

Updated Classic Cocktails
By Gary Regan



Cuzco Mojito, My Favorite Sidecar and Pomegranate Julep.

Did Bach turn in his grave when Procol Harum took his *Air on a G String* and turned it into “A Whiter Shade of Pale”? I like to believe that his spirit was quite flattered. And Tchaikovsky was probably smiling in that great concert hall in the sky when his *Nutcracker Suite* was jazzed up and turned into the 1962 instrumental, “Nut Rocker,” by B. Bumble and the Stingers. So how do you think the creators of the Manhattan and the martini would feel if modern-day bartenders took their creations and brought them up to date? I’m sure they’d be thrilled.

A firm grasp on the structure of classic cocktails is essential for today’s bartenders if they want to create new drinks for their customers, and often, all that’s needed is a nip and a tuck. Voilà, a new masterpiece hits the bars of America.

Scott Beattie, bar manager at Cyrus restaurant in Healdsburg, California, uses Bourbon in his Manhattans, but he didn’t stop there when he created his Clermont Manhattan, a drink named for the Kentucky town where Jim Beam Bourbon is made. Beatty first infuses the whiskey with a vanilla bean, and some lemon and orange zests, then adds sweet vermouth and Angostura bitters to make the drink. “The infused Bourbon has lovely tobacco-like, citrus-y, notes,” he says.

Beatty also has fun with his version of the sidecar, a classic cocktail created in France in the beginning of the 20th century. This drink, classically made with Cognac, Cointreau and fresh lemon juice, gets extra nuances when he adds Luxardo Maraschino liqueur to the mix. And don’t make the mistake of thinking that Maraschino liqueur tastes anything like those bright red cherries commonly found in Manhattans—it’s a dry, nutty potion that adds a wonderful spiciness the drink.

Great minds often think alike. Mark Mendoza, wine director at Sona in West Hollywood, also adds some Maraschino liqueur to this classic to make a cocktail he calls “My Favorite Sidecar.” But Mendoza goes one step further by adding a dash of Angostura bitters to the drink, bringing some delightful cinnamon notes into play: “The marriage of the cherry liqueur and the lemon juice give the drink an almost spicy orange quality,” he says.

We don’t know who created the world’s first mint julep, though according to *The Mint*

Julep by Richard Barksdale Harwell, the first printed mention of the drink appeared in 1803. We do know, however, that this is a very controversial potion, and debates have raged for years about whether or not the mint leaves in a julep should be crushed, or merely used as an aromatic garnish. “My grandfather always insisted that a man who would let the crushed leaves and the mangled stemlets steep in the finished decoction would put scorpions in a baby’s bed,” wrote newspaperman Irvin S. Cobb in 1934.

It’s doubtful that **Jonathan Pogash**, bartender at Manhattan’s Prime Grill, would do such a thing to a baby, but he does leave the mint leaves in his Pomegranate Julep, a drink that he and wine director Herman Allenson created for the restaurant. “In creating the new seasonal cocktail lists for Prime Grill, a kosher restaurant, I thought about utilizing an important fruit in the Jewish religion—the pomegranate,” says Pogash. (The pomegranate is said to have 613 seeds, representing the number of *mitzvot*, or good deeds, that Jews as a society must perform.) Pogash uses another somewhat unorthodox ingredient, Sugar in the Raw, in his version of the julep: “I really enjoy using Sugar in the Raw in cocktails. Its flavor is so full, yet unrefined, and especially perfect for drinks that include mint,” he says.

And while we’re talking about mint-flavored cocktails, let’s take a look at what happens when a classic Latin drink meets Asian ingredients at Zengo, a “modern Mexican” restaurant in Washington, D.C. Here, beverage director Ian Nal created the Cuzco Mojito by adding a little cucumber to the rum, limes, mint and sugar used to make a traditional mojito, thus matching the Latin/Asian cuisine of Mexican-born chef/owner, Richard Sandoval. “It’s a very cool, refreshing drink,” says Nal. “Perfect to accompany our spicy cuisine.”

The mojito was born in Cuba, whereas the margarita first saw the light of day in either Texas, Los Angeles or Mexico, depending on which story you believe—there are quite a few from which to choose. But there’s little doubt that the Mojita Rita, a hybrid of both drinks, was created in Marina del Rey, California, where drink designer Kim Haasarud is based. “I was looking to create a contemporary spin on the classic margarita cocktail for my book, *101 Margaritas* [John Wiley & Sons, March 2006], and since mojitos have made such a comeback recently, I thought it would be interesting to marry the two,” she explains.

Haasarud, whose company, Liquid Architecture, has designed specialty drinks and bar concepts for some impressive companies, including HBO and Comedy Central, uses top-shelf, 100-percent blue agave Tequila to make this drink instead of the rum that’s called for in a traditional mojito. And by adding a little Cointreau to the mix, she has created a marriage made in heaven.

So what about the dry gin martini? Playing with the ingredients in this drink can drive some staunch classicists crazy. But these same people might be surprised to learn that when the drink was first created, in the early 1900s, it contained equal amounts of gin and dry vermouth. And orange bitters were an essential ingredient in this classic right through

to the 1930s. Who's a classicist now? Certainly not Aviram Turgeman, director of cocktail development for New York-based Tour de France, a restaurant company that owns a group of French bistros in Manhattan, including Marseilles and Maison.

Using gin as a base, Turgeman adds a touch of star anise-infused Noilly Prat dry vermouth, stirs the ingredients over ice and strains the drink into a cocktail glass that's been rinsed with Pernod, that wonderful anise-flavored pastis from France, to make his Marseille Martini. "Marseille is very well known for anise," he says.

Gin is also the base for the Tom Collins, a fairly simple drink, but one that's stuck around for a long time. "This is a long drink, to be consumed slowly with reverence and meditation," wrote David Embury in his book, *The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks* (Garden City Books, 1952). Made with gin, lemon juice, sugar and club soda, the Tom Collins can be a very refreshing quaff in the warmer months, but John Mautone, one of the owners of Dylan Prime, a great Manhattan steak house, and a good place to select from an array of fine cocktails, has brought this classic completely up to date in a cocktail he calls the Dylan Collins.

"The Dylan Collins was created with the thought of marrying a classic cocktail recipe with limoncello because of the growing popularity of this spirit in our restaurant and the history of it in my Italian upbringing," says Mautone. "Pallini Limoncello is rich, thick and syrup-like, and it possesses the qualities evident in my Sicilian uncle's homemade limoncello." But not only did he add limoncello to the recipe, Mautone changed the base spirit, too, preferring to use Grey Goose Le Citron vodka rather than gin. And don't look for any club soda in the Dylan Collins—it's served straight up in a martini glass at Dylan Prime.

I love to experiment with all sorts of new drinks whenever possible, but I always end up with a Manhattan in my hand at the end of a workday, so I'm going to leave you with a Manhattan at the end of this article, too. But this one is, perhaps, one of the most innovative variations on any drink that I've encountered. The Smoked Manhattan was created by Yvan Lemoine, a New York City bartender who, at the time of publication, is working with renowned chef Paul Liebrandt on the opening of Gilt, a restaurant at the Palace Hotel on Madison Avenue.

To make his masterpiece, Lemoine pours Bourbon, sweet vermouth and bitters into an empty mixing glass topped with a strainer (the handle of the strainer must be bent upwards for the next step). He then places a woodchip—mesquite, applewood or any fruit wood will work, he says—onto the strainer, and ignites it, using a small hand torch that chefs often use to caramelize the sugar on the top of a crème brûlée. Covering the glass and strainer with a metal shaker he allows the ingredients to soak in the smoke for around 45 seconds before he removes the top, tips the woodchip into the drink, adds ice and proceeds to chill the drink by stirring it for about 30 seconds, and straining it into a chilled martini glass. A brandied cherry is added to the drink for garnish. I'm going to be first in line.

The Recipes

My Favorite Sidecar

Adapted from a recipe by Mark Mendoza, wine director, Sona Restaurant, West Hollywood.

- 1 lemon wedge
- Saucer of granulated sugar
- 2 ounces Cognac
- 1 ounce Cointreau or triple sec
- 1/4 ounce Luxardo Maraschino liqueur
- 1/2 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 1 dash Angostura bitters
- 1 lemon twist, for garnish

Moisten the rim of a cocktail glass with the lemon wedge, and press the outer rim of the glass into a saucer of granulated sugar, rotating the glass until the entire rim is coated with sugar.

Fill a cocktail shaker two-thirds full of ice and add all of the ingredients. Shake for approximately 15 seconds. Strain into the prepared glass, and add the garnish.

Pomegranate Julep

Adapted from a recipe by Jonathan Pogash and Herman Allenson, Prime Grill, Manhattan.

- 4 fresh mint leaves
- 1 teaspoon Sugar in the Raw
- 1 ounce simple syrup
- 1-1/2 ounces Basil Hayden's Bourbon
- 1 ounce pomegranate juice
- Large mint leaves, for garnish

Muddle the mint leaves, Sugar in the Raw and simple syrup in a mixing glass. Add ice, the Bourbon and the pomegranate juice. Stir for around 30 seconds, and pour into a rocks glass. Garnish with several large, fresh mint leaves.

Cuzco Mojito

Adapted from a recipe by Ian Nal, beverage director, Zengo Restaurant, Washington, D.C.

- Four slices fresh cucumber, divided
- 4 fresh mint leaves
- 2 lime wedges
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1-1/2 ounces Bacardi light rum
- Splash of club soda

Muddle three slices of the cucumber, mint leaves, lime wedges, and sugar in a mixing glass. Muddle together cucumber, mint, lime and sugar in a glass. Add ice, and the rum. Shake for approximately 15 seconds, strain into an ice-filled collins glass, and add the club soda. Garnish with a cucumber slice.

Dylan Collins

Adapted from a recipe by John Mautone, Dylan Prime, New York City.

2 ounces Grey Goose Le Citron vodka

2 ounces Pallini Limoncello

1 ounce fresh lemon juice

1/2 of an egg white

1 large orange twist, for garnish

Fill a cocktail shaker two-thirds full of ice and add all of the ingredients. Shake for approximately 15 seconds, and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Add the garnish.