

talking with Dave Wondrich

BY TAN VINH
The Seattle Times

To cocktail geeks, David Wondrich is a hero-worship-worthy figure. A former English professor-turned-cocktail historian, Wondrich wrote the acclaimed "Imbibe!" a history of the cocktail.

Now comes his much-anticipated follow-up: **"Punch: The Delights (and Dangers) of the Flowing Bowl"** (Perigee Trade, \$23.95). In it, Wondrich declares that punch — with its mix of spirit, citrus, water, sugar and spice — is a balanced and complex drink.

Of course, the mainstream drinker associates it with a candy, fruity concoction with floating orange slices; something for holiday parties and women's magazines. So the cocktail historian set out to write about this misunderstood and underrated beverage.

Wondrich, 49, who writes the cocktail column for Esquire magazine, has a doctorate in comparative literature. Last year, he appeared on Comedy Central's "Colbert Report," mixing drinks.

We caught up with Wondrich at his home in Brooklyn.

Why a whole book on punch?

Punch is the origin of the fine art of mixing drinks.

Advantages of punch over cocktails at parties?

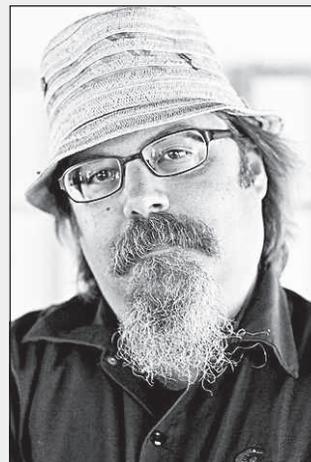
You're not stuck behind a bar making drinks. All the work is done beforehand. . . . A punch is a shared drink. Everybody gathers around the punch bowl in clusters. I always serve it in small cups, so people can moderate their consumption; and also, if they want a refill, they have to go and get it. And every time they do that, they see someone at the bowl and have a different conversation.

You think sailors invented punch?

The circumstantial evidence points most likely to English sailors in the early 1600s. All their other drinks went bad. The English were used to sailing around the North Sea where beer could [only] keep on a ship for short voyages. But once they started doing long voyages into the Indian Ocean, the beer was not refrigerated or pasteurized . . . and the wine ran out very quickly. The only thing they could keep that had alcohol in it was spirits, and punch made it palatable.

I thought Jell-O shots were a college thing that started in the '80s. Now you write that dates back to the 1800s? Good grief.

[He laughs.] Punch jelly goes way back. Nothing is ever new. A lot of the molecular mixology stuff you are hearing goes back to punch as well. They had all kinds of techniques for freezing things and changing the texture of punch.



Washington and Jefferson drank punch. Men and women of letters, too — Byron, Austen, Swift. But no one was more a punch connoisseur than Dickens.

Punch was going out of style by the time Dickens was at the height of his fame. He loved it as a piece of Olde England. He loved the ritual of making punch for his guests. He would lay out all the ingredients and discuss each of the ingredients and how historic it was. It was a big part of his entertaining. One of his punches involves setting [the liquor] on fire. There was showmanship involved, for sure.

A cocktail historian dips into the punch bowl

Relatively dull family secrets

THE LAKE OF DREAMS, by Kim Edwards. Viking, 384 pp., \$26.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

The Lake of Dreams is the name of the New York State hometown of Lucy Jarrett, heroine of Kim Edwards' second novel, eagerly awaited by the fans of her bestselling 2006 debut, "The Memory-Keeper's Daughter."

Kim Edwards



PHOTO BY DEBORAH FEINGOLD

ter." In fact, Lucy finds a copy of what can only be that book — the "ethereal baby dress on a background of black" is the tipoff — lying open on her mother's easy chair.

"Good book?" Lucy asks. "It's compelling so far," Mrs. Jarrett says, explaining that her boyfriend gave her a copy of Stephen King's "Cell," but she just couldn't get into it.

I think King can relax now. Edwards' new novel has none of the super-intense dramatic tension of the first — there are secrets, but we hardly care about them. Even the people in the book don't care. In one scene, Lucy phones her brother, Blake, in the middle of the night to discuss the revelations she's piecing together from old letters. "I know it's late," she tells him. "I'm sorry, I couldn't sleep. But doesn't it seem astonishing to you that there's this whole branch of the family we've never known existed?"

"It does," he answers with a sigh. "Of course it does, it's interesting. But honestly — it's not life-or-

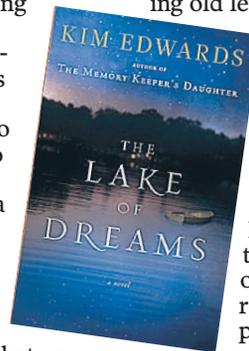
death interesting. It's not wake-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night interesting. Lucy, don't you think maybe you're dwelling on this a little too much?"

Lucy has been living abroad since her father's death in a fishing accident 10 years earlier. As the novel opens, she decides to return from Japan to visit. Her boyfriend, Yoshi, will join her a few weeks later.

By the time he gets there, Lucy will have a lot to tell him — she's dug up an ancestor that no one knew about, one who was involved with the woman's suffrage movement and with a prominent local stained-glass artist, one who abandoned her own daughter under confusing circumstances. Lucy also has been messing around with her old high school boyfriend and exhuming unsolved mysteries surrounding her father's falling-out with his brother. This bad brother is now planning to turn the local wetlands into a

housing development: the nexus at which all the old dramas will come into play.

By that time, the reader has read too many long, fake-seeming old letters, heard too many



lengthy recountings of dreams, followed too many detailed descriptions of stained-glass windows. From the minute she finds the first curio in the attic, Lucy is possessed by the idea that the lives of these unknown relatives could have powerfully shaped her own. The grounds for

this conviction are never clear, though the fact that it turns out to be correct is predictable.

So which will turn out to be the anomaly — the beloved "Memory-Keeper" or the soon-to-be-forgotten "Lake of Dreams"? Based on her skills in creating characters and mapping the tension in relationships, I predict Edwards will dust herself off and get back on her game.

this week

Readings & events on LI

Tuesday

The author of the "Magic Tree House" series for children, **Mary Pope Osborne**, introduces the latest installment, "A Crazy Day With Cobras" (Random House). She'll be joined by **Natalie Pope Boyce**, author of the "Magic Tree House" Research Guides. At 6:30 p.m., Barnes & Noble, Country Glen Center, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850.



Mary Pope Osborne, left, and Natalie Pope Boyce

Meet Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi of MTV's "Jersey Shore," when she signs copies of her novel, "A Shore Thing" (Gallery). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Wednesday

Figure skater **Johnny Weir** signs copies of "Welcome to My World" (Gallery). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Islip resident **Rhett C. Bruno** signs copies of his fantasy novel, "Isinda: Fallen Dagger" (Tate Publishing). At noon, Borders, 231 Airport Blvd., Farmingdale; 631-752-0194

"Shore" enough: It's Snooki at Book Revue.



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