



Peter Thompson for The New York Times

IN THE MIX Cyrille Pawelko preparing the \$135 Champs-Élysées at Le Passage in Chicago

Hey, Bartender, Can You Break \$1,000?

By DAVID BERNSTEIN

GEOERGE SANTIAGO, a 23-year-old nightclub promoter, wanted to impress Danielle DiCantz, 22, whom he had met at a club, on their first date. So on a recent Thursday night he took her to Reserve, a lounge and dance club that is a favorite of the trend-setting crowd here.

To break the ice, Mr. Santiago ordered a \$350 bottle of Dom Pérignon. After they had swilled the Champagne dry, Mr. Santiago returned to the bar. This time he ordered her an exotic concoction called the Reserve Ruby Red.

Served in a traditional martini glass, the cocktail is made with super-premium Grey Goose L'Orange vodka, Hypnotiq liqueur, orange and pomegranate juices and topped off with Dom Pérignon. The coup de grâce: a one-carat ruby affixed to the stirrer. And the bar tab for a Ruby

Top-shelf cocktails with rare Cognacs and cuvées reach new heights.

Red? An eye-popping \$950.

Was she impressed?

"It was the best 950 bucks I ever spent," Mr. Santiago said. "Let's put it that way."

It wasn't long ago that cocktails broke the \$10 barrier at high-end restaurants and nightclubs in cities like Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles and New York. Now a vodka martini or a basic margarita for \$10 seems like a bargain, as prices have hit double, triple and, believe it or not, quadruple digits (even without glittery gems for garnishes).

Among bartenders, managers and club owners there is a spirited (pun intended) race to concoct the most exotic, most at-

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said. "A lot of it has to do with status, especially out here."

Julie Clark, 28, an options trader from Chicago, celebrated one of her biggest trading windfalls with a \$135 Champs-Élysées cocktail at Le Passage. The Champs-Élysées is made with Remy Martin Louis XIII cognac, Grand Marnier, orange juice and sour mix; it is served in a Bottega del Vino crystal cognac snifter, which the drinker can keep. "I wanted to celebrate," Ms. Clark said. "It was great. I really liked it."