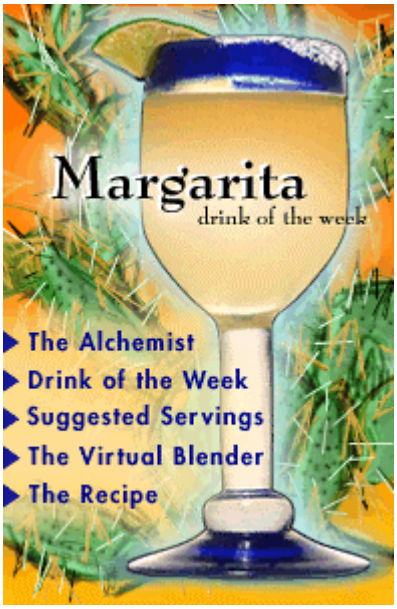

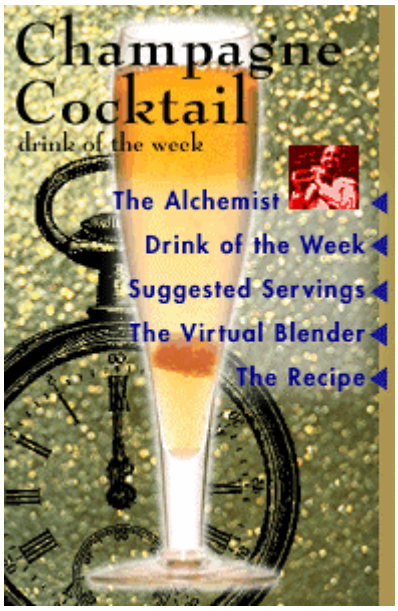

Cocktails

Classic Recipes and Tales of Their Origin

by Paul Herrington

Drink dilemma? The Alchemist can help. **www.hotwired.com/cocktail/archive/index.html**

THE Alchemist By Paul Harrington

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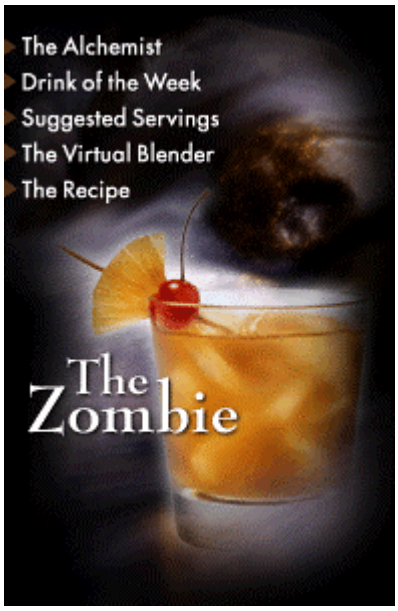
Zombie



On occasions when we need to break the bondage of banality, we order a Zombie without guilt and without regard for the bartender's sneer. If our request for this virile concoction happens to fall on Valentine's Day, then all the better. With a name drawn from the root of the West African Kongo word for "fetish," the Zombie rouses us to contemplate bacchanalian behavior without the threat of unwise inspiration.

Long before the Age of Aquarius, the Zombie's voodoo charmed a crowd that later left us with the curse of the fern bar. By the time bartenders recognized the cunning of this drink with placards maintaining that there would be only one Zombie per customer, it was too late. Only recently have imbibers learned to manage the magic of this drink, though we've found it still boils down to sipping no more than one Zombie every three to four weeks. Made of the Alchemist-endorsed mix of 1 1/2 ounces dark rum, 3/4 ounce each of Jamaican rum, light rum, pineapple juice, and papaya, and an ounce of lime juice, followed by a float of 151-proof Demerara rum, the Zombie has no bite, but certainly the potential of scarring. The drink's dusting of powdered sugar and cherry garnish only add to its ingenuous air.

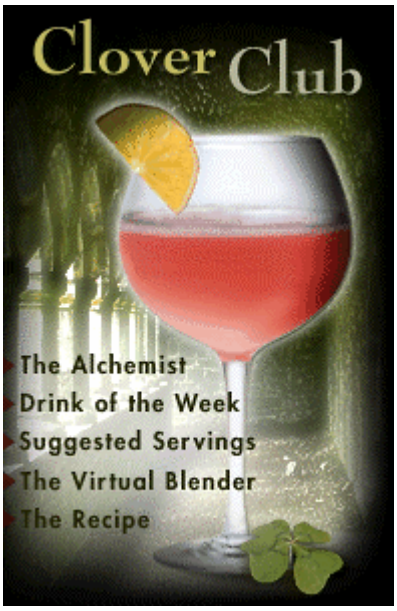
There are hundreds of resurrections of the Zombie's recipe. Some include Cognac, while others insist on apricot brandy. All, however, require rum, the presumed sorcery of the drink. We're far from certain which version came first and who might have made it. Most reports point to Ernest Raymond Beaumont-Gannt, an enterprising fellow who changed his name to Donn Beach after opening the Hollywood restaurant Don the Beachcomber in the late '30s. During the same decade and in the same restaurant - so the story goes - Mr. Beach greeted a patron still suffering from indiscretions of drinking from the night before. In hopes of curing the man's hangover, he mixed a special drink that seemed to lift the imbiber's spirits. The regular wasn't sighted for several weeks, but upon his return to his old haunt at the bar, he was asked how he had liked the drink. According to his reply, the mixed drink had transformed him into a member of the living dead. Simple semantics led to the name.

Around Valentine's, there's a creation story that we much prefer. "A Zombie ... has been called back from the Spirit World, labors without pay, without food, without complaint, in a weird sort of spirit bondage," wrote Charles H. Baker in 1951. "Christopher Clark, from a five months' stay in Cap Haitian, ... brought back ... this Zombie cocktail, claiming that it will put the spirits to work for you, but whether they or ourselves are in bondage is something for each man to decide according to occasion and the needs thereof."

Mr. Baker goes on to explain that the original Zombie was put on paper in 1935. "The high-proof, so-called Zombie known to most bar men did not raise its dizzy head until two years, or better, later," he adds. We suspect Mr. Baker's snarl is directed toward the Zombie popularized by the Beachcomber.

But there is a third notable tale of creation for this mixed drink, and we have no confirmation on the dizziness of this particular Zombie. "At the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing, New York, the supertechnologized 'world of tomorrow' stood before thousands of patrons. It was a runway full of newfangled washing machines, kitchenware, aerodynamic sculptures, and weapons galore," wrote Joseph Lanza in The Cocktail: The Influence of Spirits on the American Psyche. "But anyone looking for a high-tech escape from streamlined excess had only to take refuge in the Hurricane Bar, where a new cocktail was introduced to the world: the Zombie." We truly doubt that there's much refuge to be found in a Zombie. But when we contemplate drinks of the same ilk - particularly the Viscous Virgin and the Missionary's Downfall, both created by Donn Beach of the Beachcomber - we're convinced that sipping one every now and again really can't be all that bad. Unless, of course, we want it to be.

Clover Club



This drink's luck ran out about 50 years ago. Like a has-been whose name is only vaguely remembered, the Clover Club - still included in all the revered records of classic cocktails - now garners respect only for its venerable age. Name-dropping bartenders often cite the refreshing gin potion, but they'd be hard pressed to mix it. Of course, few imbibers would bother to actually call these mixers, based on their bluster. After all, most shun anything dubbed Clover Club, associating the phrase with corner bars of the same name - most of which are only a slight stumble beyond the less endearing dives named after various states of drunkenness.

But we like the Clover Club and make no inferences about its name. When prompt and polite with its recipe, we've been served it at every bar where we've asked for it. With the prosy precepts of mixing 1 1/2 ounces gin, 1/4 ounce grenadine or raspberry syrup, 3/4 ounce lemon juice, and - as startling as it might sound - an egg white (which we do skip when goaded), this aperitif's as rousing as most made with gin. But the Clover Club's ambrosia of fruit syrups keeps the drink's edge from digging too deep, particularly on evenings when we've had no more than the day's usual vexation.

Almost certainly invented during the Old School of American Bartending, from 1897 until 1919, the Clover Club began to brave mild baiting during the early '30s, starting with the Old School itself: "A Philadelphia importation," wrote historian Albert Stevens Crockett in the Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book of 1933, the drink "originated in the bar of the old Bellevue-Stratford, where the Clover Club, composed of literary, legal, financial, and business lights of the Quaker City, often dined and wined, and wined again."

In hopes of learning more about how this drink's fortune ran awry and its stature diminished, we tried to go to the supposed source - the Clover Club. Although we came across plenty of references to the club in obituaries of seemingly fine fellows from Boston and Philly, we never found a live specimen from the organization. In the 1995 Invisible Philadelphia: Communities through volunteer organizations, authors Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam insist that the Clover Club, a dining club started in 1881, is still going strong. We have been able to piece together that the male-only club met just once a year to eat red meat while roasting local politicians.

Given the spottiness of the record, we're ready to make what we consider a logical leap: Perhaps the club had very little to do with the drink after all. When we consider the research of Jessy Randall, reference librarian at the Library Company of Philadelphia and an especially helpful teetotaler, we're particularly convinced. "At a certain point in every Clover Club dinner, 'after the soup, and with the fish,'" reported Jessy, "there would be several toasts drunk from the 'Loving Cup,' some kind of fancy silver cup belonging to the club." Jessy went on to quote from Mary R. Deacon's The Clover Club of Philadelphia of 1897: "The knowledge of the composition of the brew in the 'Loving Cup' is not common property. It is potent, it is strong. Those who have dipped more than once in its spring have mentioned its penetrating properties and its enervating powers. Double vision may follow two indulgences...." Jessy surmised that perhaps "the 'Clover Club' cocktail is related to this 'mysterious brew' (as they call it in a poem, later). But I have no proof.... We have a fair amount of information on the Clover Club itself, including menus for several of their fancy dinners held at the Bellevue Hotel here in Philadelphia, but I couldn't find a recipe for the Clover Club drink."

When we compound Jessy's own doubts with the fact that no one at the Bellevue Hotel seems to remember either the club or the cocktail, we begin to wonder why no members of the Clover Club have ever confirmed the story. We can only suspect that one evening, long ago, a few affiliates of the group offhandedly asked a bartender at the Bellevue to mix them up something new, and at the time, the Clover Club seemed a good enough name for a simple enough drink. Either that or the bartender decided that this perfectly prosaic drink - which

rarely offends but is never noticed - didn't quite merit the flights of the picky or imaginative, and certainly not the mixer's name.

Nicky Finn

We've yet to come across someone brave enough to order this drink by name from anyone but the closest of friends. In fact, this fine cocktail faces near extinction because of a name too similar to that of a death wish.

Made with the typically benign ingredients of equal parts brandy, Cointreau, and lemon juice, followed by a dash of the mildly toxic-tasting Pernod, the Nicky Finn is admittedly a drink feistier than most. (This cocktail takes the Sidecar's Pythagorean formula for bibulous bliss and adds a bite that often scars.) But on late nights when we're after a second wind, there's nothing better - though plenty worse (the most notable of which is the notorious Mickey Finn - a poisonous bar concoction that keeps the Nicky Finn from earning its due respect).

In fact, as far as we know, the Nicky Finn appears in only one reputable drink book: William Grimes' Straight Up or on the Rocks. We've never been able to trace its origins, though Mr. Grimes suggests that the recipe was created in 1946 by Nicky Quattrociocchi, one-time owner of the now-defunct El Borracho restaurant in New York. We're not surprised that Mr. Quattrociocchi didn't christen the drink solely after himself. After all, most imbibers wouldn't be able to say it, and drink historians certainly wouldn't be able to spell it. But just as most people don't name their children Satan - a moniker that does work for a drink or two - there's plenty of reasons not to attach "Finn" to a cocktail name that rhymes with "Mickey." We won't belabor the point, assuming that Mr. Quattrociocchi had the best intentions and complete innocence when it came to his drinkmaking. After all, what stalwart mixer would want his drink tied to the Mickey Finn, a drugged drink used to send ill-behaved patrons through the door or to the grave?

Some sources suggest that one of the more notable saloon keepers of Chicago's Whiskey Row, a popular vice district during the 1870s, created the drink for improving his pickpocketing efforts. But H. L. Mencken doubted the story, and so we do too. In "The Vocabulary of the Drinking Chamber," Mr. Mencken does credit the Chicago mixer - not surprisingly said to have been named Mickey Finn - for operating "a college for pickpockets," pointing out that "the patrons of the place were a somewhat mischievous lot, and not infrequently Finn had to go to the aid of his bouncer. They used the side arms in vogue at the time - to wit, bung starters, shillelaghs, joints of gas pipe, and lengths of garden hose filled with BB shot - but the work was laborious, and Finn longed for something sneakier and slicker."

Herb Caen, a self-proclaimed "expert on the peculiar San Francisco art form known as the Mickey Finn" - dedicated an entire chapter of his 1953 book Don't Call It Frisco to his experience with the drink. "The loathsome Mickey, in case you never heard of it," he wrote, "is an odorless, colorless, tasteless liquid that is dropped into a drink to 'cure' an obstreperous drunk, gain cowardly revenge on an enemy, or make a particular point with an unreasonable columnist. Its effects are almost immediate, and so violent that they have caused countless fatalities. In the state of California, it is a felony to administer a Mickey. It is also a felony to commit murder, but people are still being murdered." Caen says by one account, "The poison - for it is - was invented on the Barbary Coast, circa 1870, by a discredited Scotch chemist named Michael Finn. Finn, supposedly a fugitive from justice in Scotland, worked as a bartender on the Coast, and soon became known as a fine source of manpower for ship captains whose crews had deserted to the gold fields."

When in need of a late-night Nicky Finn, we take no chances, and steer clear of what remains of the Barbary Coast - the old waterfront district of our town, most notorious from the gold rush of 1849 to the earthquake of 1906. Since the '20s, bartenders of the most reputable dives have translated requests for Mickey Finns to orders for a double. But not trusting our luck, our diction, or our bartenders' hearing, we always call out the ingredients for a Nicky.

Fish House Punch

First concocted in 1732 at the State in Schuylkill Fishing Club in Philadelphia, Fish House punch is said to have kicked off the club's every meeting and to have inspired several blank pages in George Washington's diary. We don't keep a diary, but we're certainly not at a loss for words about this drink.

When winter's lost all its charm and the next few months promise little more than the same, we sip this pick-me-up, which lets us weather any storm. Far nicer than its name, Fish House punch manages to have a keen tropical taste while maintaining the respectability of the most venerable drinks from the northern latitudes.

Served with the bite of a true cocktail and never with a paper umbrella, Fish House punch is so time-consuming to make that it dictates being concocted only in bulk. When holed up with friends on account of regrettable weather, we gather our reserves of dark rum, cognac, peach brandy, lemons, and sugar. After dissolving 3/4 pound of superfine sugar in a little water, we add a whopping 24 ounces of lemon juice and almost 40 ounces of water. Give the mix a good stir, and chill it for several hours. Just before everyone becomes restless, we dump the brew into a sizable bowl and toss in 36 ounces dark rum and 25 ounces cognac, followed by a tempering 4 ounces peach brandy. Soon enough, we forget all about the weather outdoors and sip what the original (and far more inventive) Martha Stewart - Fannie Merritt Farmer - called a "much esteemed and highly potent punch" in her 1896 bible of American kitchens, The Boston Cooking-School Book.

Without fail, we heed the red flag of Charles H. Baker's Gentleman's Companion of 1934: "Warning: there are a horde of so-called 'Fish House punch' receipts that include Benedictine, curaçao, bourbon, and God knows what else. Eschew them. There is but one recipe, unwavering, invariable...." And without much doubt, it's the one we've included. But even the fervent Mr. Baker makes alternative recommendations on the serious matter of which type of rum to use - Jamaican or Bacardi. His "suggestions are in no way intended as heresy, but simply indicate what substitutions, if any, are possible." Although not typically a man of compromise, Mr. Baker suggests that mixers use equal portions of Jamaican and Bacardi because "Many entirely worthy folk both on the Schuylkill River and the Mississippi don't happen to care for Jamaica rum. All our male parentage having come from Philadelphia or Germantown or the Chester Valley out the 'Main Line,' and at least two of our kin were remembered members of the famous State in Schuylkill - oldest club in America, where Fish House punch was born. Therefore, we know a bit of how Philadelphia tradition, good or poor, carries on serenely in the midst of an otherwise crude and bustling world."

Once every 10 years, we'll come across an establishment on the East Coast that'll serve Fish House punch. Fortunately, it's a peculiar enough concoction that if a place serves it, the bartender or owner is sure to let you know. Unlike the typical potions of the bar that are made to quiet a patron and elicit a hefty tip, Fish House punch is made only by those who would drink it themselves and are sure to tell you why. But considering this drink's hard though subtle blow, and our intolerance for babbling tales at the bar, we'd just as soon sip it from home, safe from Mother Nature and any unwanted recitals.

Red Snapper (the real Bloody Mary)

We'll keep this one short, knowing that after New Year's you're probably in no mood for a drink. But on the off chance you're in a weakened state, we really must mention that the Bloody Mary was first made with gin, not vodka, and was christened the Red Snapper. We wouldn't bet our lives on this factoid, but after the holidays we'd certainly contemplate betting our siblings'.

In fact, the only verity we really have on the Red Snapper is that this mixed drink does wonders for self-inflicted illnesses, particularly those brought on by the occasional bad Martini olive or maraschino cherry. We can also make a good case that the Bloody Mary has no direct

ties to dear Mary Tudor, Mary I of England and Ireland - most remembered for her nickname "Bloody Mary" and the mess she made with the Protestants.

Mixed with 2 ounces gin, 4 ounces tomato juice, the juice of half a lemon, a few shakes of salt and pepper, followed by a splash of Worcestershire sauce (pronounced "what's-this-here-sauce"), and then Tabasco, the Red Snapper always manages to keep our stomachs weighted down and our spirits high. We also count sipping any drink with a celery stalk in it fair penance for past instances of poor judgment.

After one or two Snappers, we're ready to defend the heritage of this fine drink. According to the story we like, Ferdinand "Pete" Petiot, a bartender at Harry's New York Bar in Paris, concocted a blend of tomato juice, vodka, and seasonings that American entertainer Roy Barton dubbed the "Bucket of Blood" sometime in the early '20s. However, there is substantiated speculation that the drink was first made with gin, a far more popular spirit at that time. Nonetheless, the Parisians were unimpressed, and Mr. Petiot emigrated to the States, where he manned the King Cole Bar at the St. Regis Hotel in the mid-'30s. Mr. Petiot pushed his tomato-based drink as a hangover cure, but with the far more comforting name of Red Snapper and, we suspect, the far more inspiring spirit of gin. Again, it's worth noting that during the Old School of American Bartending, right on through to the early '40s, white whiskey was unheard of in the States - until Smirnoff had its way.

Even Trader Vic, who prided himself on first bringing (or at least mimicking) the exotic Stateside, hadn't come across the Bloody Mary until that time: "I first heard of this drink on the steamer Matsonia on my way to Honolulu before the war. It was being consumed by a big, tall, redheaded lass who soon had everyone converted. I'm not saying what she had them converted to." (Proof again, we worry, of the Bloody Mary's insipidity.)

But origins aside, we're always sure to second Hemingway when summing up the merits of the Bloody Mary. In a 1947 letter, our favorite bad boy of the cocktail world wrote that after he introduced the mixed drink to Hong Kong in 1941, the drink "did more than any other single factor except the Japanese Army to precipitate the Fall of that Crown Colony." We keep that last bit of information in mind for those expected occasions when some presumptuous bartender second-guesses our order and swaps vodka for gin. If it tastes like tomato juice with spices but no spunk, we send it back - knowing that downing the spirit you can't really taste before the day's end would be a far worse fate than a spat with the mixer.

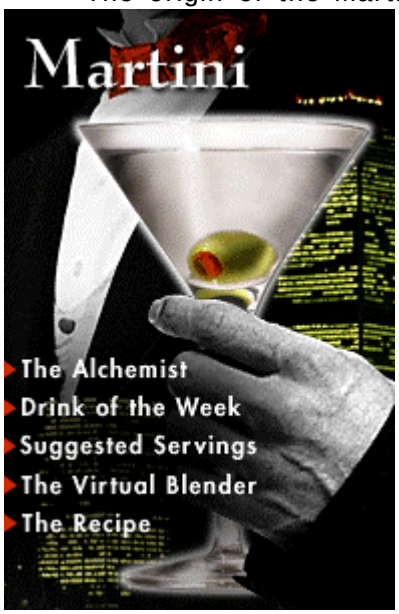
Martini

On days when we're feeling especially mortal and adrift from the American dream, we order a Martini in hope of a spiritual revival, if only for the post-meridian. As libertine Bob Shacochis wrote, "I know I'm not going to live forever, and neither are you, but until my furlough here on earth is revoked, I should like to elbow aside the established pieties and raise my Martini glass in salute to the moral arts of pleasure."

No other cocktail has come to symbolize so much. "Generally, the Martini signifies absolute decadence," wrote James Villa in a 1973 Esquire article. "Specifically it means a bitter, medicinal-tasting beverage. It stands for everything from phony bourgeois values and social snobbery to jaded alcoholism and latent masochism." But an impartial view of the Martini as a drink is absurd, so suffice it to say that unlike kings, queens, and presidents, the Martini is now - more than 20 years later - above reproach. However, its marriage of gin and vermouth - first noted by writer Bernard DeVoto in 1949 - has been far from smooth. Happy enough for the first 80 or so years, the marriage foundered when vodka, our least favorite home-wrecker, entered the picture. By the early '70s, things had become so bad that even the Martini's longtime stalwart, Esquire magazine, began to bite back: "Young people do not like Martinis and they're not drinking them. Ever! Anywhere!," reported Mr. Villa in his diatribe. With the worrisome tendency by some to treat this drink as a sophisticated shooter (a plague that hit soon after Time called the Martini "an amusing antique" in 1985), we won't defend the

Martini, but rather will look back to a time when it was a sweeter, more civilized drink, and hope for the best.

The origin of the Martini is as debatable as that of the cocktail, and though there are numerous tomes on the matter, we find Lowell Edmunds' The Silver Bullet: The Martini in American Civilization, from 1981 and now sadly out of print, the most reliable. (Of course, our faith in Mr. Edmunds, a classics professor at Rutgers, could stem from the fact that he and The Alchemist have sipped Martinis together.) The professor suggests that the etymology of the term "Martini" has much to do with the confusion about the drink's origin.



The Martinez - arguably a Martini incognito, even with its sweet vermouth and orange bitters - first appeared in O. H. Byron's The Modern Bartender of 1884, according to Mr. Edmunds. In 1862, Professor Jerry Thomas, who clearly invented the Tom and Jerry and the Blue Blazer, included a "Gin Cocktail" with some resemblance to the Martini in his Bon-Vivant's Companion, or How to Mix Drinks. By the 1887 edition of the book, he renamed the drink the Martinez and claimed full credit for its creation. As this particular story goes, a weary traveler wandered into the bar at San Francisco's Occidental Hotel for a drink before taking a ferry to Martinez, California, and Mr. Thomas mixed him the first Martinez, though not initially under that name. Interestingly enough, however, the fine people of Martinez claim that the traveler was on his way to San Francisco from their now-defunct Julio's Bar. Reportedly, bartender Julio Richelieu mixed the drink as change for a gold nugget used to buy a bottle of whiskey. It's worth noting that our local hero and newspaper pundit Herb Caen has long considered this story poppycock. "The legends, fables, and myths [of the Martini] persist," he wrote in his 7 February 1993 column. "The preposterous tale that the birth of the Martini had something to do with the East Bay town of Martinez has been duly scotched in this space several times, but it lives on like a strong hangover."

During the late 1800s, the drink seems to have assumed the names Martinez, Martine, and today's moniker, Martini. Harry Johnson, author of the New and Improved Bartender's Manual or How to Mix Drinks for the Present Style of 1888, is credited with first publishing the drink recipe under the name Martini, but he did label the drawing of the drink "The Martine." By the turn of the century - thanks in part to the marketing of vermouth maker Martini & Rossi (then called Martini, Sola & Company), and The Oxford English Dictionary crediting the company with the drink's creation - the name Martini was entrenched, though a few more creation myths about the drink surfaced. The most accepted story - and the one that still occasionally threatens to lead to civil war between New York and San Francisco - is that Martini di Arma di Taggia, an immigrant bartender at New York's Knickerbocker Hotel in 1912, invented the drink. Although arguably a Johnny-come-lately, Martini di Arma di Taggia could have been the first to mix a Martini with dry - not sweet - vermouth, which for most Martini imbibers is what truly constitutes a Martini. Of course, well-known bartender William F. Mulhall wrote of mixing both sweet and dry Martinis at New York's Hoffman House around the same time. As for talk of the drink being named after a Swiss rifle used by the Brits and invented by Friedreich Von Martini in the late 1880s - well, anything's possible, but that one we really doubt.

By the early '20s, America's expatriates had taken the Martini overseas, and in 1929 Hemingway - of all people - made the drink famous for its refining effect on imbibers, through his supposed alter ego, protagonist Frederic Henry, in A Farewell to Arms. Amid the throes of World War I, Mr. Henry said "I had never tasted anything so cool and clean. They made me feel civilized." By Prohibition, the Martini was entrenched, and in 1934, historian Albert S. Crockett, author of The Old Waldorf Astoria Bar Book, reported that "During the first two decades of the century, the commonly accepted American definition of the cocktail was a mixture of gin and vermouth with bitters, ice.... It is noteworthy that more than half the cocktails known had vermouth as an essential. Of them all, the favorite was the dry Martini."

If you plan to remember anything of the Martini's past, note that a dry Martini back then was wet by today's standards. Before the War to End All Wars, a typical dry Martini was 2 parts gin to 1 part vermouth. Today, the ratio has grown to a ridiculous 25 to 1, although the situation wasn't much better in the '50s. "The affliction that is cutting down the productive time in the office and destroying the benign temper of most of the bartenders is the thing called the very dry Martini. It is a mass madness, a cult, a frenzy, a body of folklore, a mystique, an expertise of a sort which may well earn for this decade the name of the Numb (or Glazed) Fifties....," wrote C. B. Palmer of The New York Times in 1952. "Along every stretch of polished mahogany in public places and in countless living rooms there is no talk of the world crisis ... only of how to get a Martini really dry."

When in need of a Martini as a reminder of our potential and that the American dream carries a lot of baggage, we order an ice-cold medium Martini - not "dry" nor "very dry" - with either an olive or a lemon zest at the best bar we can afford, knowing that the bartender will appreciate our sensibility and that the occasional practice of subjecting oneself to snickers from the bench only improves character. Besides, we're convinced that drinking today's dry Martinis is like living in New York: You have to work far too hard at learning to like it.

Moscow Mule

No, we're not talking about Boris. This mule is the one that kicked off the vodka craze in the United States back in the '50s. A strange creature with a mild bite, the Moscow Mule owes more to stateside hucksterism than to its pre-perestroika namesake.

A year after World War II, Americans were intrigued by one of their more notorious allies. Some went as far as to suggest that the Moscow Mule, made with the white whiskey most associated with Russia, was a heady olive branch. Although we'd like to encourage such claims of good will, we must not betray the true tale of this ersatz classic of a mixed drink. Made with 2 ounces vodka and an ounce of lime juice topped with 4 ounces ginger beer, the Moscow Mule was merely the marketing ploy of John G. Martin of Heublein Inc., an East Coast spirits and food distributor. On a good day, even the Alchemist would agree that the Moscow Mule is a cool vodka libation with a slow ginger burn that warms the blood on a cold winter night.

The Moscow Mule became a national favorite in just a few years. Martin was a farseeing flack who even contemplated selling low-fat foods long before most. But he was first determined to get Americans to try something few had ever considered - vodka. His timing, however, wasn't ideal and his decision to buy a vodka distiller - a spirit almost unheard of in the States during the '30s - nearly got him fired.

The vodka was Smirnov, originally owned by a family of the same name, whose members started life as serfs before eventually rising to near royalty by pawning off their spirit to czars during the late 1800s. When the family became the official purveyor of vodka to the court of Nicholas II, the Bolsheviks weren't so understanding, and in 1918 the faction turned the Smirnovs' distillery into a garage. The family recipe made it to France via an older Smirnov brother and was sold to another Russian émigré before making it into the hands of Martin, with the Anglicized name Smirnoff.

Several years after Heublein purchased the vodka distillery, the company still relied on sales from its A-1 steak sauce, and the VP's purchase had become known as "Martin's folly." To save face, Martin hit the road with Smirnoff vodka in tow. The sales trip wasn't going too well, so while in Hollywood - presumably visiting the pretty, young, but now-forgotten, actress who later became his wife - he decided to stop at the Cock 'n' Bull for dinner and drinks. Known as the oasis of Sunset Strip, the Cock 'n' Bull was then owned by Jack Morgan, a fine restaurateur who was losing money fast trying to sell the ginger beer he made on the side. Morgan had a friend who was also experiencing business troubles, only she was trying to offload mugs made in a copper factory she had inherited. The three sat down and concocted a

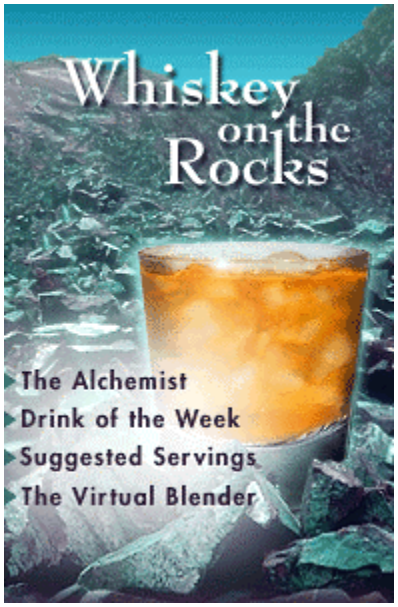
Moscow Mule, which was to be served in and sold with a 5-ounce copper cup with an embossed kicking mule on one side. Besides garnishing the drink with a lime wedge, the marketeers added a twist of a cucumber peel and claimed the drink had the kick of a mule. Before shoving off, Martin took a snapshot of the drink with a Cock 'n' Bull bartender to show mixers at his next watering hole - proof of the drink's popularity and its success with the competition down the street.

Martin didn't let his marketing efforts rest there. By the time the New York Daily News' front page flashed a photo of local bartenders parading down city streets with banners patriotically declaring, "We can do without the Moscow Mule," Heublein explained that Smirnoff had long stopped serving those nasty Commies. In fact, the distiller was making its vodka with 100-percent American grain in the bastion of the motherland, New England.

The Yanks bought both the story and the spirit, and as James Brady (author of The Coldest War) shows, the Moscow Mule became associated with the innocence of youth: "We were 21 or 22 and sure we would always be young ... we drove up the Shirley Highway to Washington weekends to chase girls, which it was okay to call them then, and fall in love and dance close as people did to the big-band music of that year and drink Manhattans and a new vodka drink called a Moscow Mule. And when you look back on it now, it seems as wonderful and yet unreal as an MGM musical."

Older, perhaps wiser, and not terribly worried about a Red scare, we admit to giving in to this drink more for its story than for its taste. Any bartender at any bar can make it well, and we'll even take it with ginger ale instead of ginger beer, though we always skip the cucumber peel. Besides, it's always a pleasant reminder that it's been awhile since that whole Sputnik incident.

Whiskey



When traveling through uncharted territories and other dry spots, we pack whiskey in a hip flask and keep in mind the wise words of Charles H. Baker: "Taken sanely and in moderation whisky is beneficial, aids digestion, helps throw off colds, megrims, and influenzas. Used improperly the effect is just as bad as stuffing on too many starchy foods, taking no exercise, or disliking our neighbour."

Whiskey, from the Gaelic word uisgebeatha for "water of life," is distilled from a mash of grains typically wasted on home-brews and pigs: barley, rye, and corn. We won't argue about the "correct" spelling of this word, which dates to the early 16th century. But in general, the Irish and Americans spell whiskey with an "e"; the Scots, English, and Canadians go without the "e." We suspect the whole debate started between the English and the Irish, though we treat the spelling as a matter of semantics.

You may be confused as to why there are so many variations on the theme: **bourbon, rye, scotch, Irish, and Canadian**. Why does one so readily loosen your muscles while the other tastes like a fluoride rinse? The differences come from the rigors of whiskey-making and each distiller's peculiar efforts to tame the spirits. When coupled with the lore surrounding each label, you can see how so many whiskeys survive in today's fickle market. With a little research and sampling, you'll find a brand that warms the temple of your soul.

Whiskey on the Rocks

On evenings when we want no guesswork from the bartender - or anyone else, for that matter - we order a whiskey on the rocks. Admittedly, we've asked for the same on occasions when a little spirit of conjecture would be welcomed. But under any pretext, there's no more comforting or inspiring drink.

We've heard tell of mere monkeys making this drink deftly, but even in an unscouted bar, we still eye the bartender closely every time we order a whiskey on the rocks. Not getting

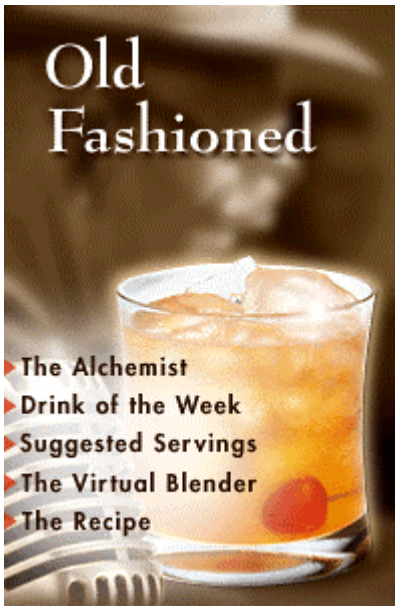
it right can be crushing. In fact, we've tossed tables over less. Greenhorn mixers often skimp on ice, leaving us with a tepid drink we're certain not to finish. Or they'll toss in more than a jigger of spirit, which makes drinking the last of the tipple a task, not a pleasure. Oh, and stars forbid they actually run out of our favorite brand of whiskey.

Fine bartenders struggling at establishments with damaged reputations, take heart. We follow the words of the Esquire Drink Book from 1956, a tome whose editors rarely take to begging: "When nearing whiskey, or the place where it is dispensed - be it saloon, private bar in a friend's or enemy's home, 'package store,' or your own humble shelf under the sink - we beg you, approach your drink in a spirit of reverence.... And therein lies a hint to us mixers. Are we doing right by our favorite rye when we ball it with plebeian fizz put out by the local popmaker? Must its flavor suffer lèse-majesté...? It is a personal choice, and we will be damned for it, that we should pick one among the whiskeys over another." So we only pick for ourselves, and though our choice rarely wavers, we pay homage to whatever a whiskey drinker may sip, be it bourbon, Scotch, rye, Canadian, or Irish.

We're also well-seated with the view that whiskey drinkers are moody. On more than one occasion, an irksome bartender has given us a pleasantly wide girth merely based on our order of whiskey on the rocks. Deep down, we know that "moody" is just their interpretation of our determination to get what we ordered, just how we like it.

But we're quick to distinguish ourselves from those who chug shots of whiskey. There's an old saying (for which we usually exclude single-malt scotch drinkers) that those who won't take ice in their whiskey are either pretentious or drunk. We also point to H. L. Mencken's father, who, according to his son, tried his first shot of scotch whiskey in 1894 and then "carried on in a violent manner, and died four years later," still blaming that shot. Had Papa Mencken requested ice, we're certain he would have been fine.

Old-Fashioned



A year later and we still can't resist an Old Fashioned, though the name of this whiskey drink still conjures up images of a church bingo game. This cocktail offers the sophisticated connoisseur a chance to indulge the senses and rekindle long-lost memories, especially for those distant relatives you endure only around the holidays. Old-fashioned, yes, but not weak. It's strong enough to cut through three helpings of Thanksgiving dinner.

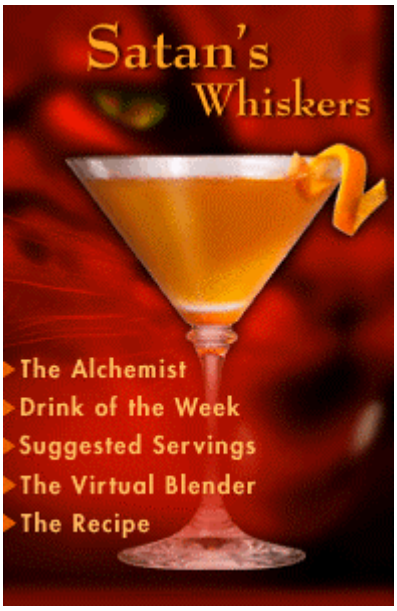
First, we combine a teaspoon of sugar with a splash of water and two dashes of Angostura bitters in the bottom of a large tumbler, then we toss in a cherry and an orange wedge. After muddling the ingredients into a thick citrus paste, we add either 2 ounces bourbon or 2 ounces rye, then fill it with ice and give it a good stir.

As our clan bickers over the sweet pickles and cranberry sauce at the dinner table, we contemplate this drink's supposed birth more than a hundred years ago, whether bourbon or rye was first used, and whether others along the way found it as soothing around the holidays as we do. The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book of 1931 credits Colonel James E. Pepper, proprietor of the once-celebrated "Old 1776" whiskey, for introducing - or at least inspiring - the Old Fashioned at that bar (author Albert Stevens Crockett, historian of the Old Waldorf, can't quite recall which). The colonel was a member of the blue-blooded Pendennis Club in Louisville, where a young bartender actually mixed it first. Of course, that's only one version of the drink's story. Those familiar with the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 - in which Uncle Sam tried to enforce an excise tax in western Pennsylvania - insist that the region's rye whiskey producers fled to Kentucky with the Old Fashioned recipe in tow. We try to remain neutral on the matter, and like the Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book, tell the drink's tale but make a nonpartisan call for merely "whiskey" in the recipe.

Whether mixed with rye or bourbon, the first sip of an Old Fashioned suspends a slight hint of cold cherry and orange over our tastebuds. Eventually, though, the throat comes alive,

and we smile as the home fire burns inside us ever so gently. At some point, the drink transforms from a bouquet of cherry and oranges into the brimstone and fire of whiskey. The Old Fashioned, with its layered taste, is an open invitation for both the whiskey lover and the froufrou cocktail drinker. It's frilly but disciplined: Our cocktail compadres compare it to a good old-fashioned spanking.

Satan's Whiskers



Long forgotten since the late '30s, a Satan's Whiskers soothes the savage at twilight. A rich digestif with a distracting taste whose ingredients are always enjoyed but rarely identified, this cocktail reminds imbibers that not all behavior is becoming. Author Joseph Lanza went as far to claim the cocktail hour as "a ceremonial disunion of man from beast." We don't quite buy that, but when we sip this drink, we certainly like the idea.

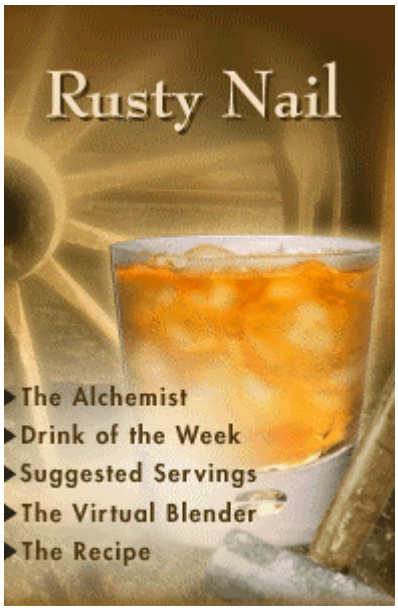
The Satan's Whiskers also satisfies our bent toward incidental dramatics. As if its name weren't inviting enough to well-mannered rogues, this drink has two versions: straight and curled. When properly made, both recipes balance 1/2 ounce gin, 1/2 ounce each of sweet and dry vermouth, 1/2 ounce orange juice, and a dash of orange bitters. Add 1/2 ounce Grand Marnier and the whiskers are straight, but add 1/2 ounce Curaçao and they're curled.

We contend that the "curled" Satan's Whiskers is more diabolic, but The Alchemist insists that that's far from the case, surmising that the first Satan's Whiskers was made with Grand Marnier and that somewhere along the way, a bartender ran out of the liqueur. Rather than disappoint, the mixer improvised and used orange Curaçao, a cordial with a similar but lighter taste and color. We sip our Satan's Whiskers curled if it's still light outside and straight if it's not.

Inevitably, we end up contemplating how such a nice drink could have been dubbed with such a portentous name. We'd blame the Temperance Society, but with Ambrose Bierce, Master of the Macabre and all-around cynical wag, defining "teetotaler" as "One who abstains from strong drink, sometimes totally, sometimes tolerably totally" in his The Devil's Dictionary of 1911, who's to say that someone like him didn't name the drink out of spite.

Nonetheless, a request for Satan's Whiskers - straight or curled - works nicely for instilling dread (if not fright) in most bartenders, though we're not sure whether the drink's name or recipe manages that. We never hesitate to order it by name around Halloween or on evenings under a full moon at bars displaying the ever fulsome Elvira posters. Once served, we recite from Richard Cavendish's The Black Arts for further effect: "Some medieval alchemists thought that alcohol was a form of the quintessence, the pure fifth element of which the heavens are made."

Rusty Nail



Sounding much rougher than it really is, the Rusty Nail came about during the 1950s, when imbibers wanted postwar coddling without seeming insipid. For a time when staid and sanitized were safe options, even in the form of scotch and sodas, and gin and tonics, the Rusty Nail was the drink for those who recognized their weakness.

Made with 1 1/2 ounces blended scotch and 1/2 ounce Drambuie, stirred with cracked ice and then poured into a chilled tumbler with peaks of ice, the Rusty Nail tries to call up the fierceness of the Rob Roy, the cocktail named after our favorite cattle thief and Jacobite guerilla. But the sweet heather honey of Drambuie comforts instead of kicks, and reminds us that even young pretenders like this cordial's laird, Bonnie Prince Charlie, are easily forgiven.

Despite this drink's obvious Scottish ties, its recipe is purely an American bastardization of two liquors usually sipped straight, at least in that country. Some say the drink got its name from immigrant Scot bartenders stirring the cocktail with a rusty nail before serving it to their American patrons. But we suspect the drink's name has more to do with its color.

Although easily ordered at any fine establishment, we no longer request the Rusty Nail at our local Scottish pub, the Edinburgh Castle. Having recently tried, we received a look of such disgust that we suddenly felt like tourists in our own town. Needless to say, we promptly changed our order to a scotch on the rocks.

We'd like to note that the Sultan of Single Malts, Stuart Macelan Ramsay, was far more sympathetic to our predilection for the Rusty Nail. Although he's never seen it ordered in Scotland, he assures us that it can't be much worse than what many Scots do: mix lemonade with blended scotch. Besides, he tells us, blended scotch was created as a mixer for thin-blooded Victorians. Ah, we knew we'd like Mr. Ramsay the moment we read about his legendary Potathlon, "a synthesis of Gaelic hedonism and athletic prowess involving the potato."

Mint Julep

We'd sip this fine bourbon and mint elixir on Derby Day only if we were at least 10 miles from the track. As far as we're concerned, the Kentucky Derby is slowly slaying this classic summer cocktail with its sorry fake dispensed from drink guns and served to imbibers certain to find its sugary mint syrup distasteful, if not poisonous.

No less an authority than Hunter S. Thompson described the Derby as a scene of "decadent and depraved ... people, most of them staggering drunk." Even the Kentucky Derby Museum's curator, Candace Perry, won't defend the event, saying that with 140,000 people ordering more than 100,000 Mint Juleps and 100,000 hot dogs and other linear meats, the cheapening of the julep was bound to happen. A representative from Churchill Downs compares the predicament to that of McDonald's: "You know the first burger cooked for McDonald's was the best, and well the rest is just that - the rest."

For us, this only slightly softens the blow that the Mint Julep has been vilified as toxic by imbibers worldwide. Most, no doubt, have never tasted a properly concocted Mint Julep. As far as the Mint Julep being synonymous with the South, well, a poll by the University of North Carolina debunks that myth: The majority of Southerners - 74 percent, in fact - had never tasted the drink.

Contrary to the jaundiced press reports that appear every year around race time, the Mint Julep is a fine libation when made with 4 ounces bourbon, 6 sprigs of mint, 2 tablespoons simple syrup, and shaved ice. Basic ingredients aside, this simple concoction is mired in mixing dictums started by the South's well-heeled gentility around the turn of the century in hopes of removing this drink from its working-class heritage.

The racetrack's clubhouse began mixing Mint Juleps around 1875 out of convenience - the mint was right out back, and the bourbon was well-stocked within. According to Ms. Perry, the Mint Julep probably didn't become the track's signature libation until 1938, when track management began charging 75 cents for the drink and the small glass vessel it came in.

In Charleston Receipts, Colonel Aiken Simons's julep recipe from the late 1800s says that to crush or not to crush is debatable and depends on the strength of the mint. Nonetheless, he stipulates that the mint should indeed be crushed in the glass and left to stand for a while before the drink is mixed.

We follow the lead of the colonel, though we're indifferent on other matters of common disagreement. Whether a mixologist uses powdered or granulated sugar is of little interest to us, and we take our juleps served in glass, silver, or pewter. We let personal taste and geographic locale settle such debates.

If we're sipping Mint Juleps in Kentucky, we accept a straw in our drink. But when in Virginia, we dare not ask for one, knowing such a request will only encourage the gentlest of bartenders to rant about the ridiculousness of serving distilled spirits with something designed for soda sipping. But be warned: Several other states - including Maryland, Georgia, and Mississippi - as well two other countries - England and Canada - lay claim to this drink.

John Davis, a traveler from Britain and a Virginian plantation tutor, seems to have first mentioned the Mint Julep, in his 1803 Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States: a "Dram of spirituous liquor that has mint in it, taken by Virginians of a morning."

Whether or not Kentuckians can claim to have originated the Mint Julep, it is now indelibly linked to the state. Bourbon - America's only native spirit - can by legal definition come from Kentucky only. However, we're obliged by good conscience to mention the stance of most Virginians: They used to own Bourbon County, from which this whiskey hails.

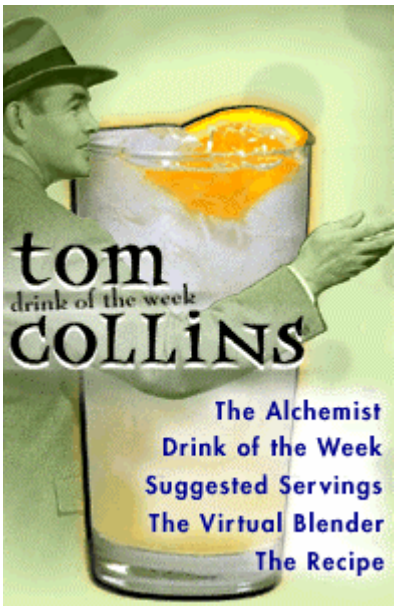
Richard Barksdale Harwell wrote a treatise in 1975 on the matter: "Clearly the Mint Julep originated in the northern Virginia tidewater, spread soon to Maryland, and eventually all along the seaboard and even to transmontane Kentucky."

We suspect that's how Harwell accounts for the infamous 1842 night in a Baltimore hotel when Charles Dickens argued with Washington Irving about the merits of a particularly large julep. "It was quite an enchanted julep," Dickens later wrote, "and carried us among innumerable people and places that we both knew. That julep held out far into the night, and my memory never saw [Irving] afterwards otherwise than as bending over it, with his straw, with an attempted air of gravity."

We often try to copy this air of gravity, and if we're annoyed by a mixer's barside manner - particularly if he's retailing silly julep lore about glassware while serving our drink with snow-cone ice - we burst his bubble by mentioning that Samuel Pepys, an English (no, not American) government official, was drinking "cans of good julep" back in the 1660s.

If we've only had one Mint Julep, we're adequately embarrassed by such an outburst, though inevitably we console ourselves with words penned by William Grimes: "If the mark of a great cocktail is the number of arguments it can provoke and the number of unbreakable rules it generates, the Mint Julep may be America's preeminent classic, edging out the Martini in a photo finish."

Tom Collins, and his brother



Chances are you've already met the Collins boys. These tall summer soldiers returned from the war as popular summer slings to be ordered at any reputable watering hole.

The oldest sibling - the Tom Collins - is made with 2 ounces gin, 1 ounce lemon juice and a teaspoon sugar, and topped with soda water. It's the overshadowing patriarch of the Collins family, which makes us sympathetic to the other brother, the long-forgotten John Collins. We never seem to get around to calling on this drink, once made with Holland gin but now mixed with bourbon.

We've heard that the Tom Collins was named after its creator, who in turn called the John Collins after his brother. We can't argue with the common-sense appeal of this notion, though we're not quite sold on it. As far as the Tom Collins goes, we suspect the name has more to do with the original sweet gin used, known as Old Tom gin. Collins? Well, maybe that was the bartender's surname.

Nearly all bars pour English dry gin as a base for both the Tom and the John Collins (this accounts for the widespread confusion over the difference between the two siblings, as David A. Embury points out in The Art of Mixing Drinks of 1958). The original John Collins was made with the overly flavorful Holland gin. However, since Holland gin is often hard to come by, English dry gin is a common substitute. Unfortunately, this gives rise to a drink with two names.

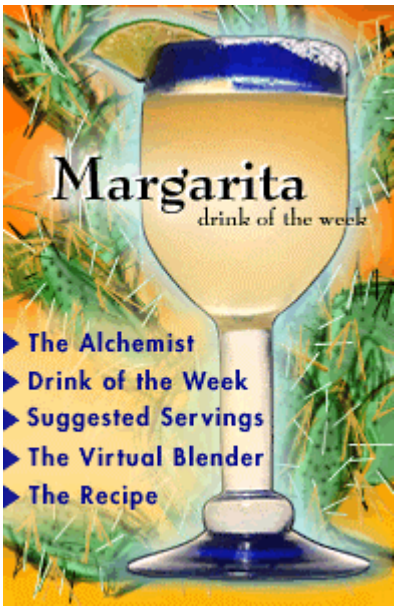
To complicate matters, the John Collins - as we previously mentioned - is now most commonly made with whiskey, though you'll still come across bartenders who insist a Tom Collins and a John Collins are identical twins. That's why we always say the drink's name and call out the ingredients - just to make certain that we and the bartender are friends with the same Tom.

By the '50s, the Collins boys had - as some others would say - married down, shedding much of the drink's original post-war seriousness and mixing with the likes of vodka. Soon the family expanded to include numerous cousins, like Pedro, Sandy, Mike, Brandy, and Jack, with the Singapore Sling not far behind.

The Tom Collins even has a glass named in its honor: the Collins, which holds 12, 14, or even 16 ounces. If we're served a Collins in anything but its namesake glass, we send it back - certain that any other vessel won't suit the effervescence of this drink.

On those warm late nights when we're tempted to call an old friend or mom and pop for obvious advice and comforting, we order a Tom Collins, knowing it's far too late. As we sip a drink or two, we piece together the sensible thing to do.

Margarita



Few other classic cocktails have had to contend against as many base influences as the Margarita. The drink has been so besmirched that few realize it is a genuine cocktail dating back to the early '30s, not some lemon Slurpee concocted for guzzling by the pool at Club Med.

The Margarita hails from Mexico and is revered by gringos whose weak gullets are menaced by straight tequila, the exotic liquor of leisure. Despite devaluation by corporate restaurant chains, the Margarita continues to garner our respect when we're in search of a respite from life's doldrums.

Out of principle and homage to this drink, we never order it frozen, though we may let a careful bartender flash blend [569KBytes .mov] it. For us, a proper Margarita requires the juice of half a lemon and half a lime, 1 1/2 ounces tequila, and an ounce of Cointreau shook in a shaker full of ice. We always request that the rim of the glass be moistened with a lime garnish and then dusted with fine kosher salt. Although we prefer small flecks of ice in our Margaritas, we certainly don't balk when they're served on the rocks.

On el Cinco de Mayo, we let the salt and tequila from a few Margaritas transport us to Mexico during the heyday of 1862, just after the Mexican defeat of the French at Puebla la heroica. As we conjure an image of French troops - naïvely proffering baguettes as sop for the people of Puebla - we vow to defend the Margarita from mini-mall madness. But first we need another, to bolster el coraje.

Cointreau

In very ancient bars, you can find bottles of cordials produced by Cointreau. But today, only the orange-flavored triple sec produced by Cointreau is readily available. It is by far the best triple sec.

Cointreau is less sweet than other triple secs, and when pouring a classic cocktail the proportions are always calculated based on Cointreau. If you are stuck with another triple sec, use a little less.

Lemon Drop

Ever since the renowned bartender Jerry Thomas reportedly mixed the first martini at San Francisco's Occidental Hotel in the late 1800s, the city has laid claim to being the capital of the Cocktail Nation.

We've always liked San Francisco, so we won't dispute its claim. But to set the stage for this week's drink, we must delve into San Francisco's somewhat tarnished past.

In the winter of 1969, San Francisco became home to the world's first - or at least best-known - fern bar. Known as Henry Africa's, the bar pushed girl drinks: mixed drinks potent enough to compete with the three-letter psychedelics of the '60s, but sweet enough to mask any taste of alcohol for kids weaned on cherry cough syrup and pink baby aspirin.

Although we'd opt for a peyote smoothie before touching most of these drinks, there is one cocktail from the fern bars that we'll sip - the Lemon Drop. While unabashedly sweet, this drink never went the sickly sweet way of the offensive potations that spawned the "shooters" of the '80s.

With only a teaspoon of sugar, 1 1/2 ounces of citrus vodka, and 3/4 ounce of lemon juice, the Lemon Drop maintains the edge of a cocktail when shaken with cracked ice, offering a sweet respite from a hot afternoon or an overheated bar.

When reminiscing about big-haired dancing queens and electric light orchestras, we'll request the drink's glass frosted. If we're in the mood for a little imbroglio, we'll have the bartender add 1/4 ounce Cointreau and only 1/2 teaspoon of sugar to the drink, which inevitably susses out those bartenders who have been watching too many James Bond films.

As these so-called mixologists try to convince us that we've just ordered a lemon vodka martini, we'll merely smile and remind ourselves that one Lemon Drop too many only makes for a hangover, not a point well taken.

Black Velvet

We wouldn't paint Elvis on black velvet, and we certainly wouldn't drink green beer on Saint Patrick's Day. But to honor Ireland's patron saint, who banished snakes from the island way back in 441 AD, we would sip a few Black Velvets.

One-quarter Guinness to three-quarters champagne, a Black Velvet combines sparkling wine's verismo with Guinness's unaffectedness for a smooth spritzer with a rich taste.

On one or two occasions, a bartender has tried to add a green hue to our Black Velvets with a few ounces of crème de menthe, the supposed liqueur of the pope that's dusted off and used only once a year. We can only surmise that the pope is carried around in a chair because of the effects of the Green Monster, and we caution our readers not to place much faith in the view that what you drink on Saint Patrick's Day should be green.

Mom recommends sipping a Black Velvet when we're feeling a little anemic. High in iron, Guinness revives a dampened spirit with its roasted barley and domestically grown grain. In fact, blood donors in Ireland receive a pint or two of Guinness, instead of crackers or cookies, to help them recover and (presumably) lure them back for another donation in a few months.

For this St. Paddy's Day, we may follow the advice of an Irish friend and watch the local parade from the corner of Market and Spear before heading to a decidedly non-Irish pub to savor and toast his heritage, sans green beer or leprechauns. As we follow the golden mean, sipping our Guinness cocktails, we may carefully broach the Troubles associated with other Irish liquors, noting one of life's great ironies: Bushmills and Jameson, the Irish whiskeys primarily distinguished by the politics of religion, have been owned by the same French company Pernod for about 10 years.

Aperitif

A good aperitif is like a ringing bell to Pavlov's dog. As potent appetizers, aperitifs ease the transition from office to dinner party.

Aperitifs can be wine based, alcohol based, bitter based, or a mixture of all three, as in the Negroni. Although there are many aperitif wines, we prefer the cocktail variety. A good aperitif cocktail is a balance of chilled alcohol and juices that perks the palate while easing the mind.

Mai Tai

Just as we never say no to watching The African Queen, we never turn down a Mai Tai. We can count the number of times we've made this drink at home on two fingers, but we can hardly recount the one or two evenings a year that this potent concoction gets the best of us while we're out on the town.

We'd entertain more prejudices about the Mai Tai, if only we hadn't had such fun drinking it. The irresistible irreverence of this drink always takes us from the doldrums to the tropics.

We salute Victor Bergeron, known to the world as "Trader Vic," for creating this drink even before he visited the tropics. By all accounts, Vic whipped up the first Mai Tai in 1944 at his Hinky Dink's restaurant in Emeryville, just over the bridge from San Francisco. Two friends who had been visiting from Tahiti requested something special from the bar. Sensing that the world needed yet another rum drink, Trader Vic concocted the Mai Tai from Jamaican rum, fresh lime, curaçao, and rock candy syrup.

Just as Trader Vic tempered Polynesian cuisine to the tastes of North Americans, we've altered his drink recipe. Rock candy just isn't our style. In a shaker, combine one ounce white rum, a half ounce of triple sec or Cointreau (though, really, using a dry French liqueur in a Mai Tai is a little like slathering Mrs. Butterworth's syrup on a crêpe).

Normally, we insist on only fresh juices in our cocktails, but we're not as picky with this drink. A quarter-ounce of Rose's lime juice, one-and-a-half ounces each of orange and pineapple juice in a tall glass with ice, and a hefty dash of Grenadine, topped with a half ounce of dark rum, creates an alluring layered look.

The recipe for any Mai Tai is so dominated by sweet flavors that if a bartender screws up, we never notice. By the second or third round, the bartender may even have us shouting, "Mai Tai - toe a&eacute!" which means, "Out of this world - the best!"

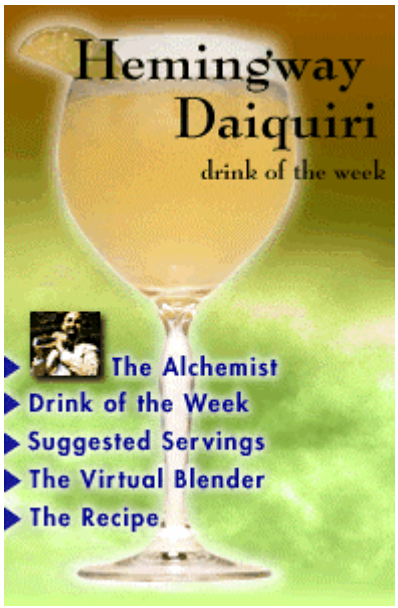
Maiden's Prayer

Prohibition prompted a renaissance of cocktail creativity. Forced to mix with bootleg liquor, bartenders created some of our favorite froufrou drinks to hide the imperfect taste of low-quality alcohol. Cubanolas, League of Nations, Monkey Glands, and Bosom Caressers are just a taste of the cocktails that died merciful deaths after the roaring '20s, but we think their cousin, the Maiden's Prayer, deserves resurrection, especially for Valentine's Day.

Also known as Between the Sheets (usually after drinking several), the drink is as strong an indication of underage drinking as is the Sloe Gin Fizz. Light and fruity, but with a sour bite, the Maiden's Prayer goes down easy, with its alcohol hidden behind the lemon and Cointreau.

To mix a Maiden's Prayer, shake equal parts light rum, Cointreau, gin, and fresh-squeezed lemon juice with cracked ice. Meyer lemons are definitely preferred by cocktail connoisseurs for their more orange-like flavor. Serve straight up in a cocktail glass with a twist of lemon for that extra touch.

Hemingway Daiquiri



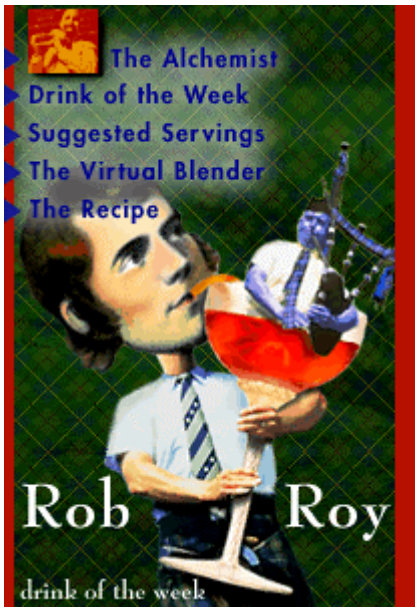
Hemingway taunted death in the streets of Pamplona running from bulls, drove an ambulance during the First World War, and drowned himself in Daiquiris in Cuba.

Named for its biggest fan, the drink is a sugarless variation on the traditional lime Daiquiri. The cocktail uses maraschino flavoring as its sweetener and a dash of grapefruit juice to enhance the overall tart taste of the drink.

When Prohibition stemmed the flow of legal drinks in the Estados Unidos, Cuba became a haven for those desperate to relieve their thirst, and Hemingway had a mighty one. Hemingway made famous not only his Daiquiri, but also El Floridita, the bar where Constantino Ribailagua mixed Hemingway's drink of choice.

Served straight up in a cocktail glass, the Hemingway Daiquiri is mixed with the juice of an eighth of a grapefruit and one lime, a dash of maraschino liqueur, and 1 1/2 ounces light rum. Consuming large numbers of these drinks is almost certain to result in the drinker composing vast amounts of great literary work that will get heaps of praise for all time.

Rob Roy



When all else fails, we turn to the Rob Roy. We can count on this drink, with its simple recipe and subtle kick, to put a happy ending on the day.

Two ounces scotch, half an ounce sweet vermouth, stirred and poured through a strainer, with an optional dash of bitters - a bartender would have to be a real louse to mess this one up. If a greenhorn tries to slide us a Roy Rogers, a grenadine-and-Coke concoction reminiscent of cough syrup, we politely send it back and request a whiskey on the rocks. If we think the bartender has been around the block or we've had a really miserable day, we'll ask for a Santiago Scotch Plaid.

During the summer, we take this drink on the rocks. In the winter, up.

By the time we've finished our second Rob Roy, we're feeling ferocious again, and after the third, we're prepared to head into battle, naked under our kilts.

Bloody Mary

The 1950s: bland, flavorless, tasteless. This staid and sanitized postwar world was reflected in that era's liquor of choice - vodka. The Bronx, the Aviation, and even the Martini fell victim to the vodka rage that swept a nation. And sadly, vodka remains the best-selling liquor on the market today.

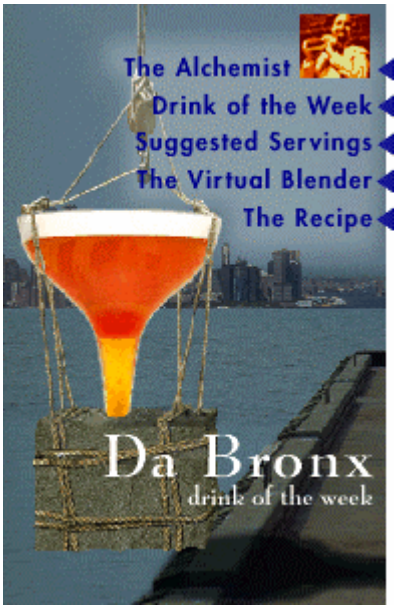
One drink, however, broke the dull mold of vodka cocktails: the Bloody Mary - a spicy mix of lemon and tomato juices, Worcestershire sauce, and Tabasco.

We find that after an evening spent drinking our favorite cocktails, downing a delicious Bloody Mary the morning after is the perfect hangover cure. (Not that we endorse the despicable habit of consuming alcohol until falling into a drunken stupor.)

In an Old Fashioned glass, mix three drops Tabasco (heavy on the Tabasco is a rookie maneuver to be avoided), the juice [443Kbyte .mov] of half a lemon, seven drops of Worcestershire sauce, a couple shakes of fresh ground pepper, a dash of celery salt, three ounces of tomato juice, and 1 1/2 ounces of vodka. Stir vigorously with a bar spoon.

For a sweeter Bloody Mary, add a few more shakes of Worcestershire sauce (pronounced "what's-this-here-sauce"). Remember, this drink is like a good stew: mix it in the morning and enjoy it throughout the day. It will only get better.

Da Bronx



People used to love to disrespect the Bronx, until the drink, like the borough, reached a state of general disapprobation rendering further criticism superfluous. But we resist these trends. If we come across a bartender who seems to possess a rare knowledge of history, we happily order a Bronx cocktail.

Perhaps the Bronx cocktail fell into disfavor in the '30s because it contained orange juice, which seemed like an affectation. Little did the purists realize how low mixologists would descend in later decades, when potent concoctions of vodka and citrus became popular.

The Bronx is an earlier, subtler version of the fruit-juice drink: just a squeeze of fresh orange, equal parts sweet and dry vermouth, and an ounce of good gin. Shake [405Kbyte .mov] it hard over ice, and pour it into a regular six-ounce chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with a cherry or a small wedge of orange.

Pale orange in color and only ordinarily intoxicating, the Bronx banishes resentment and excites a kind of calm enthusiasm for daily life.

Dip into a Daiquiri

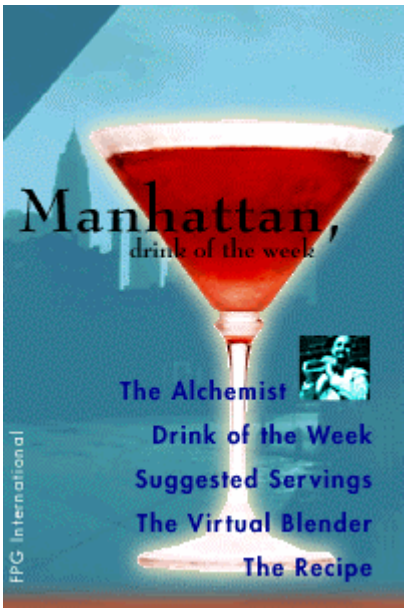
History credits a gringo with creating the Daiquiri, but we dare to dispute this claim, guessing that Cuban residents enjoyed this cocktail long before American engineer Jennings Cox stepped onto the island. Cox was sent to Daiquiri, a small town on the east coast of Cuba, to work in the iron mines with a group of thirsty comrades. Supposedly, the group often enjoyed the refreshing rum and lime beverage after a hard day's work. His chance acquaintance, Admiral Lucius Johnson, took the recipe and loads of rum back to the mainland, where he introduced the drink to the Army and Navy Club in Washington, DC. The link thus created between the Daiquiri and American national security is still celebrated today in the club's Daiquiri Lounge.

Further accentuating the Daiquiri's imperialist past is the role played by the prince of presidential style himself - JFK. The Daiquiri was the prez's preferred before-dinner drink. This factoid, when revealed to the American public, brought the Daiquiri fame and popularity rivaled only by the Martini. Regrettably, the Daiquiri's stature - and its good name - have suffered since the emergence of TGIF Friday's happy hour, where this drink has been promoted as an alcoholic Slurpee.

The Daiquiri's classic recipe of rum, sugar, and lime juice is deceptively simple. Too much rum and the taste becomes overpowering; too much lime and it's bitter and sharp; too much sugar and you might as well toss it out.

Our standard mix is one teaspoon simple syrup, a jigger of light rum, and the juice of one lime. Always roll the lime between your hands before slicing and squeezing [443k .mov] and, of course, always use fresh fruit. Never use Rose's lime juice; you'll end up with a mutated Gimlet. Shake the ingredients with cracked ice and serve straight up in a cocktail glass with a slice of lime as garnish.

Manhattan



Hailing from a time when men wore hats, the Dodgers were in Brooklyn, and a joint was still your local bar, the Manhattan held court when the cocktail was de rigueur. It also gave blue bloods a chance to slug back a bit of whiskey. On the East Coast, you're likely to get rye whiskey; from Kentucky westward, expect bourbon.

We take our Manhattans two parts bourbon, one part sweet vermouth, shaken over ice, and poured through a strainer. Occasionally, as with other vermouth cocktails, we'll take 'em dry or perfect, but never overly sweet. Let the vermouth take the edge off the bourbon, but never let it compromise the flavor. Wise bartenders add a dash of bitters to this libation, which would otherwise tend to be overly sweet.

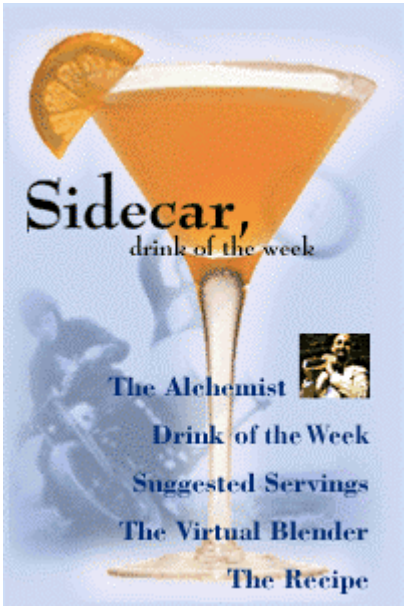
Although we generally abstain from Manhattans during the summer, we're drinking them up now that it's past Labor Day. Of course, the nice thing about San Francisco is that during the course of a month you can find the right day for any drink. This fall, you'll find us at a certain zinc-capped bar, sipping this aesthetic drink from a cocktail glass, getting our ass kicked (in the most genteel fashion) by dose after dose of true Kentucky sour mash. We don't become more and more clever with each round, as we do with Sapphire Martinis, rather we become louder and slightly petulant. And then we catch ourselves, take in our environs, and decide that the one we're drinking is our last.

Cointreau

In very ancient bars, you can find bottles of cordials produced by Cointreau. But today, only the orange-flavored triple sec produced by Cointreau is readily available. It is by far the best triple sec.

Cointreau is less sweet than other triple secs, and when pouring a classic cocktail the proportions are always calculated based on Cointreau. If you are stuck with another triple sec, use a little less.

Sidecar



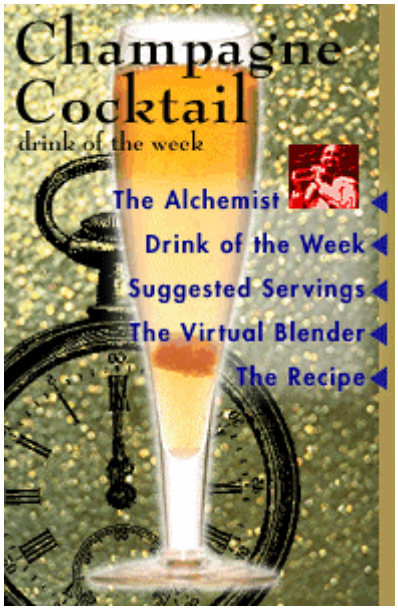
Two parts strong, one part sweet, and one part sour. These are the golden proportions of the classic cocktail, the Pythagorean formula of bibulous bliss. If you make the strong parts cognac, the sweet part Cointreau, and the sour part fresh-squeezed lemon, and if you shake it over ice vigorously [405k .mov] and serve it up with a twist, you will get instant transport back to the days before vodka arrived on the scene and ruined everything. If you can make a brilliant Sidecar, you can make any classic cocktail.

The sidecar has been in full resurgence during the last year, meaning that both sublime and execrable versions have appeared in the bars we frequent. Out on the town, it is easy to tell if the bartender knows what he or she is doing. A neatly sugar-coated rim, a pale opacity, a biting chill off the glass, and a tartness that makes it impossible to tell where the lemon lets off and the Cointreau begins, means that you've got a live one. If you taste sweet-and-sour mix, you're fucked.

One advantage of developing an attachment to this drink is that you have at least a 10 percent chance of getting one at any non-dive bar, and the chances are rising. The Sidecar fails to appear in our Gentleman's

Companion of 1939, but H. L. Mencken mentions it as one of "a dozen standard varieties," suggesting it was well-established by prohibition. Some recipes call for equal parts brandy and Cointreau. As always, we are partial to the classic proportions.

Champagne Cocktail



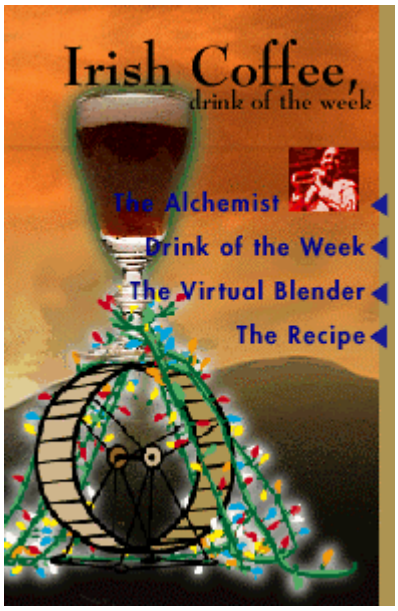
Six ounces of champagne and a sugar cube soaked in Angostura bitters is all it takes to make a sophisticated cocktail for the new year. Champagne is recognized as the universal symbol of good news, and this cocktail's simple recipe shows that life doesn't have to be difficult to be enjoyed.

As we drop the saturated sugar cube into a tall flute glass, then slowly add champagne and a lemon twist, we remind ourselves of this cocktail's amazing longevity. Although many cocktail recipes have enjoyed sustained popularity, the Champagne Cocktail has endured through society's fickle alterations of taste. The earliest reference to this drink in our library goes back to the Gentleman's Companion of 1939. But we know that the Champagne Cocktail was named one of the 10 best cocktails of 1934 by Esquire magazine, and we've found hints of other references taking this cocktail back to the early 19th century.

This drink resists being tied to the staid reputation of true champagne, which has its roots in the méthode champenoise devised in the early 1700s by a Benedictine monk, the original Dom Perignon. The reality of drinking champagne neat is that you must drop at least US$50 for a superb bottle. With the Champagne Cocktail, you can trust the bitters to take the edge off a lesser wine. For this drink, we never spend more than $10 to $18 for a serviceable domestic bottle.

Friends who insist they hate any champagne drink have been victims of a $3 to $8 bottle of carbonated asti spumante. Implore them to take two sips of a Champagne Cocktail; a properly made Champagne Cocktail should bring them around.

Irish Coffee



As the days become colder and darker, and the holiday season descends upon us, we offer up the Irish Coffee as the perfect respite for the stressful days ahead.

We dispense with all pomp and circumstance while making this drink. It's not the selection or presentation that has made the Irish Coffee worthwhile, but rather its relaxing and rejuvenating qualities. Add an ounce of your favorite Irish whiskey to your coffee, and mix in a teaspoon of sugar. Then reward yourself by topping this drink with a dollop of cream.

We'd never put a 30-year-old single malt or some froufrou coffee flavor in an Irish Coffee - they'd only detract from the drink's real virtues. Instead, we celebrate this blue-collar drink's fine taste, which always manages to rise above the quality of its ingredients. You can pull any whiskey and any brand of coffee from your cupboard and still mix a good Irish Coffee.

In the early 1900s, bosses gave their factory workers whiskey for their coffee. During World War I, the English army had its recruits add liquor to their coffees to ward off chill and fear of battle.

Our circumstances don't involve anything quite so heroic. We only demand that the coffee be steaming hot, so that the first trace of the drink is a comforting vapor, followed by a heads-up coffee-and-whiskey taste. Of course, we're grateful that we can get this drink at any bar.

We always take the time to whip fresh whipping cream, so the whiskey can flow through it. Beware: canned cream and Cool Whip merely stagnate on top of an Irish Coffee.

We've been told that this drink first emigrated to the States from Ireland in the '50s. The Buena Vista Cafe near Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco insists that the recipe was first brought over by Stanton Delaplane, a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle and a Buena Vista patron.

Although we'd like to believe this story (after all, there is a plaque at the Shannon Airport in Ireland that says it's true), we know people have been spiking their coffee since time immemorial. But we'll be the first to admit that one of our favorite San Francisco pastimes is to spend a Sunday afternoon drinking Irish Coffees at the Buena Vista, watching the tourists stand in line for trolley rides as we forget our holiday blahs.

Combustible Edison Cocktail

From the band that perfected lounge Muzak and coined the deathless phrase "Cocktail Nation," we have the Combustible Edison cocktail [movie: 683KBytes .mov].

Composed of two parts brandy to one part Campari and fresh lemon juice, the band's namesake drink warms the body and stimulates the spirit while putting on a fine show of shadowy blue flames atop the brandy.

The Millionaire (we liked him from the moment we heard his credentials: a gin man with the sophistication to appreciate Campari) says the hardest thing about making this drink is pouring the flaming brandy into a cocktail glass. The pyrotechnics of bartending dictate that one never be intimidated by the flame: anyway, it's the coolest of fires and extinguishes itself moments after hitting the citrus and Campari.

Unless the brandy is thoroughly heated and swiftly poured into a chilled cocktail glass with Campari and lemon juice, it won't put on much of a show. Of course, some days we just don't have the energy to drag out the Bunsen burner for this drink, no matter how much we like the aroma of fervent brandy. Instead, we opt for the band's Edisonian cocktail: the same ingredients minus the heat. We can count on the Campari kick of the Edisonian to revive us for the evening ahead.

Before Combustible Edison released its 1994 I, Swinger album, The Millionaire decided the band needed a drink all its own. In a style reminiscent of the illustrious bartender Jerry Thomas, who created and showcased the first flaming drink, the Blue Blazer, in the early 19th century, Combustible Edison band members and a few loyal supporters headed to a mixology lab where they spent three exhausting nights in search of the perfect Combustible Edison drink. Having succeeded, the band published the recipe on its album and began a cocktail crusade, bolstered by the group's US and European tour.

Join us this Wednesday in Club Wired, with a Combustible Edison cocktail and The Millionaire, as he updates us on the Cocktail Revolution and the latest antics of his swinging, sybaritic band.

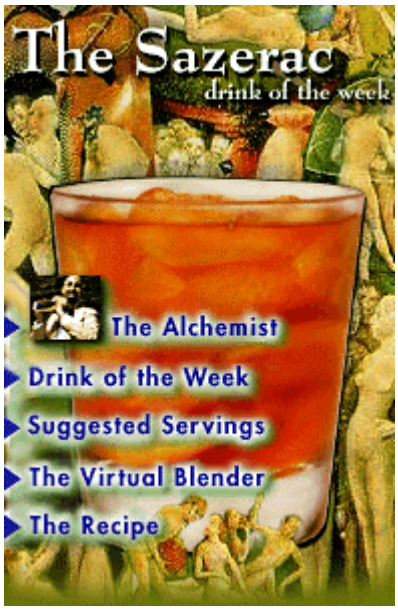
Pernod

A 90-proof aperitif that was once synonymous with absinthe, Pernod, one of the original distillers of absinthe, is as close as you'll get to that now-outlawed French liqueur.

Pernod now uses anise to produce its modern-day substitute.

We like to spend hot summer afternoons sipping on a tall glass filled with shaved ice, one part Pernod, and five parts water.

Sazerac



Dixieland jazz, Tabasco sauce, A Streetcar Named Desire, blackened anything: we've always liked New Orleans. But it was only after we had our first Sazerac, New Orleans's most famous cocktail, that we truly forgave that steamy Southern city for hosting an annual celebration for drunken lunkheads.

Southern legend traces the Sazerac to an eponymous bar, opened in 1859, where drinks were mixed from Sazerac-de-Forge et fils cognac and New Orleans's own Peychaud's bitters. As the craze for absinthe that followed the French-Algerian war swept the city, and local tastes shifted toward whiskeys and away from brandy, the cocktail that today is known as a Sazerac evolved from its simpler predecessor.

In those days, the mixture of rye whiskey, bitters, and sugar would have derived its anise scent from real absinthe (now forbidden because of its reputation for being habit-forming and mania-producing). Today, we pour our shaken rye, sugar, and bitters into a chilled glass just touched by an absinthe substitute, such as Pernod or Ricard.

After you've mastered the traditional Sazerac, a full-bodied drink with layered flavors of rye and licorice and the bite of bitters, try our mixologist's recommendation for a smoother variation on the standard, substituting rum for rye. <Picture: [strike here]>

And next time you have the foolish urge to head to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, do what we do: have a Sazerac and wait it out.

Ramos Fizz

We always start our post-Fat Tuesday fast after sipping New Orleans's most popular cocktail, and we end the Lenten entertainment with the City of Sin's second-favorite cocktail, the Ramos Fizz.

This creamy gin drink might have fared better in popularity had it not been for that awkward time known as Prohibition, when the Ramos brothers of New Orleans were forced to close their establishments' doors (rumor has it, the Feds actually padlocked the doors). Of course, Charles H. Baker Jr. claims in his Gentleman's Companion of 1939 that the world might never have known the original recipe for this drink had the brothers Ramos not been "in a fit of generous aberration" brought on by the "ridiculous drouth of Prohibition."

According to Baker and other historians of mixology, the brothers, especially Henry, the actual creator of the drink, tried their darnedest to keep the recipe secret, from its inception in 1888 until the late-'20s, when, in retaliation against the Feds and with sympathy for their friends, they let the more elusive ingredients slip out.

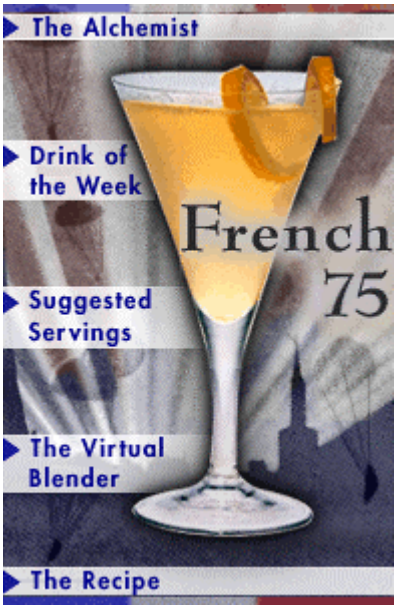
As we sip Ramos Fizzes in the Cliff House at Ocean Beach, we make newcomers guess the ingredients. No one has ever suspected orange-flower water, and few have guessed egg white.

In anticipation of a light brunch, we shake 1 1/2 ounces gin, 1/2 ounce lemon juice, three dashes of orange-flower water, a teaspoon of simple syrup, an egg white, and 2 ounces cream until they become a rich, ropy mixture, which we pour into a large wine goblet and top with soda water. If we're especially in want of warmer spring weather, we'll add a dash or two of vanilla extract and garnish with a flower blossom.

As we sip the dulcifying froth that's always so picture-perfect, we realize how Baker came to write that "the Ramos Fizz has long been synonymous with the finest in all the New Orleans

art" and that "its formula, like history dealing with the dead arts, should be engraved on the tablets of history."

French 75



Sipping a French 75 reminds us that champagne hasn't always signified celebration, but has become one of life's lasting symbols: a drink raised in the hour of hope.

To toast occasions that involve an unknown quantity of fear - such as marriage and war - we mix this cocktail with 5 ounces champagne and 1/4 ounce gin, the spirit that seems to make us smarter. We add 1/4 ounce of both lemon juice and Cointreau for a rounded edge that keeps us from being too reflective.

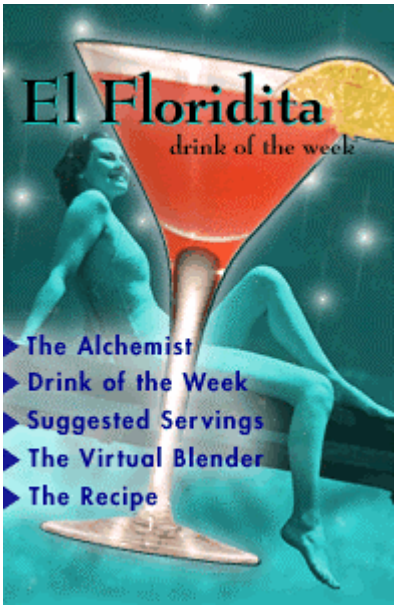
This luscious cocktail was christened by the French republic, which named it after one of the guns used by the French in World War I. An anodyne for fear, the French 75 - sans lemon and Cointreau - was reputedly sipped by French officers before engaging in battle. (Enlisted men merely received a shot of rum or pinard.)

Mordis Eskteins, author of Rites of Spring, suggests that this disparity reminded the recruits of their "disposable status," and ultimately contributed to the widespread mutinies of 1917. Fortunately, those enlisted men who survived the war held no grudge against this fine drink, and upon returning to their cities and villages, asked for it in their local brasseries.

The Esquire Drink Book of 1956 declares champagne's restorative powers worthy of a million testimonials, and its heartening influence on the lonely soul is incalculable. The gin in this cocktail brings a smile to the lips, a purl to the eyes, and steadiness to the mind.

Sadly, however, the French 75 is as forgotten as the promise that the Great War would put an end to war itself. We request it on occasions that suggest a toast - but a toast to something we haven't quite bought into. This effervescent drink raises us out of the trenches of ennui.

El Floridita



Always overshadowed by its younger sibling - a drink with the same name but a different nickname - this Floridita has been forgotten for years by all but the most resolute. About the time of the Noble Experiment, rumrunners regularly journeyed from Florida to Cuba, where many American drinkers and bartenders fled the drought. One particular bar, originally known as La Piña de Plata, became a common port of entry for thirsty expatriates. After the Spanish-American War, "The Silver Pineapple" became El Florida (or El Floridita to its regulars), an establishment credited with creating a handful of classic cocktails, including this one.

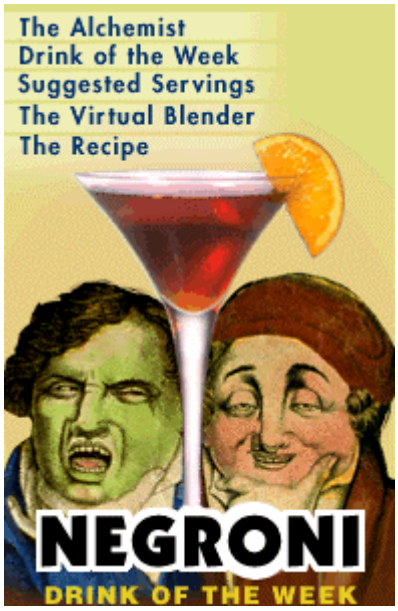
According to William Grimes in Straight Up or On the Rocks, El Floridita was just another bar until Hemingway walked in and wrapped a paw around a sugarless frozen Daiquiri, one of the many creations of Constantino Ribailagua, a Catalonian who started working at the bar during the early 1900s (the establishment dates back to the mid-1800s). Recently, we were assured that El Floridita remains an endearing bar, set in one of Havana's nicest hotels.

Less fabled and less foamy than Hemingway's drink of choice, but no less tasty, this Floridita starts out tart but ends with a chocolate finish so subtle that newcomers to this ruby-red drink always take a second sip before revealing their wonderment. Made with 1 1/2 ounces rum, 1/2 ounce each of lime juice and sweet vermouth, followed by a dash of both white

crème de cacao and grenadine (too much of either and the drink is ruined), this drink - shaken and served up - always makes us feel like we've won the door prize, a confidence we project for the rest of the evening.

Although the ingredients for this drink can be found at just about any bar, we're always particularly impressed if a bartender has put it to memory. And if someone requests a chocolate frappé and a bartender suggests a Floridita instead, we're fans for life.

Camparinete (Negroni)



Made with the bitterest of bitters, there's no fence-sitting when it comes to this cocktail: Either you love it or you hate it. As a most efficient aperitif, we're partial to this ruddy libation when in need of a little color in our cheeks and spring in our step. The heads-up Campari taste makes our throats tingle and our minds decisive and determined. Fortunately, the gin keeps us mindful.

The recipe for a Camparinete cocktail - 1 1/2 ounces gin, 1 1/2 ounces Campari, 1 1/2 ounces sweet vermouth - has been around for a while, maybe even a hundred years. Most people - including those working for the Italian company Campari - can't recall when it first surfaced. But there's a general consensus that during the early '70s Campari decided that the drink ought to be called a Negroni to avoid confusion with all the other Campari cocktails - most of which were also being called Camparinetes.

As always, though, there are a few dissenters. Some insist that the name Negroni is at least tenuously tied to Count Camillo Negroni, a Florentine aristocrat from the '20s who supposedly frequented numerous bars in Italy. From what we're told, the count ordered this drink so often that alchemists of the day began to call the drink by his name.

The name change hasn't fazed this drink's fanatical following. For them, Negroni is synonymous for Campari, and Campari remains, as one chronicler wrote, "beautiful and sparkling red, with a taste and smell that made it impossible to guess its origin; it was like the 24 carats, the four quarterings of nobility." When mixed with the proper amount of gin and garnished with an orange wheel to soften the liqueur's bite, a Negroni gives imbibers sense enough to know that such rankings rarely matter and that Campari's bewildering ads - with their fainting debutantes, Monaco Grand Prix cars, and whining priests - are all just wishful thinking anyway.

Sweet and Dry Vermouth

For most Americans, vermouth is merely a component in their cocktails. For Europeans, though, it's what the Americans, with their extra dry Martinis, have never truly appreciated. Interestingly enough, though, a Martini in Italy or France is a glass of Martini & Rossi vermouth.

Vermouth is white wine infused with herbs and is either sweet or dry, though it comes in three types: rosso, or sweet red; bianco, or sweet white; secco, or dry white.

Years ago, French and Italian vermouths were two very different vermouths. That's why recipes in many classic cocktail books call for either French or Italian vermouth. French vermouth once implied only the dry version, which is made of white wines and a slew of herbs, most distinctly quinine. The traditional Italian, or sweet, type is more bittersweet and made with brandy, herbs, and cochineal coloring. Nowadays, though, both types are made in either country, so the distinction by country is muddied and best handled by referring to each vermouth type as either dry or sweet. The large vermouth houses, such as Cinzano, Boissiere, and Martini & Rossi actually bottle both varieties. Typically, the best dry vermouths still hail from the Languedoc-Rousillon region in the South of France, and the best sweet

vermouths continue to come from Apulia and Sicily in Italy.

The difference in taste between sweet and dry is like night and day. Sweet vermouth, with its blood-red coloring, is like port wine and tastes rich and fruity. We actually know a few people who drink sweet vermouth neat. Extra dry is really just dry vermouth, which is usually reserved for mixing with clear liquors, and is indeed quite dry and acerbic.

The Alchemist has noticed that people have lost their taste for vermouth in favorites like the Manhattan, which is really quite a shame. Both mixers add a level of sophistication to drinks that can't be achieved otherwise.

Alchemist

The noble experiment, with its thousands of speakeasies, did little to keep anyone from enjoying spirituous libations. But it did manage to destroy the bartending profession's reputation and rigor, as previously achieved at such fine establishments as the Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar in New York. Even this hallmark of fine mixing failed to make it through the drought unscathed. In 1929, without the vitality of its famous bar, the Waldorf-Astoria closed quietly, claiming that the construction of the Empire State Building was taking up too much space. Although the establishment reopened on Park Avenue in 1931, the bar was gone, though there were plenty of stations at which soda and water were served.

Whenever buying a cocktail recipe book, I keep the Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar in mind. Its closing symbolized the end of what's now called the Old School of American Bartending, whose heyday lasted from 1897 until 1919. Any bartender's guide from that time is worth buying. Of course, finding such an old book never happens on demand, which is why I consider buying any drink book published before 1960.

Paul Harrington

My favorite and most trusted bar book is, in fact, The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book, written by historian Albert Stevens Crockett, with drink recipes by mixing maestro Joseph Taylor. This classic, with recipes well-established before 1919, meets my other requirements of a good bar book. After checking the publication date, I typically look at the recipes, always searching first for the Moijto. But even if a book fails to include this Cuban classic, I don't necessarily put it down. I look for my other favorites, and if it has the correct classic recipes or interesting variations, I will oftentimes buy it.

Another quality shared by the best bar books is an extensive glossary of spirits and cordials. Names for many of these have often changed over time, so having several books with glossaries or dictionaries is key.

The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book also covers history and events from the brass rail of the bar. Although such background isn't necessary, it's certainly a bonus. Recipes are only half of making a good drink - service, style, and form are important, as well. If you haven't an inkling about how to bartend, however, you'll need more than Crockett's tome, published in 1934. Remember, books of this time were published for professional bartenders; they make assumptions and contain certain elements that may confuse novice mixers. Serving sizes, for instance, were much smaller in those days, and the availability and names of some ingredients, including primary liquors, have changed. If you're just beginning to mix cocktails, find a copy of Grossman's Guide to Wines, Spirits, and Beer, from 1940. Although some of the wine and beer information could certainly be updated, Harold J. Grossman's writing about spirits is timeless.

Two of my other favorite bar books, The Gentleman's Companion and The South American Gentleman's Companion, were written by Charles H. Baker during the '30s. The recipe format of these books isn't particularly easy to follow, but each recipe has an amazing tale. I rarely grab for this book while mixing drinks; rather, I open it while resting in my armchair, nursing a cigar and entertaining the desire to be taken to far-off lands. One of my most cherished possessions is a leather-bound set of The Gentleman's Companion, with one book about exotic food and the other about their suitable beverage accompaniments. You'll

probably pay a high price for Baker's books, though. Well-kept leather-bound sets go from US$50 to $150 at used-book stores and estate sales.

Patrick Gavin Duffy, best known for his plea, "Bartending is an old and honorable trade," produced a fine, no-frills guide for mixing in 1934, called The Official Mixer's Manual. With an inspiring introduction and useful information throughout, Duffy's book is one that I commonly reach for and come across often in used-book stores and at garage sales. (In fact, a friend of mine recently bought a copy for $2 from a thrift store.) Duffy has taken care to organize all his drink recipes by their base ingredient, which is useful for someone concerned with trying different spirits. His book is more helpful to the home mixer than the professional. But if you want several good canapé ideas, search the back of this book.

If you're after tips for hosting a party, the easiest books to find and follow are those by Trader Vic. Out of the many books written by Victor Bergeron, creator of the Mai Tai, I most recommend the Trader Vic's Bartender's Guide, published in 1946. Originally a promotional item to broaden the average Joe's tastes for drinks with Polynesian flavors, this book also managed to demystify, if not oversimplify, the job of a bartender. Chances are you'll be able to find one of Trader Vic's books at a used-book store for less than $10. But you'll have to come across it before I do, because I buy every copy I find, keeping the good ones and using the others as gifts. The recipes in these books aren't always reliable, and their tone is far from classic, but there's plenty of instructional text that will lead you through an evening of merriment.

Somewhat like Trader Vic's books are the Esquire drink books from the '40s and '60s, all of which are practical for the home bartender. In 1957, Bantam books published The Art of Mixing Drinks, based on the Esquire drink books of previous decades. A great pocket resource, The Art of Mixing Drinks qualifies as a classic guide, with all its measurement tables, equipment and spirit descriptions, and bits of history and tradition. The book doesn't include the Mojito, but it covers plenty of other classic Cuban drinks, along with the magazine's favorite, though silly, 365 reasons for having a party.

One book that stands as a proud icon of a generation gone astray, at least in the realm of cocktails, is Playboy's New Host & Bar Book. Wearing polyester may be fun again and bell-bottoms are still great for hiding unpolished shoes, but under no circumstance should this book be considered a cocktail treatise. However, it is useful for putting the '70s into perspective. Compared to the garnishes of that time, the clothes were subdued.

There are a few modern-day books - all published by Charles Schumann, proprietor of Schumann's in Munich - that rival those of the '20s and '30s. Schumann trained in the New York fashion of bartending. His rigor and discipline behind the bar are legendary, and the recipes in his books follow the principles set by the Old School. Although most of his books are in German, his 390-page American Bar, published by Abbeville Press in 1995, costs about $25 in the United States and it's in English. I once bought a Schumann book solely because it was such a remarkable piece of art. I can't even read German, but it was one of the few times that I judged a book by its cover.

Drink dilemma? The Alchemist can help.

www.hotwired.com/cocktail/archive/index.html