

SAVOUR



Even manly men are picking up the new fruity drinks

BY DARYL-LYNN CARLSON
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Rob Tomé wonders if the Italians are one up on Canadians. "They work to live, while we work to save," he observes, based on his experience in Italy apprenticing as hospitality specialist.

And living for Italians would seem to include a fair bit of alcohol along the way.

On any given morning, it's not unusual to see Italians sipping wine spritzers to get their day started, Tomé says.

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Work ends early by North American standards, freeing employees to gather at the local trattoria for cocktails. Dinner at home isn't served until eight.

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Alcohol is also less taboo in most European countries and is perhaps less abused as a result, Tomé suggests.

Most cocktails in Italy are light, wine-based drinks — red or white, says Tomé, an amateur sommelier and a now a Toronto-based representative of Philippe Dandurand Wines import distributor.

(To Italians, red wine topped up with soda is just as appealing as white, he says.) Champagne and sparkling vinos are

served as aperitifs, allowing room for dinner and sober second thought.

But wine as a lighter, healthier alternative to the potent martinis that are all the rage here has yet to catch on.

Canadians seem reluctant to give up their beer and the hard stuff.

But we're not without imagination, it

seems, when finding new ways to blend flavours — even if it means mixing the equivalent of a paradox in a glass.

Take the trend to fortify a buzz with herbal extracts, such as those in the new Guru energy drink. Imbibers get a dose of ginseng, ginkgo biloba and echinacea from a can of Guru, then add their choice of vodka, rum, gin or tequila to make the cocktail experience complete.

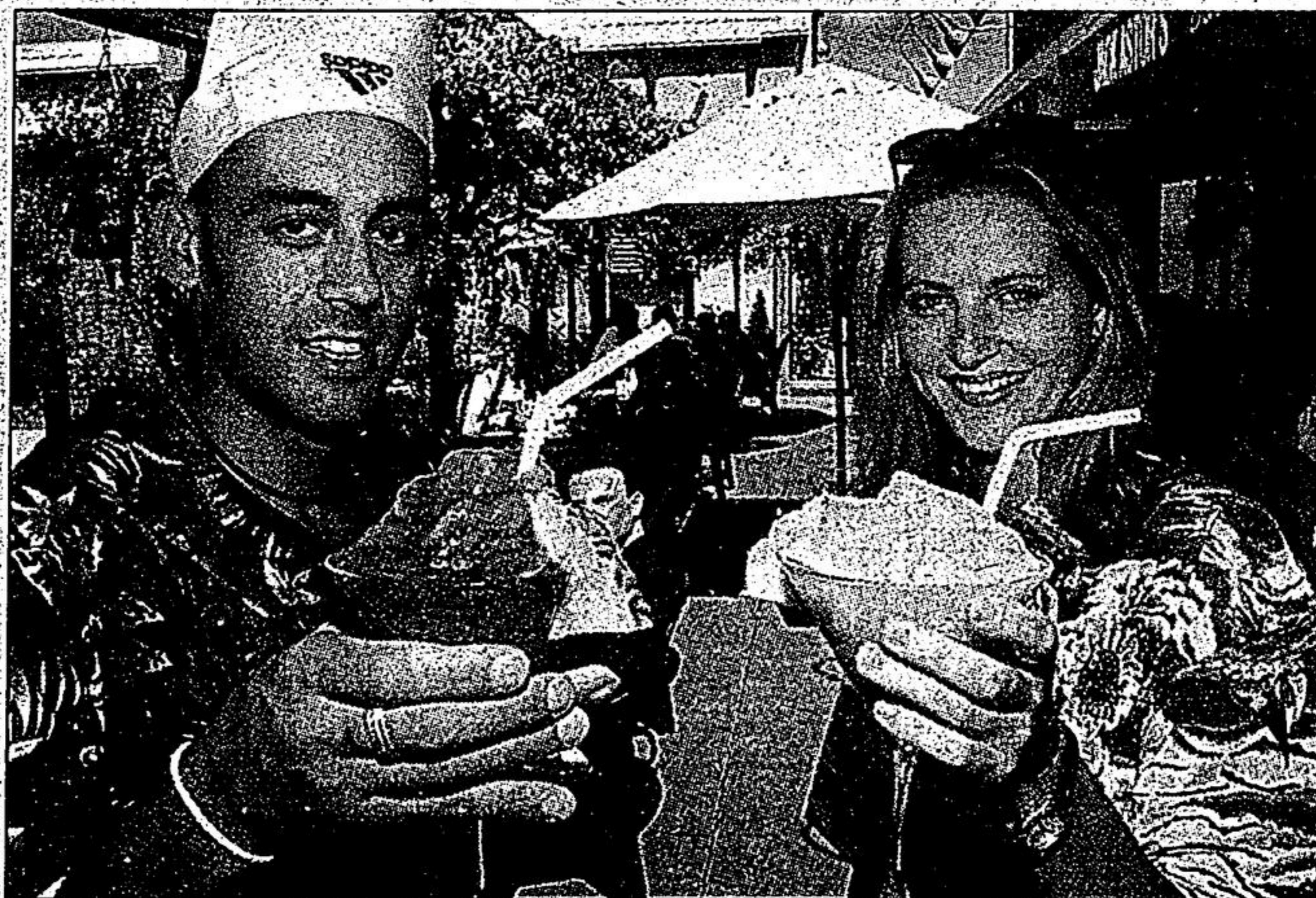
(Canada and the United States — where Tex Mex theme bars are most popular — are the only two countries that will continue to receive exports of tequila, in short supply due to a rare fungus that has infected the Mexican agave crop.)

'People were maybe getting bored with the usual martinis. Sake is almost a fusion drink.'

"I see a lot of places in downtown Toronto serving health cocktails like Guru," says Domenic Zucco, owner of Il Piatto Vecchio restaurant in Richmond Hill.

Add a slice of fruit and you've got a meal in a drink, potent enough to fend off any virus better than Jack Daniels straight up, Zucco notes.

In fact, this season more people are leaning toward fruit-laced drinks and low car-



STAFF PHOTOS/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Jack Astor's bartenders Eddie Oliveira and Caroline Murphy show off new concoctions.

See TASTES, page 13.

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