

# The Classic Cocktail to See a Good Year

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As spirits consumers continue to be more and more cocktail-savvy, bartenders are pushing the boundaries of the classics to present fresh twists on traditional flavors. These new trends reflect the increasing sophistication of cocktail consumers and their demand for innovation, technique, taste and novelty, according to The Distilled Spirits Council.

The Distilled Spirits Council states that for the past five years, the interest in super-premium spirits has grown by 92 percent.

"The knowledgeable consumer is increasingly passionate about super-premium spirits such as high-end vodkas, limited-edition scotch whiskies, extra anejo tequilas and aged rums to name a few," says Ana Jovancicevic, Distilled Spirits Council director of public relations. "Today, these pricey bottles are purchased for more than just sipping," she adds. "These super-premium spirits are now increasingly regarded as the essential ingredients to creating stellar cocktails in exclusive hot spots across the nation." She also notes that the soft economy has not affected many people's tastes for these super-premium cocktails—people continue to be willing to spend more for a little bit of luxury.

Moving beyond the fruit-infused vodkas of recent years, bartenders are focusing on flavor by experimenting with new infusion ideas. Traditional botanicals like violet, lavender, cardamom and teas are lending an old-world and elegant twist to classic cocktail recipes. And while fresh ingredients are still key, pioneering bartenders and mixologists are pushing the envelope by creating novelty infusions that amuse and entertain patrons.

"Many of my contemporaries are using eccentric flavors and ingredients you would normally find in cooking such as chili peppers, smoke, wood and pork," says Jim Meehan, a bartender from hot spot PDT in New York City. Flavors such as these are setting the tone for unconventional cocktail menus nationwide.

"Infusions are catching on within all spirit categories," says Jovancicevic. "We are seeing that consumers are now most interested in discovering new flavors that capture the senses as well as the imagination."

Today, the question of when "to shake" or "to stir" evokes a passionate answer from most cocktail connoisseurs. The same goes for when "to muddle." As bartenders embrace tradition, technique is becoming another key to creating quality classic cocktails. In many cases, it is the method that defines the drink and makes it authentic. Not only are bartenders and mixologists focused on these skills, the customer is becoming as interested in the technique as they are in the ingredients.

"In cocktail bars, patrons are captivated by the behind-the-scenes details of mixology," says Jovancicevic. "They are asking more questions. I credit the mixology movement for shedding so much light on the importance of classic cocktail techniques."

The concept of cooking "in season" is the inspiration behind the cocktail trend of using fresh ingredients to create homemade mixers, sodas and bitters. The art of making sodas and bitters in-house is also a way to re-create flavors once found in classic-era cocktails.

"Because some of the traditional brands of bitters such as Stoughton's and Boker's are no longer sold, bartenders are re-creating their own versions of these essential mixers from historic recipe archives," says Jovancicevic. "Leading bartenders and mixologists are now determined to serve the highest quality cocktails and avoid using pre-made ingredients whenever possible."

Old-fashioned liqueurs and cordials like Chartreuse, Curacao and Crème de Violette are being resurrected in today's classic cocktails, while hard-to-find and unusual ingredients like Orgeat syrup and Falernum are being re-created.

Raw eggs, once avoided because of salmonella fears, are now commonly included in high-end cocktails to replicate classic recipes. The recently launched book, *Imbibe!* by David Wondrich, chronicles the life of bartending pioneer Jerry Thomas, and it includes many recipes calling for the use of these types of forgotten ingredients.

"In Jerry Thomas' capable hands, mixology was an exacting science," says Wondrich. It is this sentiment that is prompting the modern mixologist to explore traditional methods and revisit classic ingredients.