

one more round

raise your glass to signonsandiego's bartender of the month

NOVEMBER 2006

Who: Tony Finglas

Where: The Ould Sod

Specialty: The Irish Piña Colada, er, Guinness

Tony Finglas first started pouring drinks at 14 years old (he told his boss he was 15) in his homeland of Ireland, which some ex-pats fondly refer to as "The Ould Sod." Fourteen is also the number of years ago Finglas walked into Normal Heights' pub **The Ould Sod** for a pint and ended up pouring them once again for a living. Between the two stints, wanderlust led the Irishman to an airport where he asked the woman at the counter for a ticket on the next plane. Lucky for us locals, that plane dropped him off at none other than Charles Lindbergh Airport.

Though Finglas has earned his way as a crab fisherman in the frigid waters of Alaska and as a commercial diver (two of the world's most dangerous jobs), he's happy warming up The Ould Sod's half-Irish, half-hipster crowd that seem to favor him as much as their drink. Strong and sun-splashed from surfing during the day, and possessing a charming vernacular that replaces "my" with "me," this Southern California Irish hybrid is just the barman to pour your Guinness. He's also quite a hit with the ladies for making sure no rowdy customers disturb them in or on their way out of the bar whose name, besides meaning "old country," is also Irish for "drunken lout."

So where are you from?

A county in Dublin called Finglas. Finglas isn't my real name, it's where I'm from in Ireland. But there were three other Tonys working here when I started, so they called me Finglas. It just stuck and now I get paychecks and letters to Tony Finglas.

What led you to America's Finest City?

All the Irish were going to New York and Boston and I said if I'm going to come all the way to America, I'll have a look somewhere else. I asked the girl at the counter where the next flights were going to — I nearly moved to Miami because of "Miami Vice" — but she said it's really hot there and they have big bugs so I got a one-way ticket to San Diego instead. I was 22 and moved to Pacific Beach. I thought I had died and gone to heaven.

Is bartending different in America?

Completely different. Bars in Ireland are more social. Everyone goes to bars even if you don't drink because the weather's so bad you can't barbecue or do anything like that. But bartenders there don't interact with customers the way they do here. Your job is to serve beer and that's it. It's a more serious pursuit in Ireland — you have to apprentice for five years as a bar back before you can be a barman.

When do you work here?

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Did you have to make any adjustments?

When I started bartending in America, I thought I was the most popular person in the world. I couldn't figure out why everyone wanted to talk to me. But I also had to figure out cocktails because nobody drank cocktails in Ireland then. I was here a couple of days and girl asked me, "Would I like Sex on the Beach?" I said, "Absolutely, young lady, I'm sure you would, and that's why I'm here." I hadn't a clue she was talking about a drink.

Any other confusions or confessions?

A few years ago, a guy asked if I knew how to make an Irish Car Bomb. I said, "Are you trying to be smart? I don't know how to make one, but if you keep that up I'll blow your car up. How about a drink instead?" He said, "But it is a drink."

So no one moseys into a bar in Ireland and asks for an Irish Car Bomb?

Well, you would once and that'd be it. You'd be drummed out of the bar in a second. Nowadays the young crowd there is starting to drink more cocktails. Or the big drink there is bottles of Budweiser. We just go, (rolls eyes) "kids."

Is it true Guinness is really better in Ireland?

Yeah. They make it for export. If you go to a bar here that doesn't sell a lot of Guinness, then you wouldn't want to wash your feet in it. You have to sell a lot of it to keep it fresh, and we sell a lot of Guinness here. It's not as creamy in the US as at home — there it's like good sex. But it's good here too. I wouldn't drink it if it wasn't



Find Tony Finglas at Normal Heights' friendly bar The Ould Sod.



The Irish Piña Colada

- 1 Irish bartender
- 1 pint of Guinness
- Dash of wit
- Wink to garnish

Ask Finglas for his special Irish Piña Colada. Wink back if you're brave. Enjoy.

Finglas says: "The Irish Piña Colada is black and has a white head."

Interview: **Erin Glass**,
SignOnSanDiego

Photos: **David Brooks**,
SignOnSanDiego

Who's your favorite bartender?
Let us know.

good.

Do you think there are more alcoholics in Ireland than here?

Depends what you consider an alcoholic. I think the standard is that if you drink more than two pints a day you're an alcoholic. If that statistic is true I believe more than 90 percent of Ireland is alcoholic including the government, doctors, cops and surgeons. They say Irish people drink too much, but they can drink a lot without getting drunk. It takes practice, you know. Three to four pints of Guinness wouldn't wet our back teeth.

So, if you had to pick your favorite drink that wasn't a Guinness, what would it be?

Somebody once asked me for three Piña Coladas — it's an Irish pub, and I'm real busy — so I got three pints of Guinness and said, "There you go." They said, "That's not Piña Colada," and I said, "The only Piña Colada we sell here is black with a white head on it. That's an Irish Piña Colada." We do make cocktails here. But this is an Irish bar, what do you expect?