

MR. SCIENCE

Raise a glass to the mad genius behind San Francisco's most unusual watering hole, where cocktails and enlightenment mix.



Robot builder and rock climber in his free time, Sausalito's own Alexander Rose has a cool day job as well: executive director of The Long Now Foundation, the nonprofit behind such quirky-yet-visionary projects as the 10,000 Year Clock. Its most surprising venture, though, may well be The Interval, a cafe-bar that opened (with the able help of bartender-historian Jennifer Colliau) this spring in Long Now's Fort Mason HQ. Full of questions, we met Rose there for a drink.

Why open a bar? When we started holding receptions here after our seminars, we saw people doing just what we want them to do: talk about long-term thinking. So how do we turn that one night into every night? If you look at the 10,000-year history of civilization—which is what we do at The Long Now—it's intimately intertwined with alcohol. Some say the reason people stopped being nomads is that they wanted to ferment stuff. Then there's the counterargument, which is that they stopped moving and then things started fermenting.

And they were happy. Exactly! Our menu is really a timeline of alcohol and civilization. For example, the Midas Touch, from Dogfish Head Brewery—it's a 3,000-year-old recipe pulled from Midas's tomb.

What's the first clue that The Interval isn't your average bar? The big wall of books as you come in: the 3,000 books you would most want to restart civilization.

Who decided which to include? We asked our several thousand members for suggestions, everything from the highly cultural to the highly pragmatic. Some people are completely annoyed that you would choose anything but the great classics, and some people are completely annoyed that you would have anything like that—you should just have books on how to rebuild lathes and cars.

What else do you do here? You've been with The Long Now for 17 years, but you can't have spent all that time ... Figuring out how to open this bar? No, my main project is the clock project, which is under construction in West Texas. That table over there is made out of a prototype we built for the clock.

The Interval, Ada's Technical Books & Cafe up in Seattle—what do you think explains these new geeky gathering places? I think museums, bookstores, libraries, cafes, and bars are all searching for new ways for people to interact in their space. And for people who are not really into going to a mall or watching TV, there *is* a missing niche. The evening programming at the Academy of Sciences and the Exploratorium are museums trying to be more like bars and cafes. A place like Ada's is a cafe pushing more toward being a museum. The Interval was unabashedly designed to be all of these things at once. longnow.org.

JEFFERY CROSS