



at the bar by **Robert Plotkin**

## *Liqueurs are Redefining Contemporary Mixology*

**L**iqueurs have been instrumental in the ongoing resurgence of the cocktail. The reason is that they're formulated to deliver a concentrated burst of flavor, and as any casual lounge observer will confirm, flavor is what consumers are looking for. With few exceptions, liqueurs provide the essential flavor components in most successful cocktails and specialty drinks, making them franchise players in modern mixology. Without a full complement of liqueurs on the back bar your drink making abilities shift into to low gear.

The Cosmopolitan is among a sizeable list of cocktails dependent on a liqueur for their identity. In this case, Cointreau provides the seamless connection between the base spirit—for citrus-infused vodka—and the lime and cranberry juice modifiers. In addition to the cache associated with Cointreau, the orange liqueur contributes greatly to the Cosmo's bouquet and taste, while leaving the color of the cocktail unaffected.

In mixology there's never a reason to leave well enough alone. For example, the Red Zen is the signature Cosmopolitan at The Original McCormick & Schmick's in Portland, OR. Created by bar guru Geoff V. Helzer, the sensationally delicious cocktail is prepared with muddled limes and sugar, Suntory ZEN Green Tea Liqueur, Stolichnaya Vodka and cranberry juice.

Newcomer PAMA Pomegranate Liqueur has already landed a leading role in the hit cocktail Lady Rose Cosmo. The recipe pairs the flavorful, fiery red liqueur with Absolut Citron, cranberry juice and a sour mix made with fresh lime juice and simple syrup. No mere splash of pomegranate juice could possibly achieve what PAMA is able to accomplish in a cocktail.

The hip Euro Cosmo is a silky blend of Chambord, raspberry vodka, fresh lime and white cranberry juice. Another recent émigré is the Moscow Cosmopolitan, a classically structured Cosmo concocted with Jewel of Russian Wild Bilberry Infusion in place of the cranberry juice. The infusion is made from super premium vodka steeped with fresh picked berries. The combination is marvelous.

Two other popular derivations of the cocktail are the Purple Cosmo, which is made with citrus vodka, blue Curaçao and Chambord, and the Midnight Blue Cosmopolitan, featuring Hpnotiq, Blue Curaçao and white cranberry juice. The possibilities are nearly endless. And that's the point.

### **REDESIGNED CLASSICS**

When Lauren Dunsworth of Lola's in Hollywood first mixed DeKuyper Sour Apple

Pucker and Ketel One Vodka to create the Original Appletini, a new wave of cocktails was born. The Martini is a natural for doctoring with a splash or two of a liqueur. It adds a most welcome blast of flavor, texture and heft to the body, color and a touch of sweetness.

**Another classic cocktail getting the makeover treatment these days is the Manhattan. At Indigo Eurasian Restaurant in Honolulu, the bartender's unanimous recommendation is the Nattahnam, a specialty Manhattan featuring Tuaca liqueur, sweet vermouth and Jack Daniels Tennessee whiskey.**

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At upscale Rosemary's Restaurant in Las Vegas, the signature of the house is the Kaffir Key Lime Martini. It's a blend of Stoli Vanil, Cuarenta y Tres, Hangar One Kaffir Lime Vodka, KeKe Beach Key Lime, freshly squeezed lime juice and cream. Presented with a rim of crushed graham crackers, the cocktail has become a local favorite. In Asheville, NC, the Martini of distinction at the Savoy Cucina Restaurant is the Espressotini, a light, delectable drink made with Stoli Vanil, Baileys Irish Cream, Frangelico, freshly brewed espresso and garnished with a chocolate covered biscotti.

Rickshaw Far East Bistro & Bambu Lounge in Houston is a stylish and contemporary Pan-Asian restaurant and sushi bar. The lounge attracts a well-heeled clientele that has earned a reputation for the quality and creativity of its cocktails. The bar's celebrated signature Martini is the Ruby Red Pom Pom, which is concocted with PAMA Pomegranate Liqueur, Charbay Ruby Red Grapefruit Vodka, grapefruit juice and scratch sweet and sour.

Liqueur-laced Martinis have become a

something of phenomenon and creative rite of passage for aspiring mixologists. American-born Southern Comfort is the featured player in the Socotini is a specialty at posh Stone Rose Lounge in Manhattan's Time Warner Center on Columbus Circle, while Suntory ZEN Green Tea Liqueur and Absolut Citron combine to create the Green Tea Martini, a specialty at Michael's Kitchen in Hollywood, Florida. Disaronno Amaretto, Frangelico and vodka are the cast in the Amber Skies Martini. Kahlúa is popularly enlisted for use in Coffee Martinis, Chambord in Raspberry Martinis and Godiva in Chocolate Martinis.

Another classic cocktail getting the makeover treatment these days is the Manhattan. At Indigo Eurasian Restaurant in Honolulu, the bartender's unanimous recommendation is the Nattahnam, a specialty Manhattan featuring Tuaca liqueur, sweet vermouth and Jack Daniels Tennessee whiskey. The staff at Stone Rose Lounge is equally passionate about the Midnight Manhattan that's devised with Grand Marnier, Woodford Reserve Bourbon, white cranberry juice and a splash of sour mix.

Perched atop the New York's Library Hotel is one of the city's genuinely special destination venues—Bookmarks Rooftop Lounge and Terrace. The impeccably appointed lounge lives and breathes in rarified fresh air, a condition that seems to set the tone for the entire experience. It's there that master mixologist Jonathan Pogash plies his craft. Among his creative repertoire is the Tennessee Williams, an elegant variation of the Manhattan made with Southern Comfort, dry vermouth, orange bitters and a splash of pineapple juice.

The Savoy Cucina promotes a reprise of the Bee's Knees, only this version of the cocktail is concocted Italian limoncello liqueur, Jim Beam's Knob Creek Bourbon and a few drops of honey. It eloquently illustrates the fact that bourbon loves the flavor of lemon.

Among time-tested variations of the cocktail still in the mainstream is the New Orleans' Manhattan, which is prepared by first coating the inside of the mixing glass with Frangelico. Any excess is discarded before adding the sweet vermouth and premium bourbon. The recipe for the venerable Waldorf Manhattan calls for a splash of Pernod, bitters, sweet vermouth and bourbon. The Loretto Manhattan pairs Maker's Mark Bourbon with a healthy splash of Disaronno Amaretto.

There are ample reasons to plan a tour of the wine country of Sonoma and near the top of the list is Cyrus, a magnificent, world-renowned

restaurant situated amidst the vineyards and rolling countryside. Behind the bar mixologist extraordinaire Scott Beattie calls the shots. His specialty cocktails have garnered acclaim for their innovative use of flavor. A Beattie original is the altogether sensational Charentes Sidecar, which is prepared with Hardy VS Cognac, Luxardo Maraschino Liqueur, Cointreau and fresh Meyer lemon juice. The ingredients are shaken, strained into a chilled cocktail glass and topped with a thin layer of cherry foam and thin segments of citrus.

The crowing touch on the cocktail is the cherry foam. It is made with real cherry juice, gelatin and Luxardo Maraschino, which are heated together in a saucepan. The contents are chilled down and Thai coconut milk is whisked into the compound. It is then transferred to a whipped cream canister, charged with CO<sub>2</sub> and refrigerated. It should be ready for the public in about thirty minutes.

## CUBAN CONNECTION

The Mojito has captured the collective American imagination and sparked a boom in restaurants and lounges around the country. The Cuban-borne cocktail is undergoing a transformation at the hands of the country's mixologists, who continue probing for the drink's creative limitations, boundaries that don't seem to exist.

For example, the signature muddled-marvel at P.F. Chang's Chinese Bistro is the Asian Pear Mojito. It's a delicious blend of Sour Apple Pucker, Bacardi Limón Rum and a splash of pineapple juice all built on top of muddled limes, mint sprigs and simple syrup. The Watermelon Mojito is one of the star attractions at The Carnegie Club in Manhattan's CitySpire Center. Made with Ketel One Vodka and Marie Brizard Watermelon Liqueur, the drink is as attractive as it is refreshing. Nearby at the ultra-swank Campbell Apartment in Grand Central Terminal, the specialty is the Robber Baron Mojito, a lively concoction crafted with Midori, Grey Goose Vodka, muddled limes and spearmint.

Rickshaw's Pomegranate Mojito is a superb example of inspired mixology. The recipe begins with muddling fresh mango, mint leaves, fresh lime juice and simple syrup. Add in equal parts of PAMA and 10 Cane Rum from Trinidad, and then finish the cocktail with a splash of club soda and a pomegranate wedge garnish. Another unconventional Mojito masterpiece hails from Backstreet Café, a classy American bistro in Houston. The Prickly Pear Mexican Mojito is an altogether luscious drink made with Cointreau, El Tesoro Silver 100% Agave Tequila, lime juice and fresh prickly pear juice.

Located 25 minutes west of downtown Chicago, Courtright's is a four-star restaurant situated on two acres of woodland preserve. In addition to the singularly breathtaking setting guests can enjoy the Chateau Mojito. Devised by resident mixologist Mario Recio, the cocktail is an attention grabbing combination of blue Curaçao, Bacardi Limón, sour mix, muddled lime and sugar.

The days when liqueurs were popularly served as postprandial digestives have largely come and gone. But their significance behind the bar has never been more greatly felt than today. It is a category that has reinvented itself. Just ask the legions of Jägermeister and Red Bulls fans if liqueurs are cool.

Robert Plotkin is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and has recently authored his 16th book, *Secrets Revealed of America's Greatest Cocktails - The Hottest Spirits, Freshest Places and Coolest Drinks*. He can be reached at [www.BarMedia.com](http://www.BarMedia.com) or by e-mail at [robert@barmedia.com](mailto:robert@barmedia.com).

## Kaffir Key Lime Martini

*Specialty of Rosemary's Restaurant*

*Created by Michael Shetler, Bernice Matola*

Cocktail glass, chilled

Rim glass with crushed graham cracker crust

Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass

1 1/2 oz. KeKe Beach Key Lime Liqueur

1 1/4 oz. Stoli Vanil Vodka

3/4 oz. Hangar One Kaffir Lime Vodka

1/2 oz. Cuarenta y Tres Liqueur

1/4 oz. freshly squeezed lime juice

1/2 oz. heavy cream

Shake and strain

Garnish with lime wheel

## Nattahnam

*Specialty of Indigo*

*Created by Jason Castle, Tim Skelton*

Cocktail glass, chilled

*Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass*

3 oz. Jack Daniels

1/2 oz. Tuaca Liqueur

1/2 oz. sweet vermouth

Shake and strain

Garnish with cherry

## Pomegranate Mojito

*Specialty of Rickshaw Far East*

*Bistro & Bambu Lounge*

*Created by Melvin Espinal*

House specialty glass, chilled

Build in glass

12 mint leaves

2 oz. fresh lime juice

2 oz. simple syrup

3 pieces fresh mango

*Muddle contents and add in ice*

3/4 oz. PAMA Liqueur

3/4 oz. 10 Cane Rum

1/4 oz. club soda

Garnish with pomegranate wedge

## Prickly Pear Mexican Mojito

*Specialty of Backstreet Café*

*Created by Sean Beck*

Pilsner glass, chilled

Rim glass with salt (optional)

Pour ingredients into iced mixing glass

1 3/4 oz. El Tesoro Silver Tequila

1/4 oz. Cointreau

3/4 oz. simple syrup

3/4 oz. lime juice

1 1/2 oz. fresh prickly pear juice

*Shake and stir*

2 oz. soda water

Garnish with lime slice and cilantro sprig

## Tennessee Williams

*Specialty of Bookmarks*

*Created by Jonathan Pogash*

Highball glass, iced

*Build in glass*

1 1/2 oz. Southern Comfort

1/2 oz. Dry Vermouth

2-3 dashes orange bitters

1 oz. pineapple juice

Top with club soda

Garnish with large, leafy mint sprig