

Behind the Bar with Rona Ferguson

Get to know the woman behind the wine at Bin22.

by Allison Arthur

photos by Jay Nel-McIntosh



It isn't often you'll find someone behind the same bar for more than a decade. Even rarer is someone who's been with the same restaurant group for nearly 17 years. Rona Ferguson, part of the serving and bartending team at Fine Dining Restaurant Group, is the exception. She has worked at Bin22 since it opened 13 years ago and is happy to have found a place that fits her interests and has a clientele she enjoys.

Ferguson has worked in hospitality since moving to Jackson 30 years ago and has been a fixture on the local dining scene ever since. Her résumé includes Osteria, OYG, Sidewinders, The Wort and the Million Dollar Cowboy Steakhouse, among others.

Because she recognizes so many locals and longtime visitors, we thought it fitting to get to know a bit more about her.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN JACKSON?

My parents actually met here. My mom was a waitress at Old Faithful Inn and my dad was a tour bus driver. They married, became teachers, had kids and returned as seasonal workers in Jackson during the summers. I lived here every summer until I was about 10. Like many others, I came back after college for the typical “one winter” — and stayed.

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR EARLY DAYS?

We spent most of our time in the park, but once a week we'd come into Jackson and check out as many books from the library as we could carry. Then we'd go to the park across from The Blue Lion while my parents went to “the house.” We were only allowed to interrupt them if we could “see bone.”

WHAT RESTAURANTS DO YOU REMEMBER FROM WHEN YOU MOVED TO JACKSON FULL TIME?

In the off-season, the only places open were The Wort and the diner, LeJay's. Town has changed so much. Back then, there were even vouchers for a free cab ride home, and everybody knew each other.

IF YOU COULD BRING ONE SPOT BACK?

Anthony's. They had the most buttery garlic bread ever.

ANY FUN MEMORIES FROM THE BAR SCENE 20 OR 30 YEARS AGO?

I was a Log Cabin girl. The goal was to get someone to buy you a drink without having to talk to them all night. One whole winter we did Statue of Liberty shots — you would dip your finger in Rumple Minze, light it on fire and extinguish the finger in your mouth, then chase with the shot.

WHERE DO YOU DINE OUT NOW?

Luckily, my husband is a great cook. When we go out, we head to Local or King Sushi. I tend to drink wine.

FAVORITE SWEET TREAT?

The cinnamon roll at Persephone.



AND YOUR GO-TO DRINK?

A good glass of pink bubbles in the afternoon. My favorite spot for that is the bar at The Bistro.

WHAT DISHES DO YOU RECOMMEND TO GUESTS AT BIN22?

Bin is great because people don't have to commit to one big meal. With small plates, they can try a lot without a huge decision. Guests often ask for my opinion, saying, "You know what I like." Some staples are the wild mushroom mozzarella, the Spanish salad and the meatball. We usually serve a garlicky, buttery shrimp and something creative with lamb.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS IN TOWN?

The first step is reading people. I stay in this business because I pay attention to what guests want or don't want. I'll send them to places where I know they'll be happy.

I love recommending New West KnifeWorks — it's like a toy store for grown-ups — and the Jackson Hole Winery tasting room next door. It's a one-stop shop. I also tell visitors about Made, a store with souvenirs you'd actually want to receive.

WHAT MAKES BIN22 SPECIAL?

It's unique, with a great community feel. The work is more fluid — I like having my hands in all parts of the restaurant. Every server touches every table, so guests experience different perspectives. The communal seating encourages conversation. You're not intruding on a date; you're part of the party. That's fun for me.

FAVORITE "SMALL WORLD" STORY ABOUT CUSTOMERS SITTING AT A COMMUNAL TABLE?

I was chatting with customers sitting next to each other, and little by little they learned that they not only lived in the same small town in Delaware, but one couple had bought the other couple's house. You never know who you are sitting next to!



BIN22'S WYOMING ROULETTE

1 OUNCE WYOMING WHISKEY SMALL BATCH

3/4 OUNCE WYOMING WHISKEY OUTRYDER

1/2 OUNCE BLACK RUM

1/2 OUNCE FALERNUM

1/4 OUNCE ALLSPICE DRAM

1/4 OUNCE GINGER LIQUEUR

LEMON TWIST, FOR GARNISH

MIX ALL INGREDIENTS IN A ROCKS GLASS WITH A BIG ICE CUBE AND STIR.

HAVE YOU LEARNED A LOT ABOUT WINE?

Absolutely. Working at Bin22, we get continuing education and plenty of opportunities to taste and hear the stories behind wines. Many winemakers come through, which is invaluable.

THREE WINES YOU RECOMMEND?

Everyone should have a good "popcorn" wine — reasonably priced and easy to enjoy with or without food, like tempranillo. A "special occasion" wine, such as Barbaresco, adds depth to a meal. And something bright and refreshing, like Txakolina from northern Spain, makes a perfect deck wine.

YOUR GO-TO BOTTLE?

Sleight of Hand from Oregon. I've visited the winery, and it's the winery I have the most wine from.

SOMETHING PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I paint landscapes and watercolors.

