

Plate

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Spirit of discovery

A new generation of mixologists has shaken and stirred the conventions of modern cocktails

by Terry Sullivan



menu spotlight

Hibiscus is the new pomegranate. Unless the new pomegranate is bay leaves, sage, lychee juice, or cucumber. Or maybe pine needle infusion, which would bring us back to the juniper-soaked DNA of gin.

The fact is that it's awfully hard to pin down the avant of the current cocktailian garde, given how fast it's moving. And that's a good thing. The very best thing, however, is that in spite of all these new, fresh flavors being poured behind the stick, everything old is new again.

A new wave of mixologists—imagine a generation of Alice Waters' children behind the bar—is discovering fresh, natural ingredients at the same time that they're exploring the historical roots of the great classic cocktails. They're also working in tandem with chefs, pairing drink and food menus and sharing stovetops and seasonal ingredients.



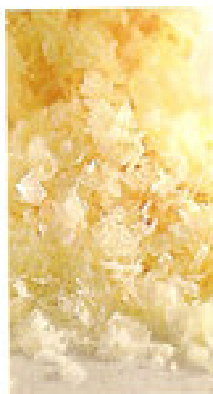
Gin and the giant peach,
Director of Cocktail Development
Jonathan Pegash, Bookmarks
Lounge, New York City.
RECIPE, p. 114.

movement in general, came a generation of bartenders and beverage managers who said to themselves, "Hey, maybe there *is* something better than sex on the beach!" So to speak.

NEW GUARDE

A lot of this noble work was done under the influence of master mixologist Dale DeGroff, late of the Rainbow Room and other sparkling venues, and more recently cocktail consultant to the stars. "I'm seeing big changes everywhere," he says. "It's moved from Europe to New York, L.A., and across the country—lots of natural juices, very sophisticated flavors. And I'm using Demerrara sugar, honey syrup, and agave nectar as sweeteners, which I think is the next area of improvement in cocktails."

Take a look at director of cocktail development for New York's Bookmarks Lounge Jonathan Pogash, who combines agave and ginger in a Triple Sec-free Margarita, called the tequila mockingbird (\$12.50, recipe, p. 114).



"I'm always looking for healthier sweeteners," says Pogash. "Agave is a great alternative to simple syrup or sugar. Similar to honey, it adds a really complex note and it's got some spiciness to it."

Another bar chef who's playing with new cocktail components is Salvatore Calabrese, from Salvatore at Fifty in London, England, who began hand-making sidecars and crushing fresh ginger first across the pond at Dukes Hotel, then at the Library Bar in the Lanesborough, where he brought orange marmalade to bear in his breakfast martini (\$25, recipe, p. 26). Fifty London Bar Manager Raffaello Dante explains that it was Calabrese's

Seeger's specialties are syrups, infusions, and cocktails—fusing the flavors of Latin America, while making his own maraschino cherries (see "Mad science," p. 91). Watermelon water is a regular feature, as is mint syrup. "Just make your regular simple syrup on a stovetop, but add a big crushed handful of fresh mint when it's dissolved and then turn the heat off, cover it, and let it sit for an hour." His hibiscus daiquiri (\$10, recipe, p. 113) infuses rum with the flowers and dries them with sugar for a rim garnish.

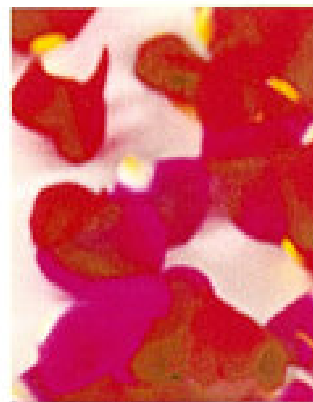
Yvan Lemoine of IFoodStudios, a company that consults on food and beverage services, adds, "When mixologists start designing cocktails, they're going to have to be in the kitchen a lot more."

Lemoine, who made a hibiscus-gin and guava gelée "shot" as an alcoholic amuse for New York City's Pong and a frozen martini with oysters, caviar and dill for New York City's Gilt says, "Now you have a mixologist or bar chef and a bar manager," he says. "There has to be harmony between the kitchen and the bar."

CLASSIC COCKTAILS WITH A TWIST

As old-school libations come back into the limelight, mixologists are leaving modern touches on classic recipes. In Pogash's gin and the giant peach (\$12.50, recipe, p. 114), he infuses the gin in white peach tea and mixes it with lime juice and simple syrup to create a modern variation of a gin Ricky. "The gin cocktail is having a resurgence," says Pogash:

"I've infused vodka, but never tried infusing gin. I found a strong, delicious white peach tea, let it infuse in a bottle of gin overnight and it came out right." Pogash's creation reveals the flavor potential of the oft-overlooked spirit. "Someone used to drinking vodka may frown



upon infused gin, but they'll be pleasantly surprised."

A classic was given a modern makeover with Abou-Ganim's cable car—a rum take on the sidecar—that he created for Harry Denton's Starlight Room in San Francisco (\$10, recipe, p. 112). The original was a Cognac-based World War I classic and the staple at Harry's New York Bar in Paris, its putative birthplace. Abou-Ganim's version followed the recipe of a basic brandy crusta, but he frosts the glass with superfine sugar and cinnamon and finishes it with an orange spiral.

At La Coñradia in Miami, Manager-Sommelier Kareem Zarwi is, we think, the first person to bring sage leaves to a classic (and staggeringly dry) gin martini (\$10, recipe p. 112).

"Gin is made from botanicals herbs and juniper berries, it's very herbaceous," says Zarwi, "Sage has a delicate but powerful aroma. The oils are picked up, and it gives a bit of a softness and takes away from the alcoholic bite of the gin."

Understand that the original cocktail, circa the late 18th or very early 19th century, was a "bittered sling," spirit, water, sugar, and bitters—and was essentially an old fashioned. And notice that spirits, wine and bitters are the base of the Manhattan. Examine a few other greats, like the bee's knees (\$10, recipe, p. 114), a Prohibition special of gin, lemon and honey syrup, that Wine and Spirits Director Andrew Green is serving at Spruce in San Francisco. Take their formula as a starting point,

and then play with the bottles behind the bar. You might create something that'll live forever.

Terry Sullivan is a regular contributor to *Plate* whose credits also include *GO*, and the *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine*.

Gin and the giant peach

Jonathan Pogash,
Bookmarks Lounge, New York City

Yield: 16 servings

Menu price: \$12.50;
food cost/serving: 15%

White peach tea bags	3 each
Gin, 750-ml bottle	1 each
Lime juice, freshly squeezed	12 Oz
Simple syrup	12 Oz
Peach slices	as needed

1. Marinate white peach tea in gin overnight, then remove tea bags.
2. For each drink, place 1 1/2 ounces of gin, 3/4 ounce lime juice and 3/4 ounce simple syrup in a cocktail shaker with ice and strain into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with a peach slice.

Tequila mockingbird

Jonathan Pogash,
Bookmarks Lounge, New York City

Yield: 1 serving

Menu price: \$12.50;
food cost/serving: 29%

Blanco tequila	1 1/2 Oz
Lime juice, freshly squeezed	3/4 Oz
Agave nectar	1 barspoon, heaping
Ginger, minced	1/4 barspoon

1. Shake ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice and strain into a chilled martini glass with a salted rim.
2. Garnish with a lime wheel.

Spicy fifty