bookstores. This was the early days of the internet. I think this was—I don't think eBay was around yet but it might have just started. But I was able to find, I got Herbert Asbury's Jerry Thomas book, the 1928 edition of Jerry Thomas. That was the first book that I bought once I got this job. I was like, "I need that." I had heard in William Grimes that he was like the first. I had a few random cocktail books that I collected over the years. I had a Kingsely Amis one that I loved the writing in and that was hugely influential on me. I had the Charles Baker, the Savoy book that I bought Karen for Christmas one year along with some maraschino liquor, and a couple other rare ingredients. We made Aviation cocktails and that must have been 1996, something like that. '94 even. We have the book at home. So I had a few of classic books and I started to pick up more as I got more into it. Oh, the other really important book at the time was Lowell Edmund's book on the martini, which was great. He was an academic at Rutgers and a Classics scholar and was very rigorous. He had a big bibliography of pre-prohibition cocktail books so I tried to dig into some of those. Unfortunately, to this day I still don't have a First Edition Jerry Thomas' 1862 book because the better I started doing the higher the price got. Now it's like $3,000 and I just can't justify the price for something that I have reprints of.

So I started in on collecting some of these books and it was much easier then. There were not nearly as many people chasing them and the prices were much lower. So I was able to get a pretty good collection. Most of the gems in my collection came from the first two or three years that I was doing this because they were affordable. After that, as it started to snowball, the affordability went out the window. Every once in a while I'll find something really good and rare these days, but I'm not the kind who is going to pay a huge amount of

money for these things. A lot of them, yeah, I have on PDF for instance from GoogleBooks. The modern world gives you all kind of paths. I don't fetishize the objects, I just want to know what's in them. Early on I would always buy the copy that was in bad condition and cheap; I don't care about a showcase collection, I just want the recipes.

Farrell: What about the liquor that you were using? I know that since the cocktail renaissance has taken off a lot of these more obscure ingredients are more accessible, but at that point were you having a hard time finding them?

02-00:20:31

Wondrich: Oh, I was having a very hard time finding some of these things. Yeah, early on even gin was sometimes a challenge to get a good bottle. Or take maraschino. If you found a good bottle of maraschino it was like, "Hosanna! Now I can make Aviations!" That was like the secret handshake cocktail. Peychaud's Bitters—we finally got our Peychaud's Bitters. Karen, at the time, was a maitre d' at An American Place, Larry Forgione's [restaurant]. This must have been around 1992, '93 and Emeril Lagasse came in to be a guest chef one night. At the end of dinner Karen was talking to Emeril and she was saying how we would go all over the city looking for Peychaud's Bitters. He goes, "Oh, I'm from New Orleans; we still have them down there." Two days later Fed Ex comes for Karen with two big bottle of Peychaud's from him. I'll always be very grateful for him because then we were making Sazeracs and that made us happy. We thought we were so cool—we had rye whiskey, we were making Sazeracs, you know, for us and our friends. We were like, "You've got to try this thing." And they were like, "What the hell is this? It's all whiskey! This thing is nuts." We didn't have absinthe, though of course we used our fake absinthe to rinse the glass and it just made everything taste like shit. But on the other hand, we thought it was cool.

Rye whiskey was another one. We jumped on that fairly early on, partly because of an accident. In high school I went camping once and it was about ten degrees out and drank a whole pint of Jack Daniels, which I promptly threw all up again. After that, bourbon I could not drink—it's like some people with gin and some people with tequila. My body would be like, "No." Rye was just enough different that I was like, "Okay, this is kind of on the edge. I can drink this." And Canadian whiskey I could get with. Fortunately, I learned to drink bourbon again but it took a while. So rye kind of got in through the back door—I could drink rye. All you had was Old Overholt. That was it and you were lucky if you found it. It was always on the bottom shelf at some obscure liquor store. But yeah, beyond that stuff was hard to get, like weird products.

In 2000, 2001 I was fortunate enough, living in New York you still have big liquor stores. It wasn't impossible to find semi-obscure things like rye and I avoided the weirder stuff. For writing the *Esquire* book, I had a budget for booze; I bought the booze and submitted receipts. I had most of the stuff that I needed for those kinds of drinks. It wasn't always exactly what I needed; white rum was hard. All we had was Bacardi, which at this point since the '60s it's become a much lighter, more neutral rum than it used to be. Other ones were hard to find that were better than that. Ryes we were doing okay with—not great with. Old Overholt was great but it was lower in proof than some of this old stuff. Other things—we had basic vermouths—other things were pretty challenging. But Genever—there was a Bols Green label that was made in Canada at that time, but in 2004 or 2005 they discontinued it, even 2003 even. So Genever was out and that became a problem as I discovered.

But now we're around—in 2002 I quit my professor job. I said, "You know, I don't really want to do this anymore. I quit." Thank God Karen supported me in this because she really saw that this was making me miserable and I couldn't get anywhere with it. The writing thing was at least something I seemed to enjoy and was starting to get a little bit of notice with.

The music book came out in 2003, *Stomp & Swerve*. Robert Christgau was supposed to review it for the *New York Times* book review and got, as I found out a few months later, in a fight with his editor about revisions and published the review instead in the *Seattle Weekly*. That was kind of the end of that. Some people noticed it, some people liked it. All of my musician friends who were into old jazz liked it. It was written in a very snotty over the top style because it was like what I was doing instead of being an academic. But I was still pretty much an academic. I didn't have enough time in at *Esquire* to have learned how to pitch things right. *Esquire* is a very good education in writing because things have to be lively but at the same time it isn't about you—it has to be about the subject. But it has to be lively and concise; it has to be very concise.

Farrell: What year did you actually leave St. John's?

02-00:25:42

Wondrich: I think it was—I'm trying to remember the exact—it must have been 2002. I had taken a year off and I had gone back for one semester, and I think that semester was 2001. So it was either 2001 or 2002.

Farrell: And when you left did you feel like you were taking a risk?

02-00:26:06

Wondrich: Oh yeah. I definitely felt like I was taking a risk. It was mid-life crisis hit early. Not that early—I was in my—I was just turning forty. I was like, "I can't do this for the rest of my life. So I get tenure and then I have to be with these people and be on committees?" Some people there were very Machiavellian. The better professors at the time were the ones I thought really just cared about the students. There were some who really didn't care about the students. There was one guy—I'm not going to name names—he was a fellow English professor, and some of the students came to me. Every black student he had he gave an A to. Period. Whether they did anything or not. Some of these students were my advisees and they would come to me and say, "Why did I get an A? I didn't earn this. That's fucked up." And I was like, "Yeah, why did you?" We had a search for faculty and somebody I knew had been filling in for a year and busting his ass for the students and really working hard and above and beyond. It wasn't this guy's candidate and he wanted someone else. He refused to vote for this guy and the guy lost his job. After that I was like, "Do I really want to be with children like this? This guy is not doing any work, he's patronizing the students, he's fucking up the faculty. I can't. If this is the rest of my life I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want these people running my life, I don't want these people in my life." So that was really the precipitating stuff. That and a bunch of stuff like that. And that and the idea that nobody is every going to read the work that I did. So that all came to a head around then. I mean, I'd gone into academia in the first place because I didn't know what else I wanted to do. You know, it was almost accident. It turned out that they paid—if I had to pay for my PhD I wouldn't have gotten one. But they paid for it and it was interesting and I learned stuff, but I was learning that stuff for me, not for academia. All throughout I chose what I wanted to study and I chose stuff that I was interested in. Once it stopped being interesting I was like, "I don't really need to be doing this for any personal reason." I didn't have a calling. I was doing it because I didn't know what else to be doing.

Farrell: So then when you officially left were there other—I mean I know you were working on the book—well, both books—but were there any other projects that you had on the horizon that you were moving into?

02-00:28:52

Wondrich: Well, I started writing for other magazines, you know, and I was still writing about music. That started to peter out because I wasn't really making any money. The failure of *Stomp & Swerve* –the fact that it didn't really make that much of splash took some of the fun out of that for me, too. I was up for the job of music editor at the *Village Voice*; I was on their short list, I auditioned for it. I knew it was a long shot telling them that I wanted to do something that I knew they probably

weren't going to like but I thought it was worth a try. I didn't want to just review college white bands. I said, "I'm in New York. Let me talk about all of the music that's in New York. Our coverage focuses in on indie rock, you know, and these few places. Let's go out into Queens and go to the clubs where the Africans play and send people out there. And as editor, this is the direction that I want to go in." I knew that was very naïve because those people don't advertise. But it was worth a try and what I told myself was, "If I get the job on these terms it's something I would do." If they gave me the job on their terms, I didn't want to do that. So I didn't expect—I wasn't disappointed when I didn't get it, but it was worth a try. So that was a possibility and after that I started to sort of lose interest in writing about music, mostly because there is just no money in it and I had a family to support.

So I started writing about drinks. I started going on press trips and learning more. I went to Scotland, I went to Ireland—always taking notes. I went down to Kentucky. I started doing more of that stuff and just trying to visit places and ask questions and see how things are made and education myself, basically. I bought books. I started writing for all kinds of people. I've written for, God, *Caribbean Bride Magazine*. I got a job as the Spirits Editor at *Wine and Spirits Magazine* because Ray Isle moved onto other things and I got his job. I'd been writing for him and I got that job and it paid some money and was also a good education because I got lots of booze sent and I got to taste it all. We did tasting and evaluations. Any systematic tasting is good. I started writing more and more. The *Esquire Drinks Book* came out and it wasn't super successful but people paid attention. It helped a lot—it was a good calling card.

Then at the end of 2002 a real landmark just for my own career was I'd been earlier that year down in Trinidad visiting the Angostura Rum Distillery with the journalist Andrea Strong. Andrea and I stayed in touch after the trip. She had her birthday party at a place on Smith Street. I went and met three people there and we got to talking; they worked for Slow Foods—Allen Katz, Shawn Kelly, and her partner in PR, Ana Jovancicevic. Shawn and Ana had this PR firm and they did a lot of restaurant and drink stuff. Allen was working for Slow Foods at the time, I think, and he did other stuff too. I get to talking to them and they are telling me about Slow Food. I said, "You know, there is this guy Jerry Thomas. He was the great American bartender and you know, that's really a slow food tradition, craft bartending. Juicing, making your own juices, it's not what things are now. Everything is fresh and local and it's a real American local cultural thing, this saloon culture. We should celebrate that. Let's do a tribute to Jerry Thomas. There hasn't been one and this cocktail thing is getting more and more popular and he was sort of the founding father. Let's do that." So they said, "That sounds like a good idea."

They are good organizers. They still are. They got a sponsor, we got Jeff Pogash from Moet Hennessey to sponsor the thing. We got the Plaza, the Oak Room at the Plaza, which was the old men's bar at the Plaza. I got eight of the top mixologist around the country. We got Dale to make Blue Blazers, we got Audrey Saunders to make Tom and Jerry, we got Gary Regan to make Manhattans, Sasha came and did his Gin Daisies, Ted Haigh, Dr. Cocktail, who was by then enormously influential on me and a crazy son of a bitch on top of that, he was making Brandy Crustas with lemon peels around the inside of the glass. Robert Hess made Japanese Cocktails. You know, I had to make all sorts of decision to do that and really learn a lot to set this thing up. I was sort of the mixology coordinator and Allen and Ana—at this time Shawn had dropped out because she was having a child and that's important—and Allen and Ana corralled the rest of it. We had raw oysters, we had this whole lunch spread. It kind of got out of control. I got Arrack—I could get Arrack here but I wanted to make Arrack punch so I got it via airmail from Germany. I think that year I had done an article for *Esquire*—at that point I was writing regularly for the magazine—and I did this article "What Can I Get with an Internet Connection and a Credit Card?" to see what I could get from around the world that's weird and exotic. My editor at the time was rather loose and was like, "Sure, we'll do that!" I managed to get Batavia Arrack, this legendary spirit not seen in America since Prohibition, so I knew I could get it. I had them ship me a whole case of it. "This is so cool; I've got a whole case of Arrack and no one else does." I was such a spirits geek about it.

So this thing came off in March and it was absolutely fantastic. Ted and I had gotten together –Ted Haigh—and said, "You know, we need a souvenir for this. We need a booklet. A little thing that you can take out." Ted is a graphic designer for movies, things like *Boardwalk Empire* now, and he knew exactly how to do this and where to get it printed on printing presses and not Xerox machines. We put everybody's recipe in there and I wrote a little biography of Jerry Thomas for the first page. I did a bunch of research for that as my wont. I found some obituaries on him that hadn't come up before. I talked to this women in London, a lovely person by the name of Theodora Sutcliffe, who was also interested in Jerry Thomas and researching his life. We kind of pooled notes and she was extremely helpful and very kind.

That was the other thing—the more I did in the drinks world the more I realized how nice everybody was as compared to academia. People were generous. If they were working on a project and you're doing something similar: "Give me what you got and I'll give you what I got." Not like, "I'm going to hoard this and blow you out of the water." There was very little of that. People were open and curious and

that was very refreshing to me. The part of academic world that I'd been in was maybe less so. Some departments were much better than others and some universities were obviously better, but my experience hadn't been very good with that.

So I started researching Jerry Thomas' life and I said, "Maybe I should turn this into a book." I went to my agent—I had an agent from the *Esquire* book—and she walked me through the proposal. Finally we found Marion Lizzi, whom I had known socially, she was a friend of a friend but she was a tough editor and she had her own imprint. We spent a lot of time negotiating but we finally got this book contract to do basically an edition of Jerry Thomas' book with commentary, was how it started off. It was based on the research that I had done for the tribute.

The tribute, by the way, was a spectacular success. It was cool. William Grimes came and wrote it up for the *Times*; it was this big article on it kind of saying this stuff is coming back. He was the perfect person because he was one of my inspirations in this and had also written a book on it. He knew what he was talking about and was pretty authoritative. Everyone who came was like, "Wow, this is so cool."

Farrell: When you were putting together the eight mixologists, eight bartenders, how was the whole idea of the tribute received?

02-00:38:38
Wondrich: Oh, everybody was thrilled. They were like, "Hell yeah—this sounds like a blast!"

Farrell: And they were all familiar with Jerry Thomas at this time?

02-00:38:43
Wondrich: Oh yeah. He was known from William Grimes' book, who talked about him a lot. William got the key article, the first new information since Herbert Asbury; he found an 1882 article with him, which was great. He sort of got the ball rolling. Most of what he says is still accurate. He's a fellow comp lit PhD, in Russian literature no less, so he's academically trained. And a very, very good prose stylist also, which made his book an inspiration. And also it's like this combination of being exact, let's get beyond the myths, and at the same time this stuff is entertaining and why write about it in a boring way? So it was very influential on me for that, too.

Farrell: Who were some of the people who attended?

02-00:39:40
Wondrich: The attendance was journalists, booze company people, interested cocktail geeks. It was a mixed lot. We had an invitation list of about one hundred and fifty people and I think one hundred and sixty came. It was packed. Terry Waldo we got to play piano, who I'd known from my music writing days. He wrote a book about ragtime and he knew everything about ragtime. So we called Terry up and said, "Can you come play piano for this?" Now he plays at the Dead Rabbit, many years later. Eleven years later he's still in there swinging and he's a wonderful piano player. It was a little after our period of ragtime but he can play the piano. I was thrilled to have him and it was an honor.

It was mostly media and there were Slow Food people there. It was a benefit for Slow Food and a tribute. You saw people looking around and saying, "This is cool. We want more of this." That was pretty impressive. In early 2003 it was really before this whole cocktail thing had busted open. It was still bubbling under with a lot more people getting interested every year, really key people. It was still a little weird. There were still only a few bars in New York where you could get a great cocktail and that took it seriously. Pegu Club wasn't open yet, Flatiron Lounge had just opened and that was great.

It was pretty new, but that got me researching Jerry Thomas and putting this book together. That took me a number of years. That was a real education, putting that together because what I realized right from the beginning is if I want this book to work, I have to learn how to mix drinks they way they made them then, not how we do it now. I had looked through all of my cocktail books and all the new ones had taken the old recipes and had adapted them to modern techniques, and modern ingredients, and modern proportions. I said, "I don't really know what these things tasted like so what I'm going to do is put the original recipe in there verbatim and then make suggestions rather than have it pre-adapted. I'll let you adapt it because I don't want to look like an idiot two years later and everything is wrong. At least this book will be useful because you'll have the original recipe."

At the same time there was another book that was wildly useful called The Wild West Bartender's Guide by these two antiquarians from the University of New Mexico, or something like that. They took a bunch of old bartender's guides and excerpted the recipes. But they didn't really tell you how to make them; they just gave you the old recipes. I knew I didn't really want to do that either. It was a really cool book with lots of illustrations in the front, but because I had spent all this time making drinks for my "Drink of the Week" column, which by that time, by 2003 that was sort of petering out and I was getting more busy and I was running out of drinks that I wanted to do. *Esquire* said,

"Ah, we don't really need to do this anymore," so that was falling by the wayside by the middle of 2003.

But because I knew how to mix the drinks I wanted to learn how to mix the drinks from then. I started looking for old bar gear and I started trying to figure out what they meant by the measures, the weights and measures that they were using. I spent a lot of time on the technicalities. Rather than use the recipes as a jumping off point I wanted to see how they actually did it. Like the Blue Blazer—I knew Dale made Blue Blazers: he warmed up the whiskey first because he was using the regular scotch that we had and that worked beautiful but I realized that they weren't warming the scotch then, so how did they make it work? I finally dug deeper until I found somebody saying that you have to use cask strength spirits and then suddenly, "Oh! That's how it worked—you need a stronger scotch to make that thing work." A lot of stuff like that. How much is a wine glass? Turns out that was a standard measure; it was two ounces because it was based on the kind of sherry glass the English drank wine out of in the 18th century. A little two ounce glass rather than a big four ounce or six ounce glass. So there was a lot of stuff like that. That took a long time, but it was interesting to me so I put it all in there. I researched the history of the drinks as much as possible.

The real revolutionary thing was we were starting to get newspaper databases. You see here in my office I've got print outs of all these books here; basically, copies of all these old bar guides. I've got the databases, the print outs of the newspapers over on another shelf, all chronologically arranged. I don't do that anymore—I usually keep them in PDF on my computer in chronological order. That was really pretty revolutionary because—well, there are a couple older books that were written on the history of bars and saloons by academics that used newspaper files. There was a good one by guy Perry Duis about Chicago and Boston comparing their drink cultures. But that meant going through this stuff on microfilm. The drinks stuff is always, if you find it, it's on like page six at the bottom. You almost have to do it real time It's slow, slow, slow. I can't imagine how much time it took him to research that book. Early on I did a lot more microfilm stuff because that was the only option to find something. You had to spend all day at the New York Public Library and come back with three useful articles. But they started digitizing this stuff. Very badly at first, but nonetheless that lets you drill into it. Now it's like, of these databases—well, there are many. The early ones, like at the Brooklyn Eagle, they had up until 1902 and that was great. Plus I was in Brooklyn and that was great. The American Historical Society—I think that was AHS, or maybe that is the Antiquarian Society—but anyway they had a great one and ProQuest had one that was good.

Now there are a lot more. Every time there is a new one I find new stuff.

These are really essential for this kind of stuff. You can do it well but you can't do it comprehensively without it. You find so much stuff that was previously unknown or misunderstood because cocktail history was something that was never recorded at the time; nobody gave a damn. Who invented the first cocktail? That was barroom conversation, not history. Now we have much more interest. Even in the late 19th century there is much more interest. They are starting to pay attention to bartenders. The newspapers are sending correspondents to the bars to see what the top bartenders are mixing. They are printing the recipes. Unfortunately, the period that this whole thing started in, the first half of the 19th century, they didn't do that. The most they did was mention a bartender as being a great bartender and give the name of the drink; they never went into detail.

Farrell: Why do you think happened, that there was this shift?

02-00:47:52

Wondrich: That's a really good question. I don't really have an answer. America got more confident in its Americaness is part of it, I think, after the Civil War. It's like we fought this horrible, titanic struggle but we also learned a lot. We were gaining in power and self-confidence. At that point the American bar as an institution was three or four generations old. It was less of a novelty and a weird thing and less of a departure from our national culture—it *was* our national culture. Before that in the early days it was like this is some local weird yahoo thing we do in America; not very correct according to European laws. I think that's my suspicion but I don't really have proof for it. You get the sense—also newspapers were greatly expanded and they were competing. There were many of them and this is something colorful to write about, what's in the bars. They saw that all of the men were in the bars, even in some cities the women were in bars too. Henry Ramos had this saloon in New Orleans, a lot of women would come because it was so respectable, but that was pretty rare.

Nonetheless, the late nineteenth century all that stuff gets covered. I've got hundreds of articles about cocktails then; you know, this is the new drink of the season and it came from here and so on and so forth. But with microfilm you need to have a basis to find that kind of thing, you can't really do it by chance. Or you need teams of grad students working for you, or undergrads, combing these things. A good academic approach worked too, but this [the electronic databases] was a lot quicker. On the other hand, they aren't one hundred percent reliable, or even eighty percent reliable.

Farrell: When you were doing that research what was the biggest surprise that you encountered?

02-00:49:57

Wondrich: There were several. One was gin, right? Jerry Thomas' book just says, "gin" and I was like, "What kind of gin?" I learned early on that you have to ask these questions, obviously, what did he mean by gin? The more I looked, and I started looking at, like, Port of New York records as reported in the trade journals—there were liquor trade journals at the time—and shock and surprise, there's thirty times as much Dutch gin being imported as there is English gin; there's hardly any English gin. We'd always make these drinks with London dry gin, you know, we'd make them all with Beefeater or Tanqueray or something. Huh, that's not what they used. They were using jenever. Some of the drinks, the Martini—or the Martinez in its early days—that was a London, English gin drink. But most of the gin drinks of Jerry Thomas days were made with jenever, which is essentially flavored whiskey, not flavored vodka, and a very different spirit.

That was a real eye-opener for me. That one kind of blew my mind because a lot of my theory, convictions and approaches are shaped by my academic career. One of the things I learned and one of my tenets as an academic is that people are no smarter today than they were then and they were no dumber then than they are now. I would taste some of these drinks—I'd make them with London dry gin—and go, "Wow, that is awful." There was this drink, the Gin Cocktail, for instance, and in Jerry Thomas it is gin, a little bit of sugar, a bar spoon of Curaçao, and ice, and lemon peel, and bitters. I would make this with the London dry and go, "This is really kind of harsh; this is really not very good." Then I'd be looking through the old newspapers and there was one little article I found from about 1830—something like that—and the reporter had a dollar bill that someone had written on: "This is the last dollar bill out of 30,000 I had, all because of Gin Cocktail." I'm thinking, "This Gin Cocktail would not make me spend $30,000!" You know? "This is nasty, what's wrong?" And then I find another thing were this guy goes, "Do you have any good gin? I want a gin cocktail," and the bartender says, "Yes, I have Holland's," which is Dutch gin.

I started to put two and two together and I confirmed it with these reports. That's really what gin was like. That's really the process that you have to go through; you have to question everything. I mean, what size were the eggs? What kind of limes were they using? There was a lot of stuff like that. What were they doing for ice? What kind of tools were they using? I started collecting these old bartender tools, not like the kind of collectible gear like the kind of shaker that's like a cocktail shaker shaped like a rooster or anything like that. I just wanted the

plain, straightforward stuff and I managed to get a little bit of that before the book came out. I got as much as I could because I knew that people would go look at the illustrations and go on eBay and get the same stuff that I was getting.

Farrell: As you are writing these columns and you are starting to do this research for the Jerry Thomas book and you're starting to see some of these cocktail bars crop up, did you see some of the drinks that you're writing about make their way into bars?

02-00:53:39

Wondrich: Yeah. A few of them definitely did. There was the Improved Cocktail and when Imbibe! came out that one went. There were some of the later drinks that I put in. Some of the sours and fizzes you'd start seeing. But already Sasha was doing Silver Fizzes well before I did the book. Sasha was an independent person. All of the first round of people did their own thing and it started moving on from there. Blue Blazers you'd see people doing as a stunt all of the sudden; that was kind of cool. There was a few of these drinks, some more than others. But the thing that I think really Imbibe! helped with was ice—this idea of using different sizes of ice, and which kind to use for which drinks. Cracked ice you used for stirred drinks and cube ice—I talked about that. I talked about people carving ice balls and you started seeing that. And then people are dong that in Japan all along, and people start bringing the Japanese people over.

I'm not saying that was all because of Imbibe! but Imbibe! helped with that. It also helped with—a lot I think—with this idea that bartending is a dignified profession and worthwhile; I spent a lot of time on that and that bartending is, you know, a profession of substance. It helped to illustrate that. And also the tools, use the proper tools. But really I think it was useful as a compendium of old bartending culture and that's what I think it's being used as even now. This is the history of the drinks, but it's also a history of the profession and what you're getting in to.

Farrell: When you started seeing that happen in bars and pick up, what was it like for you?

02-00:55:59

Wondrich: Oh, it was cool. At that point, in 2006, which—I think we started in 2006 for *Esquire*—we started doing "Best Bars" with my new editor, Ross McCammon, who is still my editor now. That was at first kind of loosely defined, but we knew right off the bat we wanted to not just have cocktail bars, we wanted dives, etc. At first I did the architecture with Ross and I did a number of entries but then farmed some out. We kept having problems with some of the bars that we farmed out; we

didn't like what was coming back or some of the bars that were chosen, necessarily, so we had to kill a lot. We finally decided that I was going to do most of them and that took a couple of years for that. I had already started traveling around the country doing bartender education—I guess we can talk about that later.

So going into these bars and seeing people doing it was so cool. I mean, you know, in San Francisco and Seattle and people doing it Jerry Thomas style. I'm getting recognized in these bars and that's just really fun and kind of gratifying. I'm meeting all of these fun and interesting people all over the country, you know, young bartenders. I'm seeing these people in this economy that even in the mid-2000s it was already not great. Even in the mid-Bush years it wasn't great for young people. In 2008 it fell of the cliff, the year after my book came out. Suddenly these very hardworking, talented people are getting behind the bar because it's a portable job; there's always work for a skilled bartender, wherever you go. The people that are treating it like it was for some in the 19th century, a profession capable of mastering, and they're setting out to master it. That I loved seeing. Sometimes it's a little ridiculous, but they are also twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six years old and they will grow out of it; most of them have.

So that was very cool for me, seeing it trying come back to par as this great American art. It goes back to the beginning when I started writing about drinks and it was a little odd to my friends. I'd talk to people and they'd say, "Why are you doing this?" and I'd go, "Well, I want to be able to go into any bar in America and get a good Old Fashioned or get a good Manhattan." And they were like, "Okay, like that's ever going to happen." I said it as a weird joke, because there was no way this stuff was going to come back. This little, weird fetish thing, at the beginning. So I would always say this as a grandiose ambition and we'd all laugh. Suddenly, it's 2008 and I'm going into these bars—it might not be every bar, but I'm going into these cities—and they're doing this, you know? I can ask for a Gin Cocktail or I can get a Sazerac or I get a Prescription Julep—that's another one that I put in the book and I can get at most of these bars—and I was like, "Wow, that's really cool." It is good. It is good to be able to do this. So that was pretty intense when that started happening.

Farrell: Well, I think this is a good—we're running out of tape so I think this is a good place to leave it today and we'll pick it back up tomorrow.

02-00:59:52

Wondrich: Awesome.

Interview 2: May 2, 2014
[Begin Audio File 3]

Farrell: All right, this is Shanna Farrell with David Wondrich on Friday, May 2 in Gowanus, Brooklyn and this is tape number three. So David yesterday when we left off we were talking about Imbibe! and you were talking about Stomp and Swerve, and I was wondering if you could tell me about what some of the differences were in writing those two books?

03-00:00:34
Wondrich: Yeah, Imbibe! was in some weird way kind of a technical book. I tried to dress it up as much as possible with fancy prose, which is a failing I have and I tend to over fancify things a little. I get into the style of the period and throw myself into it and it ends up affecting my prose. But Stomp and Swerve was a cultural essay, I guess you could say. I talked about the music and records. I talked about individual records and tried to put artists, etcetera, in some kind of musical terms, but I'm not a musicologist and it wasn't musicology. It was basically an attempt to turn the exuberance and, I don't know, cultural intoxication of Lester Bangs back on the music of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, based on this conviction that I talked about yesterday, which was that people were really no different. People in the nineteenth century liked to have sex and drink and do all that kind of stuff and if we look at them like black and white photos that really misrepresents them and misrepresents their music and their cultural products. So that book was a big extended essay in that.

Imbibe! was a bit more of a sober book, ironically, because of its subject matter. At the same time there was also an attempt to bring that period to life. It was also not supposed to be your first books on drinks. We assumed people already had Dale's masterful Craft of the Cocktail, Gary Regan's masterful Joy of Mixology, these really great beginning histories. William Grimes' Straight Up or On the Rocks, a great history of the cocktail. I didn't want to make it just the history of the cocktail and I didn't want to make it just "here are all of the drinks you need to know;" I wanted to more narrowly focus on what those people were doing then when they stood up to make drinks. And that's really what it was for, secretly; it was really for bartenders. I wrote it for the general public, but I was really thinking of bartenders.

By the time it had come out I had started training bartenders and teaching them, so that really changed things; it changed my perspective because I realized that there was no text for them. It really would help them really settle arguments in a way. So much of the discussion of history of cocktails at the time were arguments with no data. It was here is this story, here is this story, we have no way of

judging which one is truthful and which isn't and we're going to go by our gut feeling about which is reasonable. There was all of this folk history and folk etymology and I thought, "Well, let's try to get some real facts here, at least as close as we can come." You can never come exactly close; like I said, it's history that happened in a bar. You can't get people to agree to what happened last Tuesday night, let alone what happened twenty years ago when you were there and they invented a drink.

But that's also where it succeeded, also. Among people who read carefully it settled a lot of myths. You don't hear a lot of stories over and over again, a lot of baseless stories. I sort of tried to weigh things on the scale and my thumb might have been on the scale sometimes, as authors' always are, but nonetheless I tried pretty hard to never say anything without actual evidence for it and I tried to avoid jumping to conclusions as much as possible. I think it was actually useful for that.

Farrell: So in speaking of settling arguments and using it for bartenders but also trying to come at it objectively and research-based as possible, what do you think the general reception was by bartenders and kind of what it did for the profession?

03-00:05:18

Wondrich: I think the reception was very positive. It really look a while but slowly spread from bar to bar. It was kind of the inside hipster book that you have to read about this stuff. That was extremely gratifying for me, but it also gave people a standard place to start on the history. The broad history that I gave was not different from William Grimes' or Gary Regan's before me, really. But I did spend more time on the actual techniques—the physical stuff—used back then. I didn't spend time on how to make the best drinks now, which is what Gary did. William Grimes, not so interested in the mixology part, but I spent time on how they would have made these drinks. That gave people access to fun bits of historical flair and I think that gave bartenders another sort of secret handshake to share that they are really into this thing. They are doing things the correct pre-Prohibition way.

Farrell: You had mentioned that you were also training bartenders at that point. Are you talking about Beverage Alcohol Resource?

03-00:06:39

Wondrich: Yeah, I am. There was some stuff that I had done already on my own; I had started to do lectures and talks on this sort of thing, and demonstrations. In 2005 Paul Pacult, the leading spirits journalist and who was a friend of mine, we had sat down and we'd started talking about how there should be a school for this; a type of school that's not the typical bartender school, which are basically just cheap mills to get

people behind the bar in sports bars and not really teaching things at the highest level or really with the attention to the culture or craft aspects. So Paul and I were talking about this and unbeknownst to us—you know, Paul and I had also said, "We should get Dale involved. We need a real master bartender and Dale is our friend and the best guy in the world. We need him."

Meanwhile, Steve Olson, great spirits educator in the trade—you know, if you had a complex new high-end product you'd hire Steve to go around and explain it to journalist, bartenders, etc. etc. He's very good at that. Doug Frost, who was his partner at that, is also great at that and is a master of wine—a Master Sommelier—you know, really distinguished in the wine field and a great educator. They had been talking about the same thing and also thought about getting Dale. We were all judges at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition that year and we got to talking and decided we would combine forces and start a school.

Fortunately, Paul and Steve are both very well organized and they helped to shove us together to do this and drive it along. In the beginning of 2006, when I was still working on Imbibe!, we did our first program. Because of New York State law, we originally wanted to do it over many weeks, you know, a standard school thing. And then we realized that bartenders can't really take every Monday night for twelve weeks and they can't come from all around if they have to come every week. We didn't have a space and New York State makes it very complicated to start any educational institution. We couldn't teach for more than five days in a row without getting a license from the state, which would have meant hundreds of thousands of dollars and getting a premises and all that and a state certified school. We didn't really see any point in becoming a state certified school because we were basically all putting our word in and we were all pretty well known at that point, some more than others but nonetheless. We were putting our certification on these people and we didn't need a state certification on top of it. It wasn't a trade school; it was a master class.

We ended up with this weird structure where we do five days, the first four days instruction and the fifth day testing. It would be kind of a brutal immersion experience, which is what it ended up as. We did our first class at this absolutely atrocious night club in Chelsea—not even in Chelsea—midtown South on 28th Street. This place was horrible and it was a nightmare. I had three broken ribs, or cracked ribs, at the time because I had fallen off of my bicycle the week before—all this stuff like that. But we managed to make it through the week. We had some great students who came the first time and we thought, "Okay, this might work." Then we did it again in the fall. This time we had moved to Keen's Steakhouse, a place that we all loved dearly. We did it there

for a number of years and we started to get some of the biggest names in the industry come through because there is no other training like it. We blind tasted one hundred and something spirits, mixology demonstrations, and hands-on, and history and all that kind of stuff. It goes on in this feverish kind of week with all this stuff being thrown at you and then you have to stand up and make drinks for us and that's not easy. That seemed like it might work.

Before long we were doing a very light version of it on the road for Diageo, this thing called Drinkwell. Traveling around the country we did that maybe early 2007 to 2009. That got us into places like Los Angeles, which had no cocktail culture anymore except for maybe Musso and Frank's and the bartender there was in his eighties. The first time we went there we thought that nobody was going to come to this thing. We held it in Newport Beach at this Hyatt Regency or something and there were like eighty people there; we were stunned. We did it in New York, we got a good turnout; we did it in San Francisco, we got a good turnout. We were starting to move to markets that we were less sure about and we were surprised at the number of people who showed up so we knew something was happening.

But Diageo is a huge company and not always completely organized at this kind of level and our corporate patron moved on and the program kind of fell by wayside. But, around the same time Pernod Ricard, another one of the big companies, came to us and said, "We want to do something like this but we want it different. We want there to be some kind of certificate that you get out of it at the end." With the Diageo one there was no testing at the end. Pernod Ricard liked the testing and that was the genius thing that they did. We did a different program and similar, but different in all of the details, and ended up with testing. It's a light version of what we do in the five-day; you have to stand up and make drinks for us or our assistants. We bring a bunch of our five-day program graduates around, some of the biggest names in the industry—Jim Meehan, Julie Reiner—they'll judge with us, people like that. Local people on the West Coast; we get Eric Alperin from the Varnish—he's one of our favorite judges. People from Boston—Misty Kalkofen, the wonderful agave expert and just crazy woman. So we have this impressive core of people and we show up.

We started that and we just last week—or this week—I just got back from our thirty-third city—or rather our thirty-third time. Some cities we've repeated. But we were just in Cleveland. Nobody has ever done anything that big in Cleveland before and we got one hundred and twenty people, which is pretty close to our maximum. So we go all over the country; we've been to Austin, Dallas, Houston, Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles a couple of times, San Francisco a couple of times, New York several times, Chicago, New Orleans a couple of

times, New Orleans, Miami, Orlando. We've been around quite a bit and it's always fascinating. We blow into these cities with our black-clad crew and run this huge circus. It's been great for me; I know bartenders all over the country and we've turned out thousands of graduates at this point, which is impressive. It's really helped to sort of standardize things in way. It sounds bad when you say "standardize" but on the other hand it's helped to lift the bottom. BarSmarts is not high-level training—it's basic. It's like, "Can you make an Old Fashioned, a Martini, a Margarita, a Mojito, and can you do a decent job?" You know, you don't have to make a perfect one necessarily, you'll get points off, but we want to make sure you have a good idea of what you're doing. Then we'll give a certificate saying that this person is basically competent and that's what the certificate says. It's worked. It's an accepted credential. [Knock on door] Oh hang on. What do we have here?

Pause Tape

Okay.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about your role in the conception of Beverage Alcohol Resource and how that's developed?

03-00:15:54

Wondrich: Well, you know originally we had five partners. I was the history and mixology guy, and we all kind of did what we did. Paul Pacult did scotches and cognacs mostly, Steve Olson agave master, Doug Frost spirits generalist, Dale DeGroff mixology, practice, and how to do things. There was some overlap—I also helped Dale with that and some areas—like, Doug Frost and I dove in on rum and Irish whiskey, two things we are fond of. We tried to get coverage. After our first one we realized that our back of house guy needed to be full partner because that was the key to success in something like that in logistics. We had Andy Seymour, who'd been Steve Olson's right-hand man, running the back of house, and boy howdy did we need him. We made him a partner full partner after the first one, I believe. He's in charge of the logistics. He also covers some of the modules and talks about service and things like that. But he's also just a master at organizing bartenders; he's like top sergeant in the army. He wrangles the people and gets the people to do things because they want to. That was the smartest decision I think we made as partners because so many booze events and attempts at education falter on logistics. They either have to low-ball things because they can't do anything ambitious. You know, we can have cocktail samples for one hundred and twenty people—three cocktail samples—come out. I can make punch on stage and know that it will immediately be served to people. We know that we can set up ten practice bars when we are setting up for BarSmarts because we've got Andy in charge of the extended team, and now Leo

DeGroff, Dale's son, who is also amazing at this. We've always tried to identify the best organizers and the best back of house people because that's the only way to look good, you know? It makes the thing work otherwise we're just standing there talking and nothing is happening. So that was really our breakthrough.

But my role has pretty much always been the same; I do history. As my interests change I emphasize different things. I'm always looking for more stuff and revising what I know, or what I think I know. So the details of it change often and every once in a while I get a breakthrough—I found something that I really didn't understand before, now I understand it so suddenly we talk more about that.

Farrell: Can you give me an example?

03-00:18:52

Wondrich: Three years ago Dale and I went to China to visit the Maotai Distillery in deepest Guizhou Province south of Szechwan, really south central China—pretty remote from anywhere—and saw this crazy process from which they make this stuff that is really an acquired taste. It tastes very stinky at first and it's hard to get used to. But now we have a Chinese spirits module. We already had one because I had done a little on Chinese spirits for *Esquire* just out of curiosity, but now we have an informed module on that. We'll talk about that and we'll taste. That comes out of that travel and our interests, and my interests, too. The historical stuff—punch—we do a lot more about punch because I wrote a book on punch; we do a lot more on that now.

Farrell: So you had also talked about sort of establishing a baseline for consistency across the country.

03-00:19:58

Wondrich: Yes, absolutely.

Farrell: What are some of the things when people are doing the testing that you are looking for and judging and how did you produce that collectively?

03-00:20:44

Wondrich: Well, collectively on the cocktails it was mostly Dale and Andy Seymour and I sat down and said, "Okay, what is a reasonable Mojito?" We had to do this already with our five day because we give people lists of cocktails that they need to know. We don't expect people to follow our recipes, but our recipes are sort of standards and they have to be variations of that; they can't be too off there. For instance, the Old Fashioned we don't want it drowned in soda water. You can make it with muddled fruit in there, as is the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s version, or you can make it without—a version previous to that. But you can't drown it in soda—that's a no-no. We tried to get rid

of the no-nos. The Manhattans should be stirred, not shaken. Some towns, some parts of the country, they still shake. We don't take a huge amount off but at the end of when we test everybody we talk about what we would have liked to see and where they—we give a little teaching moment at the end.

We want to see people measuring accurately. If people are free pouring they better be damn good at it. If they're using jiggers, they better know how to use a jigger. We encourage using jiggers for consistency, but you know, it's things like that. It's just basics. We're not looking for anything fancy; we don't need a huge amount of flair from them. We just want to make sure that they've got the proportions right in a sour. It depends what kind of drink we are testing. If we ask for a Martini and they ask us what kind of Martini we want and not just make us something—we're looking for that kind of thing. It's stuff that people should know but in large parts of the country, up until now, there really weren't any master bartenders to show people.

You can buy all of the books that you want, but all of the books are contradictory. The books are all very personal. That's, again, what I was trying to do with Imbibe! was to take the personal out of it. Let's just say what they did. Here is the their recipe. I put the personal back in by my interpretation but I made sure to put the data in so if you disagreed with me you had the data. I definitely know that I've been wrong about a whole lot of stuff, as people are, but at least it's there. This is, again, what we are trying to do here—to take the personal out, to have some general understanding. It seems to—obviously we are not the only people moving ahead with this kind of thing—it's a pretty broad movement right now; it's a weird cultural moment that the cocktail is having as a culinary art, but it seems to be working. I go to bars all around the country now, these new bars opened by people in their twenties and their early thirties, and I ask for a Manhattan, and it's almost always the same Manhattan; that's kind of great. I mean, it's a little sad but it's also great. [Laughs] You know? It's like, "Okay, you didn't fuck up my Manhattan. It's safe."

And ten, fifteen years ago when I started this you never knew what you were going to get. And now there are still many bars where I'll get a horrible Manhattan. You know, the people who haven't bought into this, they still make their Manhattan—I'll just use this, an example, sort of, of the difference: if I go to a craft cocktail bar they'll make it either two parts rye or one part rye to one part vermouth. They'll put bitters in it, they'll stir it, and they'll ask me if I want either a cherry or a twist. Right? That's great. That's fine. If I go to another bar, they'll put in a little splash of vermouth, like your average hotel bar or things like that around the country, because they learned to make Manhattans like a Martini, but like one from in the '60s where no vermouth went

in, or the tiniest amount. They've learned that vermouth is this toxic waste that you only put the tiniest drops in. Gin is a fairly light spirit. If you stir it up cold with ice and put a little bit of vermouth in there you get something very strong, but it's drinkable. It's intense, but it's drinkable. With the whiskey you get the worst of both worlds. It's not whiskey on the rocks that's been stirred up, but it's too strong and unbalanced and weird tasting because there is stuff in it but not enough stuff to change it. It's just worse than whiskey and it's worse than a Manhattan. They put in this sweet vermouth as if it is this toxic waste and they always put just a tiny little dash in. I always get this sad, sinking feeling when I see this coming to the table because it's always too light; it's always the color of the whiskey, not the vermouth. I'm like, "Ah, now I have to drink this thing," because I'm not one to send things back; I don't like to be that kind of customer.

So at least in the craft cocktail bars they have this baseline. It's spreading and it's getting easier and easier. Those other places are starting to age out and once the big chains—the hotel chains, they are already starting with this—and once the big restaurant chains cave in and start to pay more attention to their beverage programs it will be good for everyone.

Farrell: So kind of backing up in a time a little bit, when you started to do research for Imbibe! I know that mentioned yesterday that you talked to Dale DeGroff and Sasha Petraske, but who were some of the other people that you went to talk to about research and some of the bars that you went to?

03-00:26:03

Wondrich: Well, for that book I didn't really—you know, I shared information. Ted Haigh was generous enough to share information, Gary Regan also. William Grimes sent me some of his bar books once he got out of drink writing. He got rid of all of his antique bar books, which is kind of crazy. But he sent me some of them and that was really nice of him and extremely useful. Those were the main people that I talked to. Mostly it was book research and magazine research. It was more about that kind of thing than getting oral traditions. I was looking to the way back. I should have cut out in 1885 when Jerry Thomas died but I used the very specious reasoning that he died young and if he had lived longer—just to extend things to Prohibition—what his natural life would have been, just to bring in a little more of the stuff that I knew and the stuff that was consistent with the stuff that happened during his life just to show how it played out. I think that was actually a pretty good decision.

Farrell: So when you were writing Imbibe!, Punch—the next book that grew out of that, Punch, can you tell me a little bit about writing that?

03-00:27:30

Wondrich: Yeah, absolutely. Well, by the time I finished the manuscript of Imbibe! to my long-suffering editor, Marion looked at it—Marion Lizzi—said, "Okay, this is 135,000 words; you were supposed to give me 85,000. We can't publish this. You're going to have to make some major cuts here." I looked at the book and realized—well, at first of course very upset, as one is because it's my baby and how can I cut off an arm from my baby? But then I said, "You know, actually she is right."

As I'd been writing the book—Jerry Thomas' 1862 book begins with a huge selection of bowls of punch, these great complex recipes. I realized that those weren't his recipes—he didn't put them in there. They were all contributed by other people and they seemed to be amassed by his publisher and they brought him in to do the cocktails, as far as I could tell, to do the American drinks. I had written these things up with commentary, etc. etc., and so I just cut that whole section out because those weren't drinks made in American bars, they were there as kind of legacy drinks. I said, "You know, these are kind of their own stories."

That snapped Imbibe! much better into focus. That's when I really went back and focused more and more on the bartending, because the punches hadn't really been bartending; they had been history of drinks. Then I was able to see the other stuff in much better focus. For the final drafts I really moved in that direction a lot more. But I had this huge chunk and I said, "Well, I'm going to turn this into a book because I did all of this work." I had been making punch a lot—partly for the Jerry Thomas book because I'd test all of my recipes—but also because by 2006, 2007 when the Jerry Thomas book came out I had a good reputation among my friends; I was a professional drinks writer and I made cocktails at every party. I was tired of making cocktails at parties because it's a lot of work and you don't always see your friends in the best light. They are like, "I don't want this, I want this," and that's a pain in the ass. "I don't really want to do this." Suddenly you're having conflict with them and you don't really get to participate in the party and you start to get resentful and I don't like to feel resentful.

So I started making bowls of punch and I started to really appreciating the ritual of it, put it that way where everybody would gather around the punch bowl. I would see it happen over and over again where everybody would say, "I'm not going to drink that. I used to drink that in college and it was disgusting. Why are you serving this? Do you have wine? I'll drink beer or something else." They would do that and meanwhile everybody who had been to one of these parties before would be clustered around the punch bowl. I'd serve it in very small

cups so you'd have to keep coming back for a refill; every time you came back there would be someone else there. Soon there is this circle of people around the bowl and there would be a few crabby people sitting in the corner determinedly not drinking punch, but most of them ended up drinking punch too. When you take choice away from people they don't have to worry; this is the drink. We'll give some wine also and some beer, but we're not going to give an unopened bar with liquor or make your own drinks or an array of drinks. Once in a while I'll have a cocktail party where I'll make drinks, but I don't do that very often. It's usually a big bowl of punch because of that. It takes away a source of social anxiety in a way: "What am I going to drink? What am I going to drink next?" It gives people a shared experience and I'd really started to appreciate that and the ritual.

And also the history of punch worked very strongly into some of my historical interests from when I was an academic. One of my PhD exam topics was travel literature, for instance. One of the few courses at St. John's that I got to develop and teach was a course on the discovery of the Americas and the literature of that. That all had to do with sailors; I've also been fascinated by the age of sail and sailors and all that and punch was a sailor's drink. Travel literature—I got to dig deep into the East India Company, a fascinating story, the English East India Company and, to a lesser degree, the Dutch East India Company, the whole India trade. I got to look at some Islamic history. I got to look at all kinds of stuff. The research for that was just endlessly fascinating for me, and then there was a lot of English history, which I'd also done; I knew a fair amount about the English cultural history in the eighteenth century and the seventeenth century, periods I had studied and read widely. So this was very fun for me to research because that was where the story lay and punches had these great stories behind them.

So I was finally able to sell the book to the same publisher. I started writing it and I thought it would be easy because I already had most of the punch part written. It turned out that needed to be entirely re-written because I found out all kinds of other stuff. It turned out to be extremely hard to write but I think much better integrated than Imbibe! I think finally it's the book that I'm most proud of because it came out really well. Of course it didn't sell for shit because it's sort of a bridge too far for most people. A book on bartending and cocktails that's really geeky, okay. A book on punch that they are never going to make, maybe less so. It was well received and it got great reviews. I made it onto the approval matrix in *New York Magazine*; that was funny. I got all these nice reviews for it but the sales have always been kind of a little slow on that one because, again, it's pretty geeky and off the beaten track. But on the other hand the people that like it really like it, so it was sort of a lesson to me.

Farrell: And you've been, for these books, nominated for James Beard Awards as well and Imbibe! was the first to win cocktail—

03-00:34:02
Wondrich: Imbibe! was the first cocktail book to get a James Beard Award and I won a Tales of the Cocktail Spirited Award for that, which was great.

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about when you first learned that you were nominated and then the ceremony?

03-00:34:15
Wondrich: Oh, I was thrilled. I expected that it would not really attract their attention because cocktail books didn't, and suddenly there it was. I was nominated. That was a big deal for me, obviously. As we're doing this interview I'm up for another one on Monday, so a little bit nervous about that, but that was great. I loved seeing—I mean, it was great for me but I also thought it was kind of great for mixology, seeing this new, almost insurgent, art being up there with the wine and the beer and spirits, finally where it belonged getting the recognition for the stuff that had been happening for almost ten years at the time. To see that it was starting to be recognized by the culinary establishment, that was for me very gratifying. I kind of felt like a symbol there.

Punch didn't get nominated for the award. I was hoping it would, of course, but that year it was all wine books; it was kind of like the *Empire Strikes Back*. But I did get a Tales of the Cocktail award again and those are all my peers in the business. Those awards are fun to get but also mean a lot because it means you have a lot of friends in the business, which is a good sign. So both books were well received for the most part but every once in a while you read online reviews and see somebody throwing it across the room because it's hard to read and pretentious, as they say. Well, okay, maybe you're not the reader for this. People go to books for different reasons. Some people go to books for pictures and easy to make recipes but my books don't do that these days. I did write some of those and they are fine; I have nothing against them and they are useful, but it's time to move on.

Farrell: So when you were winding down with Punch what were some of the thing that you had in mind to do as a follow up or following?

03-00:36:41
Wondrich: Well, I was going to do a book on how the American cocktail became global. It was going to be called Around the World by Brass Rail. I have all this research for it but I never really got excited about it. It was like, "Is this going to be more of the same?" I could use photographs for it, which would have been nice—so, learning; maybe I can sell a few more books by getting photographs—since there are some bars that are still there that I would have been talking about. But

there was an enthusiasm deficit on my part. I didn't push the book proposal. I kind of meandered around on it. I loved the research part of it and I did talks on the subject. That I liked doing but I could never really quite get the proposal finally drafted.

Then I got approached by my friend Garrett Oliver, who is the brewer at Brooklyn Brewery, and lives down the street from me—a cool and fascinating guy. He had just published the Oxford Companion to Beer and he said, "You know, the Oxford people want to talk to you about a companion to spirits and cocktails." I didn't realize that my life would be over once we had that conversation, but that is in fact the case. That is just such a huge project that it's moving along very slowly right now but it will pick up again; it's just in a slow phase. It's just an overwhelming project; there's never been one before, something like that. There have been some great books on spirits, sort of reference books on spirits and cocktails—some of them very big—but they are very selective about what they cover. What I'm trying to do with this thing, as the Editor in Chief, is send a satellite around to the dark side of the moon so to speak. I want to cover Chinese spirits in some detail. Nobody has done that. I want to talk about what they are drinking in Africa.

I want to present accurate histories of spirits that generally get their history from the industry and I want to step back from the industry and get more historical sources for some of these things. Because, for instance, bourbon and rye—which seem to be well known—the history of them is very different than what we think. They were produced in very different ways than they are produced today but nobody every talks about that because history is written by the survivors. The survivors had to do a lot of stuff to survive. I don't hold that against them, at all; it's what they know. It's almost like evolution, the tiger thinks that all animals should be huge and strong with fangs and claws because that's what worked for him. The other animal that fell by the wayside, you know, the tiger doesn't care about him.

That's sort of the case with some of these spirit categories. Cognac, very different than how it was made, but the survivors made it this way. Eventually the survivors get together and over the years they've learned how to make things the most economic and efficient ways because over the course of one hundred years or more their efficiency really starts to tell. They tend to come up with standards that are excluding all of these other branches and I want to look at some of these other branches again because we're at a time now where you've got all these micro-distillers coming and some of those branches I think would be useful and would come up with interesting things. That is something I'm very interested in.

Farrell: There's a lot that's not documented about these things and as you're saying a lot of it is coming from the industry so the history is not as robust or dynamic or even true as possible.

03-00:40:40
Wondrich: Yeah, that's true.

Farrell: What's your research process like, if we can take a step back?

03-00:40:42
Wondrich: Well, I'm trying to go through old industry journals, I'm trying to look through - some of the best researchers, guys like Dave Broom in England and Scotland do this same process, it's no mystery. But I'm trying to do it for everything. For instance, Google Books is an amazing resource that's under-utilized. They have tons of distillation manuals and trade journals and things like that. They don't have them separately categorized; you have to sort of sink shafts in haphazardly and eventually one will lead you to another. One example of things that I found via Google Books that nobody has quoted from in one hundred years is in 1908 the Internal Revenue Service had spent eight years on a study on how American whiskey ages. They took fourteen or fifteen ryes and ten bourbons and some corn whiskies—a couple of corn whiskies—and went to the distilleries and took a barrel sample or took a sample right off the still and recorded the details of distillation. Unfortunately, they didn't name the distilleries because they didn't want it to be advertising. But they took the details of production, you know, how, what proof it was distilled at, the mash bill—all this useful stuff—and then every year they went back and took another sample. They went back and sealed these up and at the end of eight years they tested them all and they saw the developments of the ryes versus the bourbons, the ryes versus the corn whiskies. But also among their details you saw that all of the ryes—almost all of the ryes—were distilled in a different kind of still than is used today and one that hasn't used in America in a very long time. There was a peculiar American still.

I knew to look for this from a book, J. McCulloch, Distilling, Brewing, and Malting, that I found in the British Library of all places, published in San Francisco in 1867, and it gives the description of this still. It was absolutely and completely new to me. I'd never heard anything about it because the people who have survived don't talk about it because they don't use it; it hasn't been used since Prohibition. This still was basically a wooden column with two chambers or three chambers that feed into each other. It works like a pot still, not a column still. It doesn't rectify to the highest purity. It does double or triple distillation in one box basically. And they are usually made out of wood, out of cedar wood or poplar wood. Particularly poplar.

I'd heard of distillation on the log, which is something that old timers in the bourbon industry would talk about but you never got any of the details of the dominant methods of making rye whiskey. Bourbon was made differently. The bourbon industry is now in charge so they make rye according to bourbon standards. That's fine; they make great whiskey. But it's different than what it was. The more you dig into this stuff the more you realize this was the case with other spirits, too. Over the 20th century they became very streamlined and I think in the 21st century, personally, I'd like to see them un-streamlined again.

Like, looking through production, similar sources, you find that rum was made very differently. Rum was made on sugar plantations and they used the skimmings as you boiled down sugar juice to make molasses out of it—to make sugar out of it rather—to crystallize the sugar. You start off with just sugar cane juice and you keep skimming whatever comes up to the top. They used the skimmings, along with molasses and along with dunder, which is the leftovers once you've distilled off the alcohol. Those skimmings no one uses anymore. Skimmings was actually the part that made rum, as opposed to a molasses spirit. People used to make a distinction. New England rum, because we didn't have sugarcane, was always made just from molasses and maybe some dunder. New England rum was always considered crap. All we have in the world now is New England rum because none of the rum producers make sugar anymore.

So, its stuff like that you find out that just really sort of changes how you look at it. That's what I want to bring out in the Oxford book to show some of the richness of these traditions and how they have kind of been pruned because I know that there are people who will make this stuff now.

Farrell: I'm sorry—will or won't?

03-00:45:51
Wondrich: I know that there are people who will make this stuff. I know that if I do the job right it will inspire people to try this stuff.

Farrell: I know that you've worked with a few different brands in developing spirits. How much does this play into that?

03-00:46:05
Wondrich: Oh, greatly.

Farrell: And then when you bring up the historical point of view and how things used to be done, how receptive are they to that?

03-00:46:12

Wondrich: Well, that's actually a good question because it's sort of an odd activity. It started in 2008 when my friend Toby Cecchini, who's a wonderful bartender and writer and all around character, was touring eau de vie distilleries in Oregon. He goes to this place, Ransom, in the Willamette River Valley, and talks to the guy in charge, Tad Seestedt. For some reason my name comes up and Tad goes, "Wait a minute, I know that guy." It turns out that Tad and I were old friends and were temps together, paralegal temps, when I was grad school. Then the Gulf War happened and he was in the Army Reserve and he got mobilized and sent for training in case it went on longer. He got called to Fort Knox where he was a tank commander. I went into grad school deeper and we kind of lost touch. Grad school can kind of be like a hermetic experience. We lost touch and he had meanwhile gone to Europe after a while and taken up wine making. He moved to Oregon and bought a small winery, and also started distilling there. He turned out to be a very talented distiller.

He got in touch and sent me some of his stuff and I was blown away by great his eau de vies were; they were just perfectly distilled and perfectly cut, as opposed to some other American distilled things that I had not been so impressed with. He was the first guy that I said, "Wow, this guy really knows how to do this." He says, "I'd like to do a gin." I told him, "Don't do a London dry gin because you're be competing with Tanqueray and you can't beat Tanqueray or Beefeater, you know. Do an Old Tom Gin." I had just come out with Imbibe! and there was no Old Tom gin and it was an earlier English style, not very clearly defined, but I had some information on the botanicals that were used and how it was treated and he said, "Okay."

He took most of my advice, not all, which is the great thing about Tad—he's got his own opinions. He came up with this stuff, Ransom Old Tom gin. It's pinkish and dark because he ages it in wine barrels. Gin used to be aged in wine barrels. Maybe not quite as active barrels as his, but it gives it a very attractive color and it's a very fine gin. It kind of caught on, in a small way. It's not a mass-market product and never will be. He has four employees, including himself. But nonetheless, all the new cocktail bars will all have a bottle of the Old Tom. But, he's an old friend of mine and I'm not going to take money from him and also, I'm a journalist and I don't want to have a commercial stake in any of these things because I don't want somebody to have to say to me, "You know, you're not promoting this. You have to be doing this." I don't like people telling me what to do. If they're not paying me they can't be telling me what to do. So it's really kind of simple.

As a result other people asked me from time to time on historical help on projects. But I only really do it for my friends; I don't want to do it for anybody else. I'll do a one-off consultation and I'll charge money for that, but I'm not going to put my name on it or be a part of long-term process; I'll write them a historical report or something like that. Some companies I'm happy to work with continually on that basis—they'll pay me and I'll do something. Others I don't want to work for and I don't want to get into the details of whom I don't want to work for, but in general I try to keep it really just working for my friends and helping them out. So I've done a number of similar products. Some people I've advised, maybe not to the same degree of deep product development. Eric Seed, a wonderful importer, I talked him into bringing in a Batavia Arrak, an Indonesian product via the Netherlands that hasn't been seen since Prohibition. So there's a brand available now that he's really not making any money on so he's still doing me a kindness in having it. But I also helped him bring in a punch rum, a Jamaican rum—this stuff Smith and Cross—which is broadly popular in cocktail bars and is just an ass-kicker; it's a really great navy strength—actually it's stronger than navy strength—rum. And that was great and very helpful for me.

I tend to look at these projects selfishly: what do I want to make drinks with and how can I get that? I'm still working on a fully aged peach brandy but people are doing that and it will get there. Then a few years ago I started working with my friend Alexandre Gabriel of Pierre Ferrand Cognac, who is an absolute genius and a maniac of incredible proportions. I get these phone calls and it's midnight in Cognac and he's on the phone and we'll talk for forty-five minutes on some historical note about something. He's a wonderful producer and a real maverick in Cognac, which tends to be very traditional, but traditional in modern tradition. His knowledge goes back to 18th century and 19th century techniques and he knows all these. With him, I helped him some on bringing back a 19th century style higher proof cognac that he did. I went over to Cognac and we tasted forty vintage cognacs that he had collected, like antique bottles, and the one we all agreed was the best was the one from 1840. With the wonders of blending, he was able to exactly capture—this was a pre-phylloxera cognac—and tasted side by side they are practically identical, which is amazing. Then we did an orange curaçao that's quite popular. We've got some other things in the works, which I'm not going to talk about right now, so there's other cool stuff coming.

I've only done ultimately a small number of these things but it's always been something historical and weird that I want to see. My latest one is called the Chief Gowanus. I've got my office here on the Gowanus and I've been living near the Gowanus Canal now for most of my adult life and I've always found it rather amusing just because

it's this toxic waste channel that runs through some of the best residential real estate in New York. It's sort of Brooklyn keeping it real. My friend Allen Katz runs New York Distilling Company and I came to him and said, "You know, I've got this old recipe for how to make a resemblance of Holland gin out of rye whiskey from 1809 in an old Philadelphia distilling book, or Pennsylvania distilling book." He had a lot of raw rye whiskey that he's been aging but he said, "Well, I can do that. Let's do it." We did some research on what kind of hops they were using and went over to Brooklyn Brewery and talked to Garrett Oliver. We figured out quantities and so on and so forth. We ran it through and put it in a barrel. It's three months old and a little on the rowdy side, I will say that. It's not the smoothest of all products but it tastes good in a punch and it's very cool. It's pretty much exactly like what they would have been doing in Pennsylvania two hundred years ago to try to copy this Dutch gin.

Farrell: At what point did you start engaging in this work?

03-00:54:32
Wondrich: It was really after Imbibe! came out. It turned out to be fun. It doesn't take me a lot of time but it's something that I think is fun for me and the products that come out were fun for similarly historically obsessed bartenders. You can make drinks that you couldn't make before because you just didn't have the ingredients. That's really what it is about. It's filling in the gaps. None of these products are going to be million sellers or massively popular because they are all a little on the odd side. But on the other hand most are quite good, they are well made, and they are fun to play with and that's really what it's all about, is fun, ultimately.

Farrell: This is a good point to change the tapes.

03-00:55:24
Wondrich: Okay, great.

[Begin Audio File 4]

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell back with David Wondrich on Friday, May 2 and this is tape number four, session number two. When we just left off we were talking about micro-distilling and the explosion of that and the historical significance of that. Can you talk you talk a little bit about how the historical significance of the ways in which these things are distilled manifests in marketing or how that is showing up in bars?

04-00:00:35
Wondrich: Oh, absolutely. I mean, even before we get into that, just quickly—the 20th century is usually what we look back on that as being the norm for everything, and it wasn't. The 20th century was an extraordinary time

of streamlining and condensing and that's not actually how things were before that, ever and I don't think that's how things are going to be again. There used to be hundreds of distillers in America, small, medium and huge. The niche ones did their niche products, the big ones did mass market products and they all seemed to get along. The 20th century saw the niche ones get killed. Gone. Those products, the ones that survived were pulled into these big distilleries, homogenized, and put back out again. And you know, a lot of the products are still good and they had a lot of technical knowledge. Things might have been much better made, but they were homogenous.

We're going back to that model where things are not so homogenous. There are going to be growing pains, which we have, and that's one of the things you see with these distilleries. Gin, people are having a hell of time nailing that one. There are all of these new gins out, most of which taste absolutely awful. Whiskey is under-aged, not ready for drinking but on the market. That's going to go away in the next couple of years; there is going to be a shakeout that people will either learn to do it or fail. The people who learn to do it, suddenly there is going be dozens and dozens of distilleries making good products. Aged whiskies—beautiful complex things. There is going to be a lot of stuff like that.

My friend Tad at Ransom right now, another product that I helped him with, is this stuff The Emerald; it's based on mash bill that I came across in an Irish revenue manual from the 1860s saying the typical amounts of—typical amounts of grain that go into whiskey and they included rye and oats in the mash bills. Ireland doesn't use rye and oats anymore in their big pot stills, in their kind of prestige whiskies. So I did more research and found out that they used them until the 1950s, for instance. So he tried that formula and sat on it for four years. It's finally come out and it's beautiful. That's the kind of thing we're going to more of.

Allen Katz at New York Distilling—that rye whiskey that he had lying around that we did such violence to, he's been aging that and it's coming on four years. That's spectacular. It's fully aged and strong, like very pungent and flavorful stuff. So we're seeing that.

It turns out with these historical products, that gives a huge marketing advantage rather than making something up. You can say, "Look, here is something that people always liked and we're doing our best to make it again." It gives you cover for what you're doing. That's not to say that innovation can't be great too. Some of these companies are trying to come up with completely new products and sometimes that comes out great but often times it's hard to sell because people don't know what to make of it. What do you do with this thing? How does

this work? It's easier if you can put on a historical source. However, it has to be an accurate one; that's the problem. In the information age if it's not accurate people will find out.

One of the biggest liquor companies in the world—Bacardi—is having problems with this in their white rum right now. Their white rum is the biggest selling rum in the world—maybe tied with Captain Morgan's these days—but sometime in the 1960s they cleaned it up quite a bit and made it much lighter and much more neutral. This was the time that vodka was just killing everything else in sales and they were like, "Okay, we can bring ours in line with that." Now, people are less interested in that and they can't back down; they can't climb back down the tree. They got themselves up and there because they've said, "This is exactly how we've always made this stuff," which is patently untrue. You can try earlier bottlings—they still exist. I've had bottlings from the 50s, 40s, 30s, 20s, 10s and even in the 50s it was a much heavier product. In the 1920s it was this rich, creamy grassy intense, like heady flavorful stuff; it was wonderful. In the 1930s it was the same. In the 1950s they started lightening it up some. But if they hadn't insisted so strongly that they hadn't changed a thing they'd have a much easier time reclaiming this legacy. As it is now they've abandoned the field of white rum that they pioneered to other people who are making rich, more flavorful rum who are right now not getting the sales, but the cachet. So you really have to sort of be in touch with your history. You always have to, I think, keep a path back to it. Even if you change something I think you have to know how to go back because things meander. Trends come and go. But if it's an honest historical product or product that is in touch with its roots—single malt scotch is a great example—that's why people buy them. They are delicious. Other things are delicious too, but they are also buying this idea of Scottish handcraftsmanship and this time immemorial.

Of course, in the 19th century this stuff was never aged more than twelve years, usually a good deal less than that. It was always bottled at a higher proof and so it was a little bit different, but not that much different. There were older whiskies and they did kind of taste like the ones we have now. I've tasted old scotch and it's like, "Okay, that's scotch. That's not radically different." Cognac, there are differences, yes, but there is a great deal of tradition there too and that's works as well. So if you can keep one hand on that tradition I think it's very valuable because it gives you an anchor as the market keeps shifting. That's something that people will never hate, you know? You might lose some of them and you might seem old fashioned, but there will always be a portion of the market that will like that. If you completely cut loose you can really cave in. Canadian whiskey sales plummeted because they really staked everything on these very light blends that

were not what the whiskey traditionally was and then people wanted heavy whiskies. What do they do? They can't really go back. So I guess that's there.

Farrell: So there is a big, in cocktail culture right now and I think in craft distilling or micro-distilling, there is this return to artisanal culture. How do you think that your books have played into that or influenced that at all?

04-00:08:30

Wondrich: Well, I mean if you were drawing up sides I'd be on that side, put it that way. I'm sort of an uncomfortable participant sometimes because of the silliness that goes into it. I'm not a big believer in wearing sleeve garters and suspenders and hats, you know. I'm a 21st century person and I'm fine with that. The dress up thing is more appropriate for people in their twenties who are trying to establish an identity. I already have an identity and I'm stuck with it, whatever it is. That part I'm not so interested in and the typography and all the resurrection stuff. For me, this stuff is as vital now as it ever was and it doesn't need to be dressed up. So that kind of puts me a little off to the side, but at the same time it's definitely my people and if push comes to shove I will back them up.

Also, my approach to this was influenced by in some ways getting my start through Slow Food here and the movement. I appreciate their goals. I think the world is splitting up into slow food and fast food worlds and their critique is not wrong. While I don't hate the fast food parts entirely, I really love the slow foods parts, traditionally the human elements that it involves and this idea of community rather than online. It's like the online versus the human. I like to see people in person. I prefer socializing to social media. That's sort of, if you're going to split these people into two camps. Of course you can't split them up because they are so intertwined but nonetheless if you could try I'll end up on the artisanal side. A lot of these people are maybe not the artisans that they call themselves. At the same time I just said in my column in *Esquire* if you told Tom Nichol, the guy who has been making Tanqueray forever, that he isn't making a craft product he'd punch you in the nuts. He would, too. He's an irascible Scotsman who is very amusing.

One of my issues with the artisanal is people use it to as a "couch hold" to beat anything that's made on a large scale and that is widely marketed. There is artisanship and craft in major products as well as in small ones. There is also sloppiness and inattention and commercial calculation in micro-distilling too. So, that sanctimony in general doesn't work for me and I think you need to take a more balanced view. I'll use a product like The Glenlivet, the biggest selling scotch in

America: absolutely beautiful stuff. You taste it, it's subtle. They don't say, "Here's a bunch of peat to bring in the scotch geeks." It tastes the same as long as I've known it and made on a much larger scale now but still carefully aged. Jameson Irish Whiskey is another one. Very light. I mean, not my maybe my favorite of the Irish whiskies but it's five to seven years old as opposed to two to three years old, which is its competition. Impeccably made, smooth as velvet and cream and yet available everywhere. I've seen where they make it and I know how they make it and rather than lower the proof or speed the aging, they built more warehouses. You know? That's what they do. They just bought more barrels and put it in more barrels. That's how they increased their production. So you know, it is possible to do that on a large scale and to have the same pride in what you do. That's what I think it comes down to—having pride in what you do.

Farrell: So you've also guest bartended in a number of places. Where was the first place that you guest bartended and can you tell me a little bit about your experience?

04-00:12:57

Wondrich: By guest bartending, I don't know how to run a cash register—I mean don't know how to run credit cards, I can actually run a cash register now. But you know, I come in as sort of a celebrity and I'll make a limited list of drinks, though it depends on the bar. These days I'll do maybe one bar shift a year because it's hard work. It's really hard work. But I really like to do it and I'll do it for events and make drinks like crazy.

I started doing that probably—Audrey Saunders had me do something here for Taste of the Nation many years ago. That was probably in 2005, something like that, and that was the first time I was confident in myself enough to mix drinks for the public. I realized that this was actually fun and as a writer, it's so much more fun than writing. It comes closer to the musician. I'm in the moment, I'm doing this now, I'm not thinking and worrying, I'm just doing it. You have to be fast and I try to be as fast as possible. I know as a non-professional bartender I'm kind of on trial when I'm back there. The last thing I want to do is be slow and awkward and fumble around and have the other bartenders back there pick up my slack and do most of my drinks. So I'll really make an effort to work fast and bang the drinks out and deal with the public and talk to everybody and just be a bartender about it.

I was thrilled last year Gary Regan gave me one of his Gazzer Awards, which he only gives to bartenders; I'm the only non-bartender to ever get one. I was really honored by that and I think it's because when I do it I really make an effort to be bartenderly about it and not just blow it

off. I think it's a responsibility—if you're back there everybody better get a good drink and they better get one on time. You know, they are customers there. And if there are customers there I will do the work.

Farrell: Was there a learning curve at all?

04-00:15:18
Wondrich: Oh yeah. Oh, it's a hard job. It's crazy, you know? If you're making complex drinks in a crowded bar, that's a very hard job. You have to basically be an on-the-fly systems engineer. You have to know, "Okay, I've got these five orders and I know in three minutes these things have to be on the bar." And you need to do everything in between in the proper order and every order is different so you have to keep re-engineering. It's like short order cooking expect you have to talk to the customers also. It's really hard. It looks much easier than it really is. You see like the Tom Cruise throwing bottles around, but that's the easy part. The hard part is banging out the drinks for a lot of people while not being an asshole about it. I always find that if I'm really slammed I get a little grumpy and I hate that and I try not to be. But you know, that's my fault and I'm conscious about it. I always have to check myself and say, "Don't be grumpy. You asked for this. Be nice to the people."

Farrell: Have you ever received—because you're so well-respected in the field—have you ever received any pushback for never having been a bartender by other bartenders?

04-00:16:34
Wondrich: Oh yeah. Mostly from ones that don't know me. It's like, "Who the hell is this asshole? He doesn't know what he's doing, he's not a bartender; he's an English professor." But what is gratifying is when that happens I see people jumping to my defense, which is really, really gratifying. You know, I never claimed to be master bartender but I always looked at myself as part of the bartender support network. I'm like the historical wing that helps them do what they do. Every once in a while I will jump in and make people drinks because people ask me to, but I don't think that makes me like a bartender, you know? Unless I'm your bartender for tonight and then I better damn well be a bartender as much as possible.

Farrell: Do you have a favorite bar at which to guest bartend?

04-00:17:36
Wondrich: The last full shift I pulled was at Tooker Alley here in Brooklyn, run by Del Pedro, my friend since the 90s—he was one of the real pioneers in making retro cocktails—we did Mardi Gras there and we had a list of six New Orleans drinks. The place was absolutely packed. We gave everyone a string of Mardi Gras beads and we were making Ramos

Fizzes from scratch, which is a very complicated drink. It takes time. We said, “Alright, we’re going to do this, because really we asked for it. This is going to be a pain in the neck but we’re going to make them from scratch, like we should, and not bitch about it.” And we did. We didn’t bitch about it. People ordered them and everyone was reluctant. They said, “I know this is a complicated drink but I’d really love a Ramos,” and with a smile we made a Ramos. We cracked the eggs and did the whole thing. If you’re going to do it, you should it—you should do it because you want to do it. You don’t want to be forced into that. And that was really fun—Del and I had a blast. Kenta Goto, the head bartender of Pegu Club and is a friend of Del’s, came in and was watching me tend bar. It was like, “The shoe is on the other foot here,” because that guy is a master and fast as hell. So I got to make him some drinks and that was thrilling for me. I always like having the shoe on the other foot because it’s a challenge and as lazy as I am, often, I do like a challenge sometimes.

Farrell: And I’m sure informs your writing, as well.

04-00:19:18
Wondrich: Yeah, I get more sympathetic, I think. I’m less likely to beat up on ignorant bartenders and things like that. I don’t cause scenes in bars and I don’t counsel people to do that. Yeah, I know the challenges that the job has, at least that. I mean, I don’t know them long-term from having to go work five shifts a week and ten hours on your feet, but at least I can appreciate the general difficulty of the job.

Farrell: So you also made an appearance on “The Colbert Report.”

04-00:19:56
Wondrich: Oh, I did.

Farrell: And you made a special drink—the Colbert Bump?

04-00:19:59
Wondrich: Yeah, they called me up and asked for the Colbert Bump.

Farrell: Can you tell me about that experience?

04-00:20:04
Wondrich: Oh, it was fun as hell. I’d been on the Conan O’Brien show before. That was during the writer’s strike so they gave me eight minutes. I made Blue Blazers and was cracking eggs and separating the whites; I did everything complicated I could think of. I don’t know why, I was an idiot for that but it all worked out okay. He was like dealing with a hyperactive eight year old, so I was like, “Okay, ‘Colbert.’ This is going to be a pain in the neck,” but it wasn’t. He was extremely pleasant and funny and got in a good zinger. But you know, I managed

to hold my own mostly and he was respectful and I made him three drinks. The Colbert Bump was basically a simple version of a Singapore Sling but was tasty and looked good, which is what they asked for. It worked out fine. It was very fine. Off camera he was as pleasant a person as I've ever met and on camera he was funny. Very smart man.

Farrell: After you went on the show did things change at all?

04-00:21:20
Wondrich: No, not really. I did get the Colbert bump on book sales, though.

Farrell: That's what I meant.

04-00:21:24
Wondrich: Oh yeah, my book sales shot right up. Things were looking up! It was like suddenly everyone was buying Imbibe! and that was funny, as he and his producers had promised. If you go on "Colbert" you get the bump and I got the bump.

Farrell: Speaking of writing and your career, as you still have your hands in all of these projects—BAR and BarSmarts and developing new spirits—you're still writing.

04-00:21:57
Wondrich: Oh yeah.

Farrell: Can you tell me about—well, the Oxford Companion is something that you're working on now, but can you talk about some of your other projects?

04-00:22:03
Wondrich: Yeah. I'm also doing a second edition of Imbibe! because of all of those spirits and all of the other historical stuff I've dug up since. I've found all kinds of stuff about Jerry Thomas so I'm doing that. That needs to come out because I've been wanting to do it for a number of years and things have changed. I want the book to stay as current for its use as a textbook for bartenders. I don't want it to be an artifact of ten years ago.

So there's that. That's a small project, but nonetheless I'm in the middle of it. The Oxford thing, huge job. Monthly column for *Esquire*. You know every month something different. That's a very hard column to write, mostly because I've been doing it as a monthly thing for over ten years. So there is that. It's also difficult because space is limited. *Esquire* doesn't want things too geeky but they also want things intelligent and informative. It's sort of like writing poetry—I have to write each word very carefully. It's takes a long time to write

that column and I have to really dig into it. Then I do a column for the *Whiskey Advocate* on whiskey cocktails, which is just fun. I get to choose a cocktail and my editor there, Lew Bryson, is a sweet and lovely guy and he lets me do more or less what I want, which is great. They even indulged me last year to the point of letting me do one of my columns in heroic couplets in iambic pentameter. Boy, did I have to argue with them for that but Lew stuck up for me. It came out and I was just thrilled; I'd been wanting to do that forever just because I could.

It's funny—it goes back to when I was in graduate school and when I was studying poetry, I sat down to write some epic poetry, because that's what I was studying, and I always believed that if you want to understand something you should know how to do it. The same with the bartending and music and all that stuff. You don't have to be a genius at it, but you have to know what the challenges are and what the pitfalls are and what the process is. It helps greatly with understanding how these things work. I'd done like a parodic sort of epic poem in iambic pentameter in like three cantos back when I was in grad school as a learning exercise. I'd written Latin verse and stuff like that as the same thing—if I'm going to write about it I need to know how to do it. I always enjoyed doing that; it's a really fun challenge and very difficult. I'm definitely not a poet but it's still fun to do. So I really enjoyed doing that — doing the drinks column in that. That was just a goof, basically, and very nostalgic of my grad school days. So that's fun—that's a fun magazine.

I do things for other magazines occasionally. I've been sloping off because of big projects. Until recently I was the cocktail columnist at *Imbibe Magazine*. I've written for a stack of magazines. I've written for *Oprah, Marie Claire* once in a while because they are a sister publication to *Esquire* and every once in a while they'll ask for a cocktail piece and I'll do something for them. *Wall Street Journal* I've done book reviews for. The list goes on.

Farrell: What are some of the challenges in keeping the *Esquire* column interesting to you?

04-00:25:58

Wondrich: That's a good question. Well, the same topics keep coming up around and around over the years and I have to kind of find different ways of approaching it, which so far I've been pretty good at. Every once in a while I'll look back on old columns and I'll go, "Wait, I said that there and I said that there two years earlier." But two years is a long time in magazines, you know, and people aren't really tracking it. If they were tracking it I'd be in trouble. I don't repeat myself all that much.

But just coming up with a topic every month is hard after a while. That's twelve topics a year. And then plus there is "Best Bars," which is a big package we do every year. We just put that one to bed the other day for this year and that's my baby. It's a hell of a project. That involves my travel all around the country every year. I'm always nipping out to go to a bar somewhere and check it out because Esquire really doesn't have a travel budget to send me all over the country, nor do I have time to do that on its own so I have to work that in. At the end of the year I pull together all of those bars and try to write them up and have some larger essays on the significance of it all.

Farrell: When you're traveling and you go to those bars, how do you learn about the bars? Is it word of mouth?

04-00:27:27

Wondrich: Yeah, it's word of mouth. I'll also look up what the local press says. I don't want to miss things and those are sometimes useful. It's mostly word of mouth. I also try to go to the oldest bar in every city, whatever it is. That one is usually worthwhile, almost always. It's a bunch of different stuff. I'll ask my bartender friends where do they like to go, what's a great dive. The cocktail bars are easy but it's the older bars that are hard to sort out. Those are the ones that I like to write about; the cocktail bars are kind of all the same, in a good way, as we were discussing. But nonetheless, they are in a pretty narrow range but these older ones sometimes are just nuts.

Farrell: You had also started an online website or blog called "Drunkistan" with your wife?

04-00:28:14

Wondrich: Oh yeah. I started that and it turned out that I didn't have time to do anything with it. We started a tee shirt business with my brother-in-law in San Francisco and we were going to do old images from my collection on tee shirts. It turns out there is some demand for it but not as much as we thought. It was taking a lot of time so we kind of let it expire on its own once we ran out of tee shirts. "Drunkistan" was attached to that.

Farrell: And your wife Karen had helped you with "Drunkistan," right?

04-00:28:43

Wondrich: Right, exactly.

Farrell: What's her role been in the cocktail writing?

04-00:28:49

Wondrich: Well, Karen is A. my best critic and she also has a very good palate for developing drinks and testing drinks. Also, we still like going to bars;

we like our pre-prandial cocktail. Karen mostly does that. She helps out a little with the travel but she's got her own stuff keeping her busy. There's a lot of family stuff that keeps her busy as well. She's not like my assistant or anything like that. She's got her own stuff to do, but nonetheless I always trust her opinion more than anybody's.

Farrell: As your career has developed, and your reputation as well, what are some of the challenges that you've faced in maintaining that?

04-00:29:52

Wondrich: Well, A. not taking myself too seriously; that's really important. I've seen people get a lot of acclaim and then suddenly they are master this and so-and-so that and they become pretty insufferable and I don't want to do that. So that's definitely something. Also just keeping it fresh, keeping up without following trends necessarily. I'm not going to go out and buy a roto-vap—a roto-evaporator—because all my friends have one. I don't really want to spend $10,000 just to distill essences. There are all these trends that kind of come rolling through and I have to know about them without necessarily participating in them.

There are other challenges. There is making sure that I get credit for stuff that I deserve credit for because I need that to keep working, you know? So there is all kinds of plagiarism and stuff like that and you have to sort of keep an eye on that and see where that's coming from and see if that's going to be problem and figure out what to do about that, not that there is much you can do about it. But you know, that's part of being up on top of a profession, you have to sort of make sure that there aren't potential problems down the line. Some people are pretty unscrupulous in all professions. That's a minor thing, but nonetheless that is something that people don't usually talk about and you have to be aware of.

There a lot of stuff, like general getting stuff done, that I have trouble with because I'm so busy. Email: I never answer my email and I always feel badly about it. It takes weeks unless it's urgent. And juggling different things. The problem for me is that I'm a freelance writer and I have to hustle and I've got a lot of different projects, as we've discussed, and they are always intersecting with each other. There are always a million things that need to be done now and some of them will end up being done later and some of them will end up not being done at all. There is nothing I can really do about that other than hire a lot of people, which I can't afford to do. So there is stuff like that.

So those are the challenges, but the challenges are the challenges. It's still a great job and it beats being a professor. I think about that every

day. You know, I think about if I were an English professor, I always think about the conferences that I used to go to when I was a junior English professor. There was one, the American Renaissance Association, I think. It was held in a motel on the outskirts of College Park, Maryland. It was so fucking miserable, oh my god. These people hated each other for one thing. Everybody was sniping at each other and putting each other down and damning each other with faint praise. That was another part of it. I was a junior professor and I didn't have publications and nobody was nice to me. Nobody talked to me. I knew a couple of people but that was it and that was like, "Wow, you people are real assholes at this thing." There was a cash bar, right, at the reception. [Laughs] Everything was just so chintzy and low-level. I had to pay my own travel expenses to go to this damn thing just be miserable for a weekend in this crappy motel outside of College Park, Maryland.

A couple months after I started writing for *Esquire* and started writing the "Drink of the Week" the Distilled Spirits Council got in touch with me through *Esquire* and took me down to Washington, D.C. to witness the groundbreaking for their rediscovery of George Washington's distillery. That was my first press trip and I was like, "Wow, I got flown down here, they treated me nice, they gave me drinks, and everybody was pleasant. This is different." I was still an academic at the time. Then the next one I went to Scotland and everybody was great. I'm at Glenlivet and then I was in Ireland and Trinidad and suddenly I'm traveling.

My dad traveled around his whole life. Not only was he a university president, but he did a lot of engineering education and professional stuff with the American Society of Engineers and consulting stuff with foreign governments on technology development and technical education and stuff like that. I mean, he was an inveterate world traveler. He died in 2011 at age almost eighty-four. He had just gotten back from China. He never stopped working. He'd been all over the world. That was definitely a pain when I was a kid but on the other hand it was also I thought was kind of cool. I get to do that now. In 2011, that same year, I was abroad sixteen times—I went to Cuba, I went to Kyrgyzstan, I went to China, I went to Chile, I went all over the place. That's kind of amazing, I have to say—I get to go to Australia, New Zealand, I was just in Brazil, I was in Argentina last year—especially thinking back on being a junior professor. So you know, the challenges I have are challenges but they are nothing compared to what I got in return. That I have to say is incredibly fortunate; this was like a weird and happy accident that I fell into this work.

Farrell: You also do a lot of cocktail seminars and I know you've done those at Tales of the Cocktail. How do you draw on your time as a professor in doing those?

04-00:36:16

Wondrich: Well, actually at this point I think I'm a pretty good public speaker, but not a media trained public speaker. That goes back to my days as a professor. When I started teaching I was so nervous I thought that I was going to die. That's when I first grew a beard, as a matter of fact. I was twenty-nine or thirty and I felt like I was way too young to be doing this so I grew a beard to look older. When I quit being a professor I grew it longer because nobody could tell me what to do. But after the first couple of semesters of teaching you realize that there is no worst that could happen. So you run out of things to say. You talk about something else, you know?

It's the same as being a musician—I used to have horrible stage fright until after a certain point. I'd get a little nervous before I started but I knew it would take care of itself; I knew things would be fine. I made all of the mistakes that I could make and nobody shot me, nobody laughed at me. I learned the same as a professor. After all of those years of teaching Shakespeare at eight in the morning and I'd show up and start rambling with no idea of what I was going to talk about and by the end of the talk we'd have a good discussion going. So I learned it doesn't matter—I could talk to ten thousand people or two people, it's all the same and it's not a problem. I've addressed some pretty large crowds and it's fine. I know it's going to fine; I just talk to people. I try to write and my philosophy is "talk like you are talking to your intelligent friend. Don't make yourself seem smarter than you are or more erudite but at the same time don't dumb it down either."

That's what I try to do with my seminars. I've been going to Tales of the Cocktail since the second one. Dale was at the first one and it was about twenty people. I've missed one other one, the [Hurricane] Katrina year, because I was in Scotland with my family, which was well worth missing Tales of the Cocktail for, but I've been to every other one and one in Argentina. It's always crazy. Last year and the year before were real peaks of insanity for me; I had eleven speaking engagements each time in like four days. That's a lot. This year I'm doing less. But I always have a big history seminar that I do each year with Jeff Berry, one of my dear friends and somebody I have boundless admiration for. One of the few people who really gives a shit about history and bothers to research it right and doesn't jump to conclusions and etcetera, etcetera. He's a really good historian. Every year we switch off who gets to pick the topic; we've been doing this for about four years now, five years now. This year it's his turn and we're doing the Floridita in Cuba. I'm also doing something on

women behind bars and it turns out that there were five different seminars purposed on that topic, I think, or four different ones. They chose mine, which was flattering but nice. I've got Julie Reiner and Pamela Wiznitzer with me.

As I'm researching individual drinks or other topics I come across other things and I put those in files because you never know. I save those articles. A couple of years ago they wanted to do a tribute to Tom Bullock, the first black guy to write a bartending book, at Tales. They wanted me to give a toast so I went into my file on black bartenders, which I had. I picked out all of these figures that nobody has ever heard of that I just stumbled across when I was researching other things. I gave this long toast on that and talked about them. That led last year in D.C., through the aegis of Derek Brown, the Dean of Bartenders in D.C., and Duane Sylvester, a wonderful bartender, Trinidadian, we put together a tribute to black bartenders in D.C. because that was the city that had the biggest concentration and they had this thing, in 1900, the Black Mixologist Club, and that was really cool. So we did a tribute to the Black Mixologist Club with black bartenders and white bartenders together. The people who came were a mixture of cocktail geeks and movers and shakers in the black community there. We had the reigning go-go band playing, Chuck Brown's band. Chuck Brown is no longer with us but his band definitely carries on. You've got all of the cocktail geeks dancing to go-go and you've got all of the black movers and shakers drinking craft cocktails and it was a fabulous success with two communities that don't often intersect. It's not like, I don't think, the craft cocktail community is overtly racist it's just not really reaching out that much. The black community is a natural constituency because they were a big part of the sporting life that drank cocktails, always. A big part of black culture is nightlife. So this was kind of great to see them come together and that was really fun, I have to say.

So I do this research and it leads to things like that if I'm lucky. I'll talk about stuff and that leads to projects. Like I talked about orange curaçao and its history at the Manhattan Cocktail Classic and that led to the Pierre Ferrand Orange Curaçao. I try to, if it's something I know about, I try to do things with it, so these speeches are always an opportunity to do a little research and come up with something new.

Farrell: What are some of your dream projects?

04-00:42:30

Wondrich: I'd like to open a bar, but I would have to own the building because there is no way to really make long-term money with a bar unless you own the building. And also I'd like to be able to sell it. If I owned the building I could sell the bar so I wouldn't have to be there all of the

time and let somebody else run it. But I'd like to run a small bar in the model of in the 70s, 80s, 90s there was this guy Bruno [Mooshei] in San Francisco who ran the Zam Zam on Haight Street where he only made gin Martinis. That was only drink and if you didn't want a gin Martinis you could get the fuck out of his bar. I've always wanted to do that but with Old Fashioneds. I'll just make Old Fashioneds and there will be like four bottles of whiskey behind the bar. Well rye—excellent rye—well bourbon—excellent bourbon. The peels from the lemons or oranges, the oranges that I'd been peeling to make Old Fashioneds with if I knew you I'd make you a punch, which is the juice from that or the lemon with an Old Fashioned poured into it. And that would be it. That would be the sum total of my drinks. I'd have a piano and a piano player and that would be it. A really small bar, just really cool. Just do that and I'd work behind the bar a couple nights a week, a few nights a week. That's sort of a dream project that will probably never happen because I'm starting to age out of that anyway, but it is still kind of fun.

I'd love to see a real 19th century rum come back, but that might happen though. The kind made with the skimmings and all that. A lot of the dream projects have come to pass, you know? It's funny.

Farrell: Are there any writing projects?

04-00:44:29

Wondrich: Yeah, I was working for a while, I was doing preliminary work on a book about the Sporting Life in American because that was the milieu that both the both the music I was writing about and the drinks that I was writing about came out of. It would be sort of stepping back and writing a thumb sucker about that whole thing and the significance of it all and so on and so forth, but it seems like a lot of work. You never know, I may get to it.

Then there is the option of writing a detective story set in a 19th century bar. I mean, if I really need to make money as a writer that is a better way of doing it than I'm doing now, I'll tell you that much. So that's a possibility down the road, who knows? But beyond that, you know. I mean, I like the bartender as a detective with recipes mixed in. that would be kind of fun. I have a lot of incidental details about life in the 19th century that would come very much in handy for that. Or I could use those details to write a sort of a history of bartending in New York City.

Those are some general ideas, but I'm sort of too busy to even think about them right now or anything beyond the most vague and sort of woolly-headed detail.

Farrell: If you weren't doing this right now, and you weren't a professor, what would you want to do?

04-00:45:54
Wondrich: I would have loved to have been a rock and roll star, I'll tell you that much, because that was just fun. I gave it a good shot. I like traveling. Unfortunately, I'm a very poor financial planner and would have never been able to go on Wall Street to make enough money to travel for the rest of my life, but I would like to have enough money to travel for the rest of my life, basically. I'm pretty restless about that. I like to go out and see things; I'm very curious.

Farrell: What are some of the things that you have kind of taken from being a musician and getting your PhD and being a professor and now being a journalist? I guess, what are some of the big lesson that you've learned or big things that you've taken with you?

04-00:46:50
Wondrich: Give it a try. That's one of the big lessons. Don't be a pussy. If something comes up, go for it. Don't worry about the other people—let them take care of themselves. Just do it. That's really the best lesson that I got. I quit my academic job; that was pretty much impulse—it wasn't impulse, it was a long time coming, but it was a big move and it was a risky move. I went into academia almost similarly. I think you just have to trust that things will be okay and take a jump. Sometimes they don't work out and that happens too. If it fails, it fails. I mean, these are timeworn platitudes, all of them. It's not like Polonius here, but you know, take a change and see what happens—you may be pleasantly surprised. At least you'll never regret it.

When I dropped out of school in a band it put back my education four years, but on the other hand I got to tour the country in a punk band, in a rock and roll band when I was young enough to appreciate it and it was just crazy. And so that's better than if I had gone on to finish my degree and gone on to grad school or whatever else I would have done. I would have missed out on a lot of really great opportunities.

Also, I try to not judge people, which I learned from playing and living in milieus that weren't like the kind of upper middle class milieu that I came from. I run into this with my mom, who comes from that milieu. She's eighty and she is not super willing to see the good in all other people, let's say; I'm being diplomatic here. I try to really genuinely appreciate people from different backgrounds and different experiences. I spent a lot of my life rubbing elbows with them when I wasn't in academia and now I hang out with bartenders a lot and have enormous respect for many of them. Life is just much more fun when

you're willing to let that go and hang out with people as they come. I don't know if that's a lesson you can teach; that's something you learn with experience if you're lucky. Some people tend to harden and hate everybody as they get older and that seems like a really sad thing.

Farrell: What are some of your hopes for the bartending or spirits community in the future?

04-00:49:57

Wondrich: Well, I think they are kind of coming true. What I'd hoped is this great American profession, and part of American culture, would be recognized again at its highest level as a dignified profession. Not a solemn one, but a dignified one. This is dignified labor; this is something that you can do. In the 19th century it was and it wasn't. Among the sporting class it was a dignified profession and one of substance. Other people looked on it and sniped, the kind of respectable class. I'd like it without the sniping. I'd like people to say, "This is fine." A chef these days doesn't get much sniping and I'd like a bartender to have the same status. If you're a master of this craft, and if you've proven that you're a master of this craft, then you should be respected as a master of this craft—as a master of any craft.

This is not an art—I don't think that bartenders are artists, and mixologists. I don't think it rises to that pretentious level. Some people try to make it that and that's where you run into trouble. Somebody who can work with their hands and execute things and do things to a high level of skill I think deserves respect. I think we're getting that, too, because of the way the modern world has gone. In the 1950s the idea was that everybody was going to go to college and become a professional, and in the 1960s. And it worked for a while, into the 1970s. Then it stopped working. There are really not enough jobs that need that much professional education. The college degrees got dumbed down more and more because it's basically just a job qualification. Nowadays you get that degree you end up a cubicle worker and you're miserable. There is no corporate loyalty to you; you're a cog that can be replaced. You have no power over your destiny. If you can work with your hands and you can work with one of these crafts, you've got something portable that you can take anywhere. You're in demand, and that's the difference. I look at this versus junior professor—junior professor you're always a supplicant and you're miserable. This, you're not miserable. People need your services; that's the difference. When I started out there weren't a million people seeking out this job, but there were people seeking out the services. Now there are a lot of people seeking out this job; there's a lot of competition. But, what can you do? I think that's sort of an interesting aspect of this is that, like chefs, bartenders have a portable skill that's always within them. It's like education in that it's a skill

that's your own, but unlike education it's actually valued. Education, not so much. Although, most of the best bartenders that I know are quite well educated because there is a cultural aspect to it and that's important too. But by no means all of them; it's not a qualification. Great bartenders comes from all walks of life.

Farrell: Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

04-00:53:38
Wondrich: I think we kind of covered it. [Laughs] We covered a lot of stuff. I'm sounding pretty damn pretentious at this point.

Farrell: No, no! Well, thank you so much, this has been great.

04-00:53:46
Wondrich: Well, thank you. This has been my pleasure. It's been an interesting experience.

End interview.