



The Barrel-aged Cocktail program at MGM Grand Detroit:
El Presidente, Negroni and Old Fashioned.

LIBATION SENSATIONS

Throughout history, cocktails have been a staple in the wine, spirit and beer industry. The perpetual evolution of these culinary masterpieces is now allowing mixologists to be craftier than ever.

By Sam Ujvary

Few things in this world have been explored more than the cocktail. In the early 1900s, drinks such as the Martini or the Negroni were perfected, yet here we are today, perhaps even more focused on how they can be reinvented over and over again. What hasn't been tried before? What new twist can be put on an old favorite? Many bartenders have attempted to mimic and perfect classics, putting their own spin on the aforementioned. In fact, the role of the bartender has launched them to new heights. Their culinary creativity is now deserving of a new title—mixologist.

Whether we're pursuing cocktails for celebrations, to rid ourselves of end-of-the-work-week

woes, or for a multitude of other reasons, beverage possibilities are endless and our interests are constantly changing. We have these ingredient aficionados and alcohol know-it-alls to thank for the meticulous craft they set in front of us—for them, the sky's the limit.

Old World

In their entirety, cocktails are seen as a status symbol—edible art. Great men drink them, and great debates have been made about them. Alcohol has its ebbs and flows woven throughout history. It plays a pivotal role in our world, and some of the most prominent people and events are centered around it. Often the silent decision-maker, alco-

hol has had a profound impact on our history, from our country's founding fathers instilling themselves in the liquor business, to the noble experiment prohibiting all things alcohol. Whether personally adored or abandoned, the salient point is the impact that alcohol has had on us as a global community.

Established in 1920 and lasting until 1933, the manufacturing and selling of alcohol became illegal, inadvertently putting the "roaring" in the Roaring Twenties. Paradoxically, this is when it started thriving. This has inspired many cocktails—and even more establishments—that are around today. You can't turn a corner in Manhattan without running into three conspicuous

doors leading you down a velvet curtain-lined hallway to some sort of prohibition-inspired speakeasy. Maybe it's our desire to be tied to our own history, or maybe it's the idea of being part of something forbidden. Either way, our country's love of classic cocktails is only a proverbial drop in the bucket for the industry we see today.

There are many cocktails that recede and flow back in and out of popularity—but since the dawn of libations, few options remain in the hierarchy of refinement and sophistication. The Gin Martini (shaken or stirred); it's vodka counterpart, the Kangaroo; a stirred-never-shaken Old Fashioned; and rum's favorite home—the Daiquiri.

Since each assumed drink's inauguration, the varieties and alterations have spiraled, spinning off and creating a niche industry all its own—craft cocktails. But the spirits that made those classics—Stolichnaya

(Stoli) vodka; Plymouth and Tanqueray gins; and Tullamore Dew, Bushmill's and Woodford Reserve whiskies—still maintain their position as favorites to include no matter how classic (or modern) the drink.

New Age

As of late, customers and bartenders alike have become enthralled in cocktails. Suddenly, we're interested in the brand of spirit, how fresh the ingredients and garnishes are, and who had a hand in developing it. Bartenders are now all-knowing mixologists, and we trust them in every respect to make something that's going to knock our socks off. There's no question in our minds that culinary cocktails have recently taken on a life of their own, we're just happy we get to be a part of the movement.

Troy Graves, chef and owner of Red Door in Chicago, Ill. conceptualized his establishment as a global pub with great cocktails and beer inspired by every corner of the world. They have six specialty cocktails with which they have taken a less-is-more approach. Chef Graves believes that fewer ingredients complement bold and savory flavors best. "You start to add too many ingredients and you lose balance," he says.

Beverage Development Manager, Shaun Page, knows a thing or two about specialty cocktail menus. At his establishments at the MGM Grand Detroit, he has concocted a barrel-aged cocktail program. Their El Presidente is made with Rhum Agricole, which differs from industrial rum as it's processed straight from sugar cane; and the Old Fashioned,



Chicago-based Red Door's take on the Dark 'n' Stormy.



Brandy Crusta cocktail from Taste by Niche in St. Louis.

with Bulleit (both rye and bourbon). Page likes Bulleit for its appropriate mixing purposes. Their modern twist on the Old Fashioned has been a big hit since its introduction. "Our menu is inspired by prohibition-era spirits," he says. For this particular drink,

An Outstanding Meal Deserves an Outstanding Cup of Coffee.



Goodness comes from the source. At S&D, our delicious coffee is sourced from the greatest growers in the world and then roasted at our innovative state-of-the-art roasting facility. Over 85 years of experience ensures you receive the highest quality product.

S&D is invested in the culinary community, providing the best product offerings, custom blends, extract ingredients, and a true partnership.

Your food is too outstanding to not be paired with the best coffee in the world.



Find out more about our culinary offerings and enjoy free downloads of original recipes from S&D culinary competitions.

www.sdcoffeetea.com/chef

LIBATION SENSATIONS

they blend whiskies with Luxardo cherry liqueur for tartness, and a turbinado sugar that isn't as refined as much as a simple syrup. Each batch is then aged in oak barrels for 55 days.

"With each cocktail, I do it [that way] for a specific reason," says Page, explaining the thought process that goes into each individual drink, creating a discerning beverage program.



Tito's is handmade in Texas and has become a popular staple in craft vodka.

Creative Components

Recent times show that it's all about the ingredients. Fresh, natural, homegrown and hybrid ingredients are making their way into our highball glasses. Limes are no longer the sole utilized citrus in margaritas (remember the lime drought earlier this year?). Grapefruit, oranges and lemons are now being used on a more frequent basis for different flavors with the same zest.

Bitters is a botanical companion for spirits that has been around for hundreds of years. Bartenders, mixologists and beverage program developers are seeing this old favorite as a new blank canvas. Richard Middleton, head bartender at Brennan's of Houston, strives to create flavored bitters for their cocktails that aren't available on the market—think basil, root beer, celery and spearmint—that go well with their southern drinks. He grabs inspiration from anywhere he can. "We wanted to create a special drink inspired by Rodeo, which in Texas happens in February and March," he says. "We wanted to do something with agave, and though it needed a kick, so we created ancho chile bitters."

They also pull from surroundings, seasons and holidays for their ingredients. Their Vanilla Bean bitters is used year-round, and during the holidays they make a vanilla bean cinnamon bitters as well.

In Detroit, Page uses Bittercube, a small-batch bitters company from Milwaukee, Wisc. They include a cherry bark vanilla bitters as well as an orange bitters in their Old Fashioned.

Ginger beer consumption has spiked over the past few years.



There's more to whiskey than meets the eye. Koval's line of whiskies range from oat to bourbon, millet to rye.

Some patrons tried their first Moscow Mule, and some establishments started making their own. At Red Door, they puree fresh ginger, adding sugar, lime juice, water and thyme to the mix.

wrongs in our everyday life, it's nice to see something so right at the end of the day. Appreciation for culinary-inspired cocktails is growing, and as libation enthusiasts, we appreciate that classic

*"Let's face it—alcohol has a million good functions."
—Sterling Hayden*

"The ingredients are all cooked together, then we carbonate it in a cornelius keg," Graves says.

Spirits—the main ingredient in mixed cocktails, are more focused on sustainability as well. More bar and restaurant patrons are interested in drinking local—knowing how far away their liquor was distilled or the face of the guy who brewed their pint of beer. Specifically, whiskey interest has grown. According to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS), whiskey sales topped all other spirits last year. Small-batch whiskey, especially, has become prominent.

Mocktails

Those abstaining from alcohol don't want to miss out on all the fun. The days of Shirley Temples, Roy Rogers and Arnold Palmers are out, and infused sodas are in. Whether it's a pomegranate apple cider developed at Red Door, or the many berry and spice-infused sodas on menus across the country, virgin cocktail-drinkers are still getting a piece of the action.

In a world with so many

cocktails, fresh ingredients and all things bootleg-inspired have come full circle. 🍴



Though not one of the oldest gins, Hendrick's is a top-shelf choice among gin drinkers.