

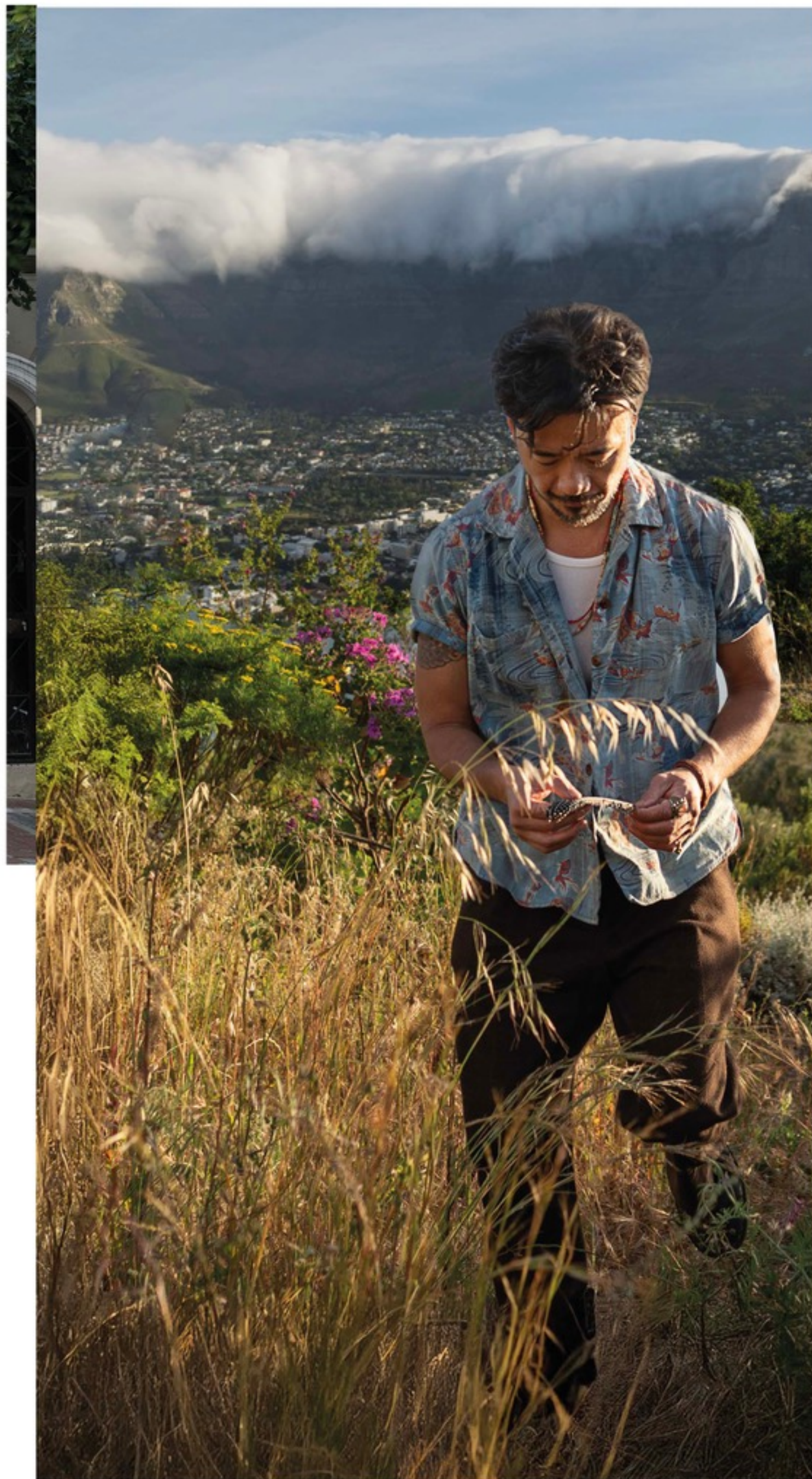


## IN RHYTHM WITH THE GLASS

At Cape Town's Anthm Bar, cocktails become stories and landscapes find their way into the glass. Here, Muse writer Ryan Enslin discovers that each drink is a dialogue of place, music and memory, a cultural conversation unfolding sip by sip.

Words and photos Ryan Enslin





The first thing I hear is the whisper of steel on ice. Tetsuo Hasegawa bends low over a block the size of my fist, blade gliding as crystalline curls scatter across the counter. It's less a bartender's motion than an artist's stroke. Precise, patient and intentional. When he sets the glass before me, the ice is perfectly tailored, a sculpture in miniature, waiting to hold its story.

I've come to recognise this ritual. Anthm has become a touchstone for me in Cape Town, its pull as natural as the glorious late-afternoon light that lingers across the bar, holding space for the parts of myself I only seem to meet here. One night it's a quick drink before dinner, another it stretches into hours of conversation with locals, carried along by the gentle crackle of vinyl somewhere in the background. Each visit offers refined insights: a cocktail I haven't tried, a pairing I wouldn't normally choose, and, in the end, another glimpse into Tetsuo's evolving world.

#### Tokyo Discipline, New York Edge

Hasegawa's journey began in Tokyo, where art school sharpened his eye for balance and proportion. New York followed, two decades of bartending and exhibiting art in the Lower East Side. By the time he left, he'd staged more than 30 shows and run his own bar. Cape Town is now the third act in his journey.

"Nature is right here," he says, fingers brushing a tray of dried herbs gathered earlier in the week. "Fynbos, sea air, citrus. I take in the smells and bring that into the glass."





I inhale before tasting, it has that distinct smell of mountain mist at dawn. The palate is deep, bittersweet, expansive, like walking through moss and cedar.

### Cocktails as Anthems

At Anthm, cocktails carry names drawn from Hasegawa's record collection. Each album spins in full, its crackle and warmth wrapping the room in a kind of lived-in nostalgia. The music is never decoration; it's part of the conversation, part of the drink itself.

The Beatnik arrives first: tequila and Cocchi Rosa, passionfruit and apple shrub, garnished with Durban masala dusted onto that hand-shaven ice. Beetroot anchors the drink in earthiness, while spice rises with each sip. The name, Hasegawa explains, was born from a New Year's duel with a friend called Nik, which Hasegawa emerged from victorious. "The drink stayed, and so did the story."

On another night, it's the Foggy Forest: whisky infused with porcini, Hojicha-steeped Aperol, plum wine,

all smoked under cherry blossom wood. I inhale before tasting, it has that distinct smell of mountain mist at dawn. The palate is deep, bittersweet, expansive, like walking through moss and cedar.

### Pairings with Place

The cocktails never stand alone. Hasegawa composes small plates as their counterpoint, each bite coaxing out hidden notes in the glass. The Foggy Forest pairs seamlessly with oxtail ramen, broth rich with mushroom oil, scallions and simmered egg. The forest floor of the drink folds into the broth's umami depths. Another evening, I try mussels, not briny, but subtle, spiced and touched with smoke, finding resonance in a bright citrus cocktail. These are not chance pairings. They are part of a strategy that shifts with season and song,

and with the impressions Hasegawa gathers from his surroundings. He speaks fondly of walking Cape Town's mountains, where scents, colours and textures spark ideas that later appear in cocktails or on small plates. It's less recipe than translation, turning landscape into flavour.

That philosophy finds its most tangible expression in the ingredients themselves, drawn directly from the Cape and reimagined through his lens.

### Foraging and Terroir

Cape Town's terroir is stitched through everything here. Fynbos dries into garnish. Citrus – orange, lemon, grapefruit – anchors both drinks and dishes. Foraging is not just about herbs but also about memory and sensation. Each walk on the mountain or shoreline becomes potential flavour. In Tetsuo's hands, place itself is distilled.



### Atmosphere as Ingredient

The bar feels like an extension of the menu. Japanese kominka-style furniture, vintage glassware, custom plates, low light. A space that is both curated and warm.

And then there is MAYHM, now a living part of the Anthm experience. Taking shape within the bar itself, it carries an eclectic energy that reflects Hasegawa's taste in music. Musical experiences unfold here with a charge of anticipation, reminding guests that Anthm is always evolving.

Reservations are accepted, though only for groups of seven or more. Otherwise, you walk in, find your space and let the night play out. Conversations with strangers often stretch into new friendships, carried by the comfort of vinyl and craft.

### A Cultural Crossover

What stays with me after each visit is not only flavour but feeling, that layered crossover where continents converse. Tokyo's discipline meets New York's edge, both softened by Cape Town's natural abundance.

At first, I came for the

craftsmanship I had heard about – the detail, the restraint. But over time, I've found myself coming back for something quieter. A shift in pace. A space that invites slowness, where moments expand and impressions settle deeper.

A whisky-plum aperitif with oxtail ramen is not fusion, it's dialogue. Mussels with a citrus-bright cocktail are not gimmick, but terroir translated into a new tongue.

Leaving Anthm, Loop Street always feels louder, busier. Inside, the pace is steadier, as the world slows, not into stillness, but into rhythm. Like a track still spinning in those few moments after the final note fades.

Each visit to Anthm reminds me that a bar can be more than a stop; it can be a space where memory, flavour and place converge. In Hasegawa's world, Cape Town becomes both familiar and surprising, its essence captured in cocktails and pairings that feel at once local and global, fleeting yet unforgettable. 🍷

| 63 Loop Street, Cape Town CBD,  
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**JASON OLIVE**  
jason@hospitalityplacements.co.za  
082 255 5000



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chris@hospitalityplacements.co.za  
072 203 5496



011 803 6040 | [www.hospitalityplacements.co.za](http://www.hospitalityplacements.co.za)