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# CLASSIC COCKTAILS

SAN JUAN ISLANDS AGRICULTURAL GUILD



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# *Introduction*

## *Welcome*

THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME TONIGHT, on a journey through cocktail history. And, of course, for purchasing this party at the Harvest Dinner and Auction, to support the Permanent Farmer's Market Project. Your support is critical to building a Farmer's Market and community center in downtown Friday Harbor, and we greatly appreciate your help!

## *What To Expect Tonight*

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF DRINK RECIPES AVAILABLE TO US, a wealth of knowledge and history and tasty concoctions—in books and available on the internet. Even if we restrict ourselves to drinks that would have been familiar in urban bars and hotels in the 1940's and early 1950's, there's far more than we can sample tonight.

What I've put together tonight is a selection of *cocktail* recipes, in the original sense of the word. In other words, out of all the diverse possibilities, we're going to focus on liquor-driven recipes, with a small number of ingredients (usually including bitters, broadly construed), that are mixed on ice but served "up" in a cocktail (or Martini) glass.

Not all of tonight's recipes *originated* in the 1940's or 1950's, of course. Many of these cocktails have long histories. Many of them continue to evolve today, but we'll try to stay firmly in the era between Pearl Harbor and Sputnik, at least in terms of how we interpret a recipe. Often we'll find that most of the cocktails common after World War II originated in the 1920's or 1930's, which was (despite or perhaps because of Prohibition) an era of intense creativity, particularly in the great hotel bars, such as London's Savoy Hotel. Some of these recipes have grandparents, and occasionally even deep family

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"Cocktail" originally defined a *specific* drink, from what historians can tell. Cocktail was a measure of spirit (usually brandy or whiskey, which meant rye whiskey until recently), a small amount of sweetener (usually sugar syrup with gum arabic, or "gomme"), and a couple of dashes of an herbal tincture (or "biters"), and was very likely born inside the triangle formed by Boston, New York City, and Albany, NY, between 1790 and 1803.

A modern reprinting of the 1930 Savoy Cocktail Book, by the great and innovative Harry Craddock, is now available, and worth having in every serious bar.

trees, which date back to the great era of cocktail experimentation between the Civil War and 1900.

### *What Not to Expect*

**HIGHBALLS**... there's certainly nothing wrong with a well-made gin and tonic, a true Mojito is wonderful in the heat of summer.

But let's face it, you already know how to make a gin and tonic, or a scotch and soda. My goal tonight is to make sure you walk out of here know more about classic cocktails and feel equipped to try making them yourself at home. And hopefully, convince you that it's well worth the effort.

**VODKA**... is omitted entirely from tonight's menu because it was largely unknown in the United States until mid-century. The rights to the Smirnov brand were bought from "White" Russian émigrés in 1933 and vodka began to be promoted during and after World War II (changing the name to Smirnoff, a Westernized spelling of the original name), with real popularity coming from the Moscow Mule – a highball combining vodka and ginger ale. In terms of *cocktail* recipes in the sense we're trying tonight, the predominant spirits are gin, whiskey, brandy, and rum.

Early in American history, the principal liquors available were brandies (of various sorts, made from apples, peaches, etc) and rum (especially in the Northeast, given trade with the sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean). Later, whiskey became prominent especially in regions that produced grain. Of course, in the north this meant *rye* whiskey, and increasingly rye is returning as the true and original American whiskey. Bourbon was relatively unknown outside Kentucky until after Prohibition. Gin was nearly always an import, first from the Netherlands (in the form of Hollands or Genever gin), and later the "London dry" gins from Britain that we're now familiar with.

Without a doubt, the best reference on cocktail history is David Wondrich, *Imbibe! From Absinthe Cocktail to Whiskey Smash*, an erudite but highly entertaining book packed with great recipes.

# *Techniques*

## *Making A Perfect Cocktail*

MIXING A PERFECT COCKTAIL IS SIMPLE, requiring very few tools, a couple of basic techniques and a bit of restraint. Here are some examples of the latter:

*Glass size* ... use small cocktail glasses and make your drinks total 3 ounces. This is a good size and will allow your guests to have several interesting drinks before they switch to wine with dinner, or have to drive. Today's giant cocktail glasses are a recipe for drunken guests. When you buy vintage glasses you'll notice that nearly all glasses hold 3 or 4 ounces if they're from the 20's through 50's, and if you go back far enough, they're more like 2 ounces.

*Measuring* ... pouring by hand and "eyeballing" it not only makes drinks larger, but many of the recipes I'm demonstrating tonight depend pretty crucially on the right proportions. An extra half ounce – which is trivial when pouring by hand – and the balance of the flavor can change completely. The only world-class bartender I've ever met that pours by hand (and gets it right!) is Murray Stenson at Zigzag Café in Seattle. Great bartenders *measure*, and you should too.

ALL YOU REALLY NEED IN THE WAY OF EQUIPMENT is a big glass to mix in, a long spoon, a measuring cup (which holds up to 2 ounces but marked to show at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$  ounces as well), a shaker, and a strainer.

THE PROCESS IS SIMPLE: POUR, CHILL, MIX, SERVE. Regardless of recipe, you do the same steps. Pour each of the (measured) ingredients into the mixing glass or shaker. Generally, start with the cheap ingredients and pour the expensive ones last, in case you make a mistake. Then add ice to the mixing glass or shaker. Shake or stir until

Next time you're in Seattle, and you want a superb cocktail, please do visit Zigzag Cafe, on the Pike Place Market Hillclimb, off Western Avenue. Murray works most evenings, and the best time to arrive is early – right at 5pm. Tell them you want to watch Murray mix your drink, introduce yourself, and enjoy the show!

the drink is thoroughly chilled. Then strain the drink into a chilled glass, add garnish if a drink calls for it and serve. That's it.

**SHAKE OR STIR?** There's a simple rule to remember. If the drink contains opaque or cloudy ingredients, shake it. If the drink contains only clear or transparent ingredients, stir it. For example, never shake a martini or manhattan, only stir. Shaking makes the drink cloudy with ice crystals and in general, overdilutes it. A margarita should be shaken, as should most rum drinks that contain fruit juice.

THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS TO EVERY RULE... but practice with these simple rules and depart from them only when you have a good reason. You're fundamentally doing *chemistry* here; every action has an effect. For example, if you're using a high-proof spirit (like a 110 proof bourbon) in a cocktail that you'd normally stir, but need more ice to melt and dilute the drink so it doesn't feel "hot", then either use crushed ice to chill it, or give it a shake. That's a good example of how the rules are flexible to achieve a perfect cocktail.

### *On Measurements in Recipes*

THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE I'll be giving recipes for various cocktails. In each case, instead of telling you exactly how many ounces of an ingredient to use, I give *proportions*. The reason is simple. Your glasses are different sizes than mine and the goal is to produce a cocktail with exactly the right proportion of ingredients for the glass you're using to serve, without making too little or too much.

Let's say you have a glass that can hold a three ounce cocktail and you're making a MANHATTAN. The proportions are easy: 2 : 1 of rye whiskey and italian vermouth. Thus, you'd use 2 ounces of rye whiskey and 1 ounce of italian vermouth. Switch to a modern, six ounce glass, and you'd pour 4 ounces of whiskey and 2 ounces of vermouth.

The use of proportions instead of exact amounts also make it easy to talk to your local bartender. If she makes something you enjoy, just ask for the proportions. It's easier to remember "two to one to half" when you're out on the town than a precise list of amounts.

THERE'S AN EXCEPTION, HOWEVER....THE "BARSPOON." In many recipes below, you'll see me mention adding a "barspoon" of an ingredient. A barspoon is basically a teaspoon. Naturally, since I aim for making a total cocktail size of 3 ounces, if you double a recipe and want 6 ounces of final drink, use two barspoons.

## *Some History*

THE MARTINI—undisputed King of Cocktails—has the kind of back story you'd normally associate with Mafia dons in Witness Protection. Nobody agrees on where it came from, or when, and everyone has a different theory. Most of the stories involve some pretty shady characters. There's a reason for all this chaos. Most likely there is no single "origin" for the martini. Instead, the Martini evolved slowly from a variety of vermouth-based cocktails common in the late 1800's. Later, of course, bartenders simply claimed the origins for themselves.

Tonight, we'll explore this evolution with four cocktails from the Martini "family tree." The early cocktails aren't going to seem much like our modern vision for the Martini, but I think they're terrific recipes in their own right. Think of them as "grandparents" and don't compare them to the Martini you like to make for yourself.

### *Vermouth Cocktails*

In the mid 19th century, vermouth became common in the United States, starting with the sweeter, red Italian variety. At first, bartenders served Vermouth Cocktails, replacing the base spirit in a "Cocktail" (liquor, sweetener, and bitters) with vermouth.

But vermouth by itself doesn't pack much of a punch and over time bartenders began pairing vermouth to create "Fancy" or "Improved" cocktails. One such combination was to pair Italian vermouth with rye whiskey with the result (unchanged to this day) is the Manhattan.

Another highly successful combination is vermouth and gin. Prior to about 1880, however, the gin would have been the lightly sweet Old Tom variety, or possibly Dutch Genever, depending upon the location and time. The vermouth would have been Italian, of course. The result is probably the oldest grandparent in the Martini family...

Recall that "Cocktail" refers to a measure of spirit, a bit of sweetener, and a dash of bitters. Well, Italian vermouth works well as a sweetening agent, so one can omit the gomme or simple syrup, and still have Cocktail. Add a dash, and later a barspoon, of orange curaçao, and even later, swap the curaçao for maraschino, and you have a Fancy or Improved Cocktail.

## MARTINEZ

Old Tom gin, italian vermouth, maraschino liqueur, bitters

 $1\frac{1}{2} : 1\frac{1}{2} : \text{dash} : \text{dash}$ 

For the most authentic Martinez, use the incredible Ransom Old Tom from Oregon, now available in Washington State, and a good aromatic bitters such as Fee Brothers.

The Martinez is a good representative of what you'd have gotten in New York or San Francisco in 1880 if you'd asked for gin and vermouth. The overall effect is sweet but malty and complex. To the modern palate, the recipe shown here is almost overly sweet, but not to the 19th century drinker, apparently. The most common addition here is 2 or 3 dashes of simple syrup to "sweeten it up a bit." I don't recommend it.

*Dry Gin and the Modern Martini*

By the mid 1880's, the "martini" — regardless of what name we give it — was commonplace in American bars. And at the same time, "dry" or unsweetened gins were first hitting the U.S. market. At first, "dry" cocktails were an urban phenomenon, a way for the sophisticates to differentiate themselves from the country cousins.

## FOURTH DEGREE

london dry gin, italian vermouth, absinthe

 $2 : 1 : \text{dash}$ 

There were a number of possibilities if you called out an order "dry" to your bartender. It could mean using dry vermouth, dry gin, or increasingly, both. The Fourth Degree is an example of a typical 19th century vermouth cocktail, made with dry gin and italian vermouth. Personally I think that, to the modern palate, the Fourth Degree is still balanced and pleasing, and I often include it when I give guests a choice of cocktails just to offer something familiar yet different.

## THE ORIGINAL "DRY" MARTINI

london dry gin, french vermouth, orange bitters, lemon twist

 $1\frac{1}{2} : 1\frac{1}{2} : \text{dash}$ 

THE "MARTINI" REALLY BECOMES RECOGNIZABLE AS OUR OWN MODERN RECIPE, of course, when you call both the gin and vermouth "dry." The recipe appears in print by 1897, which by itself

rules out nearly all of the origin myths you'll commonly read concerning the martini. The version given above is from the *Hoffman House Bartender's Guide* of 1906, by the incomparable Charlie Mahoney.

The gin here should be London Dry, and in contrast to what I'm going to recommend for a "contemporary" martini, should be highly aromatic and even assertive. It should also, if possible, be "over-proof," or stronger than the normal 80 proof. A large number of offerings are appearing in Washington State that meet this criterion, and to retain balance given the relatively large proportion of vermouth, I recommend using one in this cocktail.

Fine choices for overproof gins include Bellringer and Broker's, at the low end (each is less than \$20). Old Raj and Martin Miller's Westbourne Strength are superb, but slightly pricier options.

**1950's STYLE DRY MARTINI**  
 london dry gin, french vermouth, olive  
 3 : 1 : dash

Finally we reach our destination, or what I'm going to try to convince you our destination should be. The trend, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is to reduce the amount of vermouth. Winston Churchill is said to have remarked, "I would like to observe the vermouth from across the room while I drink my martini." That's a common feeling about martinis these days.

The recipe above is how the martini — apart from Sir Winnie — stood at mid-century. And I'd like to make a case that with excellent gin and *truly excellent* vermouth, that we all consider it part of our repertoire again. Good vermouth (made by a winemaker, not in a chemical plant) is a superb, traditional product and it has a wonderful effect on a dry, slightly austere gin like Plymouth, or Bombay "regular."

I use several gins regularly, depending upon the cocktail recipe. My personal favorite for a classic Dry Martini is Plymouth Gin. Plymouth refers not just to a brand, but a style of gin. Plymouth gins are similar to, but distinct from, "London dry." Plymouth has a clean juniper base, with an earthy body and without the assertive presence of other botanicals that can clash with the delicate aromatics of good vermouth.

One reason why the tradition developed of omitting vermouth from a martini is that vermouth, when kept too long unrefrigerated, can develop a nasty oxidized flavor. Always keep vermouth in the refrigerator, use it quickly, and look for good producers. The best vermouths on the market today, in my opinion, are the wines from Dolin de Chambery. The dry vermouth makes a superb Martini, and is available in Seattle at DeLaurenti's.



# Tonight's Menu

## AVIATION

gin, lemon juice, maraschino liqueur, crème de violette  
 $2 : \frac{1}{2} : \text{barspoon} : \text{barspoon}$

## 21 HAYES

gin, pimm's no. 1, lemon juice, cucumber, simple syrup  
 $1\frac{1}{2} : \frac{3}{4} : \frac{1}{2} : 3 \text{ slices muddled} : \text{barspoon}$

## DRESSED PIMM'S

pimm's no. 1, gin, homemade sparkling lemonade, cucumber,  
mint, assorted fruit  
 $2 : \frac{1}{2} : 3 : 2 \text{ slices} : 1 \text{ sprig} : \text{cover bottom of glass}$

## ELIXIR DI ALBA

ransom old tom gin, carpano antica vermouth, absinthe, mole  
bitters, simple syrup  
 $1\frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{2} : \text{barspoon} : 2 \text{ dashes} : \text{barspoon}$

## ALABAZAM!

cognac, cointreau, lemon juice, angostura bitters, simple syrup  
 $2 : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{2} : \text{barspoon} : \text{barspoon}$

## RUM OLD-FASHIONED

aged dark rum, simple syrup, citrus peel, angostura bitters, ice ball  
 $2 : \text{barspoon} : \text{wide strip muddled} : \text{dash}$

**OLD PAL**  
rye, italian vermouth, campari  
*equal proportions*

Most recipes, and bars, don't put crème de violette in their Aviations, but insist upon it! The drink is named after the pale color of the sky as seen by aviators on a clear day. Violette is only recently available again in the States, but most good bars will have it now.

A "Pimm's Cup" is technically a tall highball and can be as simple as Pimms, cucumber, mint, and 7up. But build it from scratch, and pay attention to presentation, and you have a Dressed Pimm's. Recipe and presentation by Chris McMillian, legendary New Orleans bartender.

Yes, this recipe calls for a barspoon of Angostura bitters, not a mere dash. The Alabazam! is a "bitters-forward" cocktail, but isn't "bitter." The Angostura contributes a depth and spicy quality to the finished cocktail.

Add a couple of dashes of absinthe and you have a New Pal – a different flavor profile but still superb.

**CORPSE REVIVER #2**

gin, cocchi americano, curaçao, lemon juice, absinthe, aromatic  
bitters

*equal proportions, dashes absinthe and bitters*

This variant on a classic substitutes Cocchi Americano, an Italian aperitif wine, for Lillet. With the modern, softer Lillet recipe, the switch improves the depth and flavor of the cocktail by adding back the quinine that Lillet used to have.

**SEELBACH**

bourbon, cointreau, angostura bitters, peychaud's bitters,  
champagne

$1 : \frac{1}{2} : 5$  dashes : 5 dashes : fill glass

**JACK ROSE**

bonded apple brandy, lemon (or lime) juice, true grenadine

$1\frac{1}{2} : 1 : \frac{1}{2}$

Serve this in a regular-size champagne flute.

**TWO BIRDS**

rye whiskey, aperol, italian vermouth, crème de cacao, peychaud's  
bitters

$2 : \frac{3}{4} : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{4} : 2$  dashes

Real grenadine is aromatic and delicious—and easy to make. Don't buy most of the commercial grenadines, which are food coloring, sugar syrup, and flavorings. In fact, only make grenadine drinks when you have some of the real thing. Otherwise, pick another recipe.

**SARATOGA COCKTAIL**

cognac, rye whiskey, italian vermouth, angostura bitters

*equal proportions, 2 dashes bitters*

This is obviously a Manhattan, but... The combination of cognac and rye appears frequently in 19th century recipes, and it worth trying in mint julep, sazerac, and almost any cocktail where you'd now use solely whiskey.

**THEOBROMA**

reposado tequila, carpano antica italian vermouth, amer picon,  
crème de cacao, mole bitters

$2 : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{4} : 1$  dash

Amer Picon is a bitter orange liqueur originally made in France. Tonight I'm using my own, made from Jamie Boudreau's superb recipe.

**MONKEY GLAND**

gin, orange juice, true grenadine, absinthe

$1\frac{1}{2} : 1\frac{1}{2} : 1$  barspoon : barspoon

The Monkey Gland was invented by Harry McElhone at the legendary Harry's New York Bar in Paris. In the early 20th century a Russian doctor, Serge Voronoff, invented a procedure that transplanted ape testicles into elderly gentlemen to restore their sex drive. Harry was inspired.

**TRUE MAI TAI**

jamaican rum, rhum agricole, lime juice, orgeat, cointreau, simple  
syrup, angostura bitters, mint

$1 : 1 : 1\frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{2} : \frac{1}{4}$  1 scant dash : garnish