

CHEF'S ROLL

PRESENTATION IS EVERYTHING

FEATURES + OUR CHEFS INDUSTRY + OPPORTUNITIES CHEF'S PLATE JOB BOARD EVENTS



STEVEN TUTTLE

Trained under NYC greats Sam Ross (Milk & Honey/Attaboy) and Phil Ward (Death & Company/Mayahuel), [Steven Tuttle](#) has tucked stints as GM at El Dorado and time behind the bar at Craft & Commerce (when it was named one of the [Top 50 Bars in the US by Food & Wine Magazine](#)) under his belt. Now, as [SCDM](#) Beverage Director he delights San Diegans with his forward-thinking cocktail creations (specifically rum-based tiki beverages) at Little Italy bar-eatery showcase [Kettner Exchange](#), and soon to be opened Pacific Beach tiki-themed speakeasy, [The Grass Skirt](#).

Title: SDCM Beverage Director – Kettner Exchange, FIREHOUSE American Eatery + Lounge, Good Time Poke & The Grass Skirt.

Years in the Industry: 7

Notable Achievements: [Eater San Diego Bartender of the Year 2015](#); [Star of the Bar 2015](#); Cocktail and dinner pairing with [Executive Chef Brian Redzikowski](#) at the [James Beard House](#) and [Outstanding in the Field](#).

Previous Experience: Consortium Holdings (El Dorado, Craft & Commerce).

How did you get into cocktails and what do you most enjoy about your job?

I got into cocktails via my good friend Matthew Stanton (owner of El Dorado), who made me a proper Old Fashioned, and the rest as they say is history. Today I mostly enjoy working with Brian Redzikowski — I've learned so much from and with him about the business side of running a restaurant/bar program, and opening restaurants.

What cocktail would you order from a bartender to suss out their skills and why?
I'd order either an old fashioned, daiquiri, or negroni. These are all three ingredient drinks and should always be well balanced.



Kettner Exchange in San Diego, California. Photo by Jorgensen Photography.

As a well-respected devotee of tiki culture, what can you share with us about the current tiki cocktail revival?

Tiki is such a fun escape from the real world. It's really exciting to see some of the most talented bartenders in the city who understand balance, fresh ingredients, and great spirits take on a fun cocktail culture that can (and has in the past) been butchered pretty easily. It's great to see the city of San Diego embrace it as well. Watching rum drinks become popular again is awesome to see.

Your most recent riff on a rum-based classic at KEX?

The "Carmen Miranda" is a riff off a piña colada. We use Diplomatico Reserva Exclusiva, Cuban style white rum, high proof Jamaican rum, lime, pineapple, coconut syrup, and banana cinnamon syrup. It will be available at The Grass Skirt.

When it comes to naming cocktails what is your general approach?

It is totally all over the place. Either I'll try to relate it to the spirit and region it's from, or just something clever. A lot of people will order drinks purely based off the name, which can be a blessing and a curse.



The Tiki Cross cocktail at Kettner Exchange in San Diego, California.

A perfect/surprising rum or mezcal-based cocktail and food pairing?

A perfect (but honestly, surpassing) food and cocktail pairing was pairing the Tiki Cross (Jamaican rum, white rum, añejo rum, falernum, curaçao, pineapple, lime, orgeat, black walnut bitters, angostura bitters) and Chef Brian's Royal Red Shrimp Garlic Noodles at Kettner Exchange.

The most unique or small-batch rum you've found on your travels?

When I was in Venezuela with Diplomatico Rums, the owners gave us some very good stuff that was unreleased. They recently dropped off a sample of a white rum they'll be putting out very soon when visiting me at Kettner Exchange.... All I can say is it's tremendous. Also, we have a very rare bottle of the Brugal Papá Andres, which costs well over \$1,000 and only 99 were released to the US.

A favorite classic tiki cocktail of yours and what you love most about it?

Probably a Mai Tai: there are so many killer variations and everyone has their own twist, plus the battle over who invented the Mai Tai (Don The Beachcomber vs. Trader Vic's) is great history.



Kettner Exchange in San Diego, California. Photo by Jorgensen Photography.

What can we expect to sip at the soon-to-be-opened Grass Skirt? How was R&D for the menu?

I can sum it up in four words: a lot of rum! We're working on a lot of rum blends and new syrups. Rum is very sweet (it's a byproduct of sugar cane) so blending is really important. If you use the right styles and proofs in your blends, you can balance out the cocktail with your tropical ingredients more easily. We're also going to feature a lot of drinks with other spirits outside of rum. We've got a scotch tiki drink that turned out really well. R&D was A LOT of fun. We spent some time in Chicago (Three Dots and a Dash, [Lost Lake](#)), [Trader Sam's](#) (Anaheim), and [Smuggler's Cove](#) (San Francisco) checking out how they portray tiki. Everyone has a special little something to bring to the table. There are also a lot of great bartenders who don't work at tiki bars but feature something exotic and tropical on their menus that are super fun.



Three bars which recently knocked your socks off?

[Three Dots and a Dash](#) in Chicago, the [Holiday Lounge](#) in New York City, and [Keoki's](#) on Kauai, which my buddy's family owns. You'll get top-notch service and cocktails at each of them, and Kauai is the best place on earth.

And finally, one person from history you'd most like to sit down and have a drink with?

My grandpa, Colonel Robert Tuttle, who passed away when I was younger. He left behind an incredible legacy and did give me a sip of a Budweiser at age two, but I don't think that counts.

For additional details about Kettner Exchange and other restaurants in the SDCM portfolio, please visit sdcm.com for more information. Cocktail photography by [Lyudmila Zotova](#) | Interior photography by [Jorgensen Photography](#).