



An attendee at last year's Science of Cocktails samples a "vaportini"—a cocktail in cloud form. COURTESY/HEATHER SEGALÉ

Extracurricular

The Science of Cocktails

To some, the science of cocktails is calculating how many \$1 margaritas you can chug at happy hour and still be on-time for work the next morning. At the University of California, Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, however, the science of drinking gets a little more clinical.

"We have a bunch of scientists and our graduate students, and the professors that we work with, and the research projects and the other organizations that we work with, and we come up with cocktail ideas that connect to the research in some way," said Heather Segalé, education and outreach director for TERC. "Not always perfectly—sometimes it's a stretch. But, you know, we make it fun."

Now in its fourth year, the Science of Cocktails is an annual fundraising event at the research center—which studies plant and animal marine life and its interactions with humans around Lake Tahoe. The idea is that the cocktails are somehow inspired by research projects taking place at the center, and each drink comes with an explanation of both the drink and the science by the actual research team. One of Segalé's favorite examples is the center's renaming of the Corpse Reviver Number Two—which includes gin, Cointreau and absinthe shaken with lemon juice.

"We're calling it the Daphnia Reviver Number Two, because one of our big research projects is related to bringing back the native zooplankton Daphnia," Segalé said. "They're like a millimeter tall, and they're these cute, chubby little plankton that live in Lake Tahoe. ... So, the scientist that has been leading that research project will be there next to a bartender who's serving this cool drink."

Another example is a selection of drinks made with locally foraged ingredients to showcase their

individual phenolics—chemical compounds that give plants their unique smells, and have been shown to sometimes attract invasive species, like bark beetles, around the lake. Vermont distillery WhistlePig Rye is also donating whiskey for flaming drinks, served with a presentation from the Tahoe Network of Fire Adapted Communities. Segalé said plenty of museums and scientific organizations put on similar events, but the faculty of TERC wanted theirs to be different.

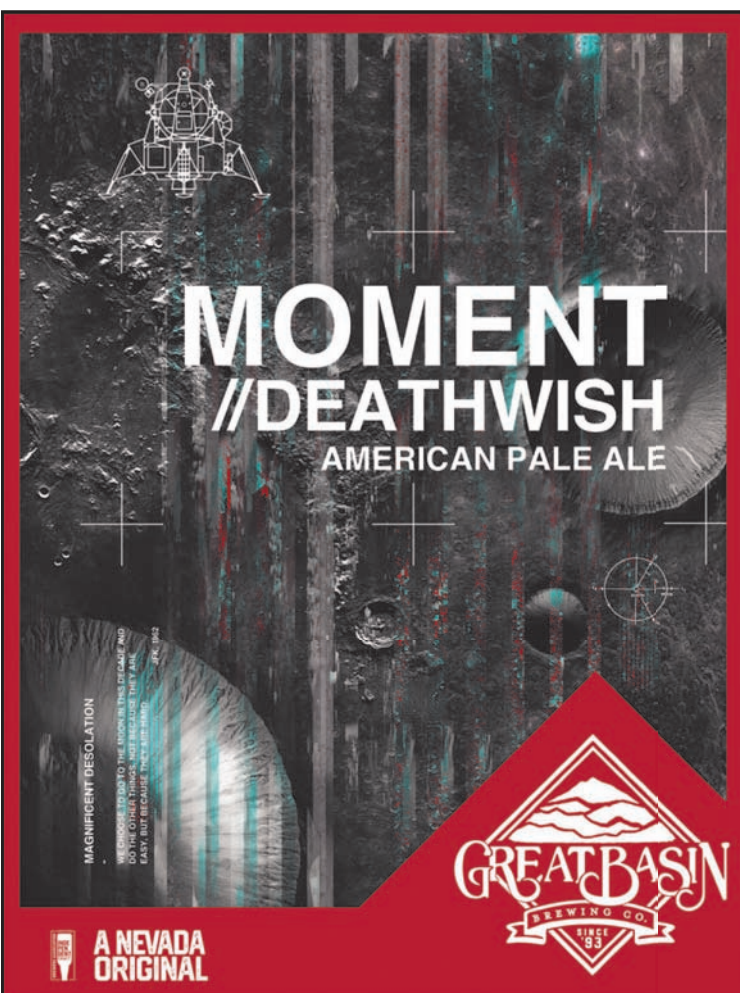
"We wanted our event to be really science-forward," Segalé said. "So, yes, there's cocktails and yes, there's food, and yes, there's kind of like a name or something that connects the cocktail to the science. But the important thing is that we have hands-on science activities and actual scientists with their equipment that they can talk about the research that they're doing so that people can come and learn something new and really try to make it like an educational event as well."

Segalé said there will be approximately 32 different stations at this year's event, and not all of them will serve alcohol. Some will have food or purely interactive exhibits, while others will serve non-alcoholic offerings like punch, mocktails or vaporized cocktails served as wisps of cloud. There will also be Jell-o shots.

"We just joke it's a college throwback," Segalé said.

According to Segalé, the Science of Cocktails gets a lot of support from local breweries, distilleries and vendors, and has sold out the past two years with all funding going toward TERC's research programs. This year's event takes place at the UC Davis Tahoe Science Center in Incline Village, 291 Country Club Drive, on Friday, Jan. 31 from 6 p.m. till 8 p.m. □

Learn more at tahoe.ucdavis.edu/events/science-cocktails.



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