2021 Nova Challenge Kick Off: Craft Cocktails @ Home

Cocktail Recipes

Recipes curated by LuAnn ‘84 and Robert Daniel from the Villanova Club of Houston

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RYE BASED AND READY FOR MARDI GRAS

Vieux Carré (Hotel Monteleone)

Named using the French term for what’s now known as the French Quarter, the Vieux Carré traces its origin to the bar back in the 1930s, and first appeared in print in 1937, in Famous New Orleans Drinks and How to Mix 'Em. With rye, cognac, sweet vermouth and plenty of bitters, it’s as rich and decadent now as it was back then, and still remarkably evocative of the Big Easy.

Ingredients (yields 1 cocktail)

- 1/2 oz Benedictine liqueur
- 1/2 oz rye whiskey
- 1/2 oz cognac
- 1/2 oz sweet vermouth
- Peychaud’s bitters
- Angostura bitters
- Garnish: lemon peel

Steps

1. Stir the Benedictine liqueur, rye whiskey, cognac, sweet vermouth, 1 dash each Peychaud’s and Angostura bitters and ice in a chilled Old-Fashioned glass.
2. Twist the lemon peel over the drink’s surface to extract the peel’s oils, and then garnish with the peel.
Sazerac (courtesy of a helpful barman in the French Quarter in New Orleans)

The Sazerac, which is a close cousin to the Old Fashioned, has been kicking around in one form or another since as early as 1838 (with other reports pegging its invention closer to the late-1800s) and was trademarked in 1900 by Sazerac Co. The Sazerac was crowned the official cocktail of New Orleans in 2008, a designation more suited to marketers than drink mixers. The truth is the Sazerac has always belonged to the Crescent City. It is believed that the first Sazeracs were made with French brandy—Sazerac de Forge et Fils, to be exact. And it’s known that those first Sazeracs contained Peychaud’s bitters, a bright-red concoction with flavors of gentian and anise that was invented by New Orleans resident Antoine Peychaud. Add some sugar and a dash of absinthe, and you have a strong, aromatic drink that embodies the city from whence it hails.

Eventually, that French brandy was replaced with American rye whiskey, a spirit that grew in both popularity and availability during the 19th century. Brandy or cognac, which are distilled from grapes, yield a Sazerac that is fruity and floral, different than today’s rye-based versions, which feature the grain spirit’s trademark spice notes.

A well-made rye Sazerac is indeed a tasty cocktail, full of kick and depth, though perhaps a hair too much muscle. That’s why this recipe combines equal parts cognac and rye, not as a gestural homage to a lost classic but because the two work together so perfectly. The opposing pairing, when accented by the licorice flavors of absinthe, produces a cocktail that’s simultaneously soft and bold, smooth and brash—and unmistakably New Orleans.

Ingredients (yields 1 cocktail)

Absinthe, to rinse
1 sugar cube
1/2 teaspoon cold water
3 dashes Peychaud’s bitters
2 dashes Angostura bitters
1 1/4 ounces rye whiskey
1 1/4 ounces cognac

Garnish: lemon peel

Steps

1. Rinse a chilled rocks glass with absinthe, discarding any excess, and set aside.
2. In a mixing glass, muddle the sugar cube, water and the Peychaud’s and Angostura bitters.
3. Add the rye and cognac, fill the mixing glass with ice and stir until well-chilled.
4. Strain into the prepared glass.
5. Twist the lemon peel over the drink’s surface to extract the peel’s oils, and then garnish with the peel.
GIN BASED

The Cucumber Rickey (from Shake: A New Perspective on Cocktails)

A rickey is a carbonated cocktail made with gin or bourbon, lime and soda water. It’s said to have been invented in Washington, D.C. in the 1880s. The most popular rickey cocktails right now are made with gin. This is a great cocktail on a hot day!

Ingredients (yields 2 cocktails)

4 shots gin (would not recommend a botanical gin)
1 handful of fresh mint leaves plus a few for garnish
6 slices of cucumber, skin on, plus 2 for garnish
1 shot fresh lime juice
Ginger beer (we like Fever Tree brand)

Steps

1. Add the mint leaves, cucumber, and lime juice to the shaker.
2. Muddle the ingredients in the bottom of the shaker until thoroughly mixed. If you don’t have a muddler, a wooden spoon will work fine.
3. Add the gin then fill with ice about midway. Shake vigorously for 10 second.
4. Strain mixture into pint glasses containing large cubes of ice, top with ginger beer, and garnish with remaining cucumber slices and mint leaves.

The Vesper (Liquor.com)

The Vesper, also known as the Vesper Martini, was made famous by James Bond. The cocktail was invented by none other than Bond author Ian Fleming. The drink first appeared in his book Casino Royale, which was published in 1953, and the cocktail is named for the fictional double agent Vesper Lynd.

When Bond orders the Vesper, he provides strict instructions to the bartender. So, those instructions should be followed by any who make it. Bond says: “Three measures of Gordon’s, one of vodka, half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well until it’s ice-cold, then add a large, thin slice of lemon peel. Got it?”

With all due respect to 007, there’s one change we’d recommend. Shaking a Vesper can result in an overly diluted and less smoothly textured drink—and a Martini isn’t meant to have ice shards floating on its top. The golden rule is to always stir a spirit-only cocktail, and there’s no reason to make an exception here.
This Vesper recipe makes a stiff drink with four ounces of full-proof spirits and a half ounce of lower-proof Lillet blanc. In the book, Bond claims that, when he’s concentrating, he never has more than one drink before dinner. But he likes that one drink to be very large. It’s easy to appreciate such a loophole. But if you want a less boozy drink, you can dial back the volume while keeping the proportions intact.

**Ingredients (yields 1 cocktail)**

- 3 oz. gin (we prefer Hendricks)
- 1 oz. vodka
- 1/2 oz. Lillet blanc aperitif

**Garnish:** lemon twist

**Steps**

1. Add the gin, vodka and Lillet blanc into a mixing glass with ice and stir until well-chilled.
2. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass.
3. Express the oils from a lemon twist over the drink, rub the twist along the rim of the glass and drop it into the cocktail.

**TEQUILA/MEZCAL BASED**

The Spicy Mezcalita (from *Shake: A New Perspective on Cocktails*)

Since moving to the Houston area, we’ve been learning about the in-depth world of tequila. It’s so much more than shots! Mezcal is gaining ground on tequila in American bars. While the two Mexican spirits are both made from agave, that’s where the similarities end. All tequilas are mezcats, but not all mezcats are tequilas. Tequila is a type of mezcal, much like how scotch and bourbon are types of whiskey. According to spirits writer John McEvoy, mezcal is defined as any agave-based liquor. However, they’re made with different kinds of agave. Mezcal can be made from more than 30 varieties of agave, but tequila is a distilled beverage made from the blue agave plant. Mexican law regulates that to be called tequila it can only come from the state of Jalisco and must be bottled between 35 and 55 percent ABV. When sold in the U.S., tequila must contain a minimum 40 percent ABV.

**Ingredients (yields 2 cocktails)**

- 2 shots tequila (we use a silver tequila, 1800)
- 1 shot mezcal
- 1.5 shots of Cointreau
- 1.5 shots fresh lime juice
2 slices fresh jalapeño, plus 2 slices to garnish

2 slices of fresh lime (to garnish)

Steps

1. Combine the tequila, mezcal, Cointreau, lime juice, and 2 slices of jalapeño in the shaker.
2. Add ice to above the level of the liquid and shake vigorously for 15 seconds.
3. Strain the mixture into a chilled rocks glass containing large cubes of ice and garnish with remaining lime and jalapeno slices.

Oaxaca Old Fashioned (Epicurious.com)

Widely known as the quintessential calling card of mezcal cocktails, the Oaxaca Old Fashioned was developed by bartender Phil Ward during his time at Death & Co., but the uncomplicated yet memorable union of tequila, mezcal, agave nectar and bitters rose to fame on the menu at Mayahuel. Now it’s widely heralded as the drink that communicated the potential and versatility of the spirit in the cocktail world. The recipe hasn’t aged a day. One sip, and you’ll be hooked. We had one of these at a local restaurant and backwards engineered the drink until we found this recipe. Del Maguey makes a large line of mezcals, some of which are very pricey! Vida is one of the more moderately priced mezcals in their line.

Ingredients (yields 1 cocktail)

1.5 oz. reposado tequila

1/2 oz. mezcal (we use Del Maguey Vida)

1 bar spoon agave nectar (find this in the baking isle near the sugar)

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Luxardo cherry for garnish

Flamed orange peel, for garnish (flaming brings out the oils)

Steps

1. Mix tequila, mezcal, agave nectar and bitters in a mixing glass with ice.
2. Strain over a fresh rock in an Old-Fashioned glass.
3. Drop in one Luxardo cherry.
4. Flame an orange peel over the top of the drink and rest the twist in the glass as garnish.