



**CLOCK'S TICKING**  
The Ten Years in a Day cocktail at Loa

## Side Shows

IN NEW ORLEANS' MOST ORIGINAL HOTEL BAR, EVERY DRINK COMES WITH A LITTLE DRAMA

At Loa, a plush cocktail den in New Orleans' International House Hotel, a customer orders a drink called "Ten Years in a Day," a reference to the melancholy George Jones song "I've Aged Twenty Years in Five," in which a disgraced cowboy faces himself in a dusty men's room mirror. Served on a silver tray, the drink comprises a glass of cabernet, a hand mirror and a small etched-glass box of smelling salts. When it arrives, the customer plays along, "fainting" convincingly upon seeing her reflection and "reviving" when the bartender opens the smelling salts. A few seats down, a man orders the "Ne'er-do-well," a sinner's tableau that includes a half bottle of Bulleit rye with several juices for mixing, some playing cards and a pair of dice.

Bored with the punctiliousness of the craft cocktail movement, Loa's "Spirit Handler," Alan Walter, a onetime playwright who has a master's degree in directing, started including beverages with nonfood sides on the menu purely as conversation starters. "I believe there's theatricality in every cocktail, and I like to entertain," he says. "The more whimsical drinks I serve take advantage of the natural anticipation people feel when they enter the social arena of the bar."

Though interactive theater and dining experiences, such as "Queen of the Night" and The Heath in New York City, have recently been all the rage, as far as Walter knows, he is the first to broach the fourth wall solely through alcoholic beverages. "Cocktails don't fill you up like food, and they're not medicinal like they used to be," he says. "Where they have meaning is as a psychological transaction with the bartender." —AMY PATUREL