

# Forbes

## Meet Miami-Based Valentino Longo, North America's Most Imaginative Bartender For 2020



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Travel

*I write about travel and food and everything in between.*



Valentino Longo, head bartender of Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club in Surfside ANDREA DI LORENZO

Nestled inside the [Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club](#) in Surfside, Florida is Le Sirenuse Champagne Bar, a gilded space that is, as its name suggests, known to serve some of Miami's best champagne selections, as well as dexterously handcrafted cocktails by head bartender Valentino Longo.

Longo and bar manager Jacopo Rosito created a cocktail menu, *Amore Eterno*, inspired by the artists, farmers, winemakers and musicians, all bonded by generations of family tradition, whom Longo and Rosito met during their trip to southern Italy last year.



They've also been busy hosting award-winning guest bartenders (like Agostino Perrone of The Connaught Bar and Erik Lorincz of Kwānt) through their *Viaggio* Cocktail Series, and taking part in competitions. Valentino emerged victorious at the Tales of the Cocktail Foundation's 13th annual [North America's Most Imaginative Bartender competition](#), presented by Bombay Sapphire gin, competing against 12 finalists from New Orleans to Texas to Ontario.

"Valentino is elegant behind the bar and makes 5-star service look effortless," New York-based mixologist Lynnette Marrero, who was one of the judges of the competition, tells us. "He is attentive and thoughtful in his combinations and presentations. He also has a very clear understanding of timing in service. [During the competition], he was always able to choreograph his movements to ensure the cocktail came to the guests (us) in its best form." She added, "I have had the pleasure of seeing this outside of a collection setting. I can say that he also brings a warmth to formal service."

We talk to the Italian-born bartender about his background, cocktail program, trend predictions for 2020 and a recipe you can make at home:

**Could you please share with us a little bit about your background? How did you get into bartending?**

I was born in Rome and I lived there until I was 23. I started my career in Hotel De Russie led by Massimo D'Addezio. At that time the "De Russie" was the best hotel bar in Italy. I started as a barista, and then moved to a food runner and eventually made my way to being back in a bar. But, because I wanted to learn the English language, I decided to move to London with few of my colleagues in 2011.

London is the "Mecca" for bartending and bartenders. I was fortunate to learn by doing and growing in a city that has had such an imprint on the bar culture and my passion for the industry. I ended up staying for three years!

**How and when did you end up in Miami, and at the Four Seasons?**

After London, I went back to Rome for few years and the place that I was managing decided to open a second outpost in Miami. I was chosen to come to Miami [in February 2016] to run, open and operate this cocktail bar-restaurant which gave me a taste for the magic city. Unfortunately, after a year, the restaurant group wanted me to go back to Rome. It was then that my path crossed with one of the executive managers of Four Seasons who told me about an exciting new project happening in Surfside. I got the job while the hotel was under construction and was able to travel to Japan for one month of intensive training at bars in Tokyo and Osaka, when I returned [in April 2017], it was the start of my journey and career at Le Sirenuse.



Valentino with Agostino Perrone of The Connaught in London (No. 2 on World's 50 Best Bars), who did ... [+] CHRISTINA MENDENHALL

### **What was your thought process in creating your winning cocktail for Most Imaginative Bartender competition?**

The Most Imaginative Bartender Competition asked us, “What is your creative outlet outside bartending?” We were posed that question at the beginning of a 9-month run of national competitions. I always knew the initial answer, but the question had me thinking deeper into how I could use that outlet and really put my all into it. My passion is photography. I wanted to link that thought process of making a picture into one drink: Lights- Shadows- Subject- Contrasts — those are the 4 elements that create a picture. Being so inspired by my creative passion, I wanted to put that into my love for cocktails by recreating a photo—something that pleases the eye, emotions, senses, and replicate that into something that pleases the palate as well. I chose ingredients that represent each of the Elements and transform it into a drink.



Valentino Longo's winning The Decisive Moment cocktail SHANNON STURGIS PHOTOGRAPHY

The Decisive Moment Recipe:

1.50 Oz Bombay Sapphire Gin

0.75 Oz Fortified Bergamot

1.25 Oz Sherry Lactic Blend

Garnish: 2 Drops coconut olive oil, 2 drops of coffee balsamic

**I understand you are a photographer as well. Do you marry this passion in the creation of your drinks?**

Photography is literally seeing the world through a box, and in this box you can imagine whatever you want and you can create anything you like.

And there isn't much difference to me between being a photographer and being a bartender.

Behind the bar I imagine myself to be inside the camera, through the lens of a bar I can see things that [guests] won't see. I can imagine stories of the guests in front of me and get ready to get that decisive moment And that to me is art. Art through drinks, Art through hospitality. Nevertheless the cocktail it is a piece of art.

**What are your favorite spirits or ingredients to use?**

I love low ABVs like vermouth, amaro and bitters. That way, you can enjoy few drinks without compromising the flavors having a less "alcoholic " beverage.

**Any favorite bars to visit outside of yours?**

I truly believe that Miami will be the best city for our industry in the next few years. The best bartenders like Daniele Dalla Pola [Esotico Miami] are moving here and opening amazing places, keeping the vibrancy of this city alive and thriving. One of my favorite spots right now is Cafe La Trova by Julio Cabrera. It is an amazing journey to Havana and Cuba through music, food and drinks. A perfect representation of Miami coming to life.

**What's your favorite thing about being a bartender/working in this industry?**

Everywhere I go there are friends around the world. As bartenders, we believe in making people happy and the guest always comes first. That's what I love: creating a bond with the guests, being able to draw inspiration from the different people you meet and conversations makes for such special moments.