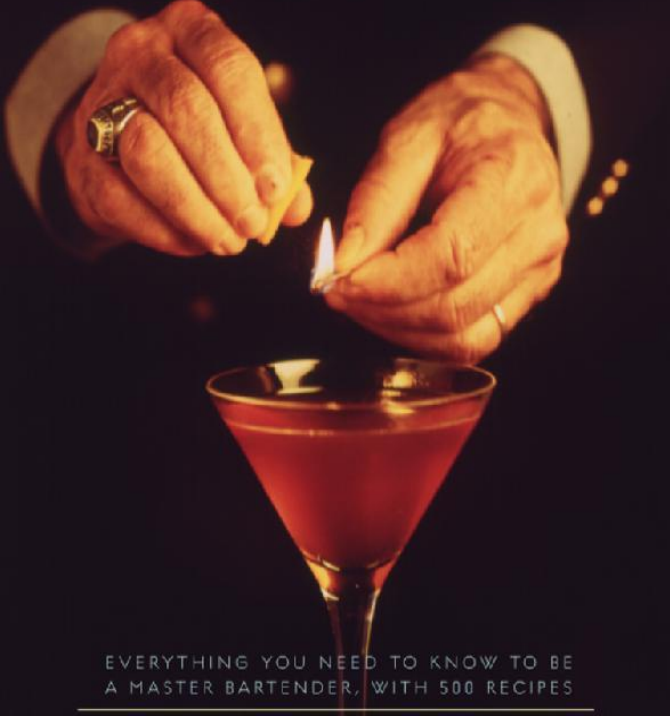


# THE CRAFT OF THE COCKTAIL



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BE  
A MASTER BARTENDER, WITH 500 RECIPES



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A MASTER BARTENDER, WITH 500 RECIPES

DALE DEGROFF

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE ERML



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My life has unfolded like a day behind the bar. The regulars, the unexpected guests, the solitary drinker methodically working toward his end, the group spontaneously celebrating another day on the planet. I fell in love with bars because of the uninhibited, disordered, and surprising way life unfolds at the bar. The only logical progression in my life has been the wealth of characters who have crossed my path, leaving their sweet, sour, strong, and weak for me to ponder. I dedicate this book to all the friends and strangers who took a moment to tell a great story and send me on my way.



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# INTRODUCTION

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By age twelve, I knew exactly where I wanted to live when I grew up: Big things happen in big places, and New York City was the biggest. Luckily, my father had instilled in me an unreasonable supply of optimism, which buoyed me through learning a city that could swallow you up without a trace. This optimism, along with a few good friends and dumb luck, was about all I had when I arrived in New York in 1969.

Within a year, I went to work for my best friend's brother, Ron Holland, a principal in a small creative ad agency called Lois, Holland, and Callaway. Everyone's favorite account at the agency was Restaurant Associates. Besides affording Ron and his partners the golden opportunity to work with the legendary restaurateur Joe Baum, it also enabled them to dine and entertain their clients at the very best restaurants in town. In short, a dream account. My chief occupation at the agency was to get in on as many expensive free meals as was humanly possible, which was easy given Ron's generosity. It did not take long to get hooked.

Every Sunday we'd meet for brunch at Charley O's at Forty-eighth Street and Rockefeller Plaza in the heart of Manhattan, assembling just before noon. The old blue laws forbade serving alcohol before noon on Sundays, so the stroke of midday was much anticipated. Ron Holland and his partner, the legendary art director George Lois, had worked closely with Joe Baum creating Charley O's. It was a terrific room, full of dark mahogany and leaded glass, with a long bar along the east wall and a beautiful oval window looking out on Rockefeller Plaza. On the walls hung photographs and quotes from great writers and great drunks; Ron's own Grandma Holland, who pronounced on her death bed, "I'll keep drinking them as long as they keep making them," was on the wall too, her wisdom right alongside Robert Benchley and Errol Flynn. Charley O's was a bar for everyone from writers to gamblers, secretaries to politicians, all drawn there by solid drink, hearty food, and tremendous good cheer. Charley



O's was where Pat Moynihan threw his yearly St. Paddy's-day breakfast; it was where Bobby Kennedy announced his candidacy; and it was the beginning of my love affair with the New York Bar & Grill.

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If there was one single pivotal day in my life that determined my future, it was when I volunteered to fill in for a bartender who failed to show up for a party that Charley O's was catering at Gracie Mansion, the home of New York City's mayor. The manager was frantic and asked whether anyone knew how to tend bar. None of the old-time barmen wanted to work a thankless, tipless gig; I lied and said I was a bartender. But before dashing off to the mansion, I rushed over to Mike Flynn, the head bartender, and asked, "By the way, how do you tend bar, anyway?" There was very little time, but Mike was a kind and sympathetic soul. He wrote out a list of common drinks and how to make them, and gave me some pointers on how to pour. In what seemed like seconds later, I was behind the bar at Gracie Mansion. Mayor Abe Beame was presenting the keys of the city to Rupert Murdoch, so all the top people in the Beame administration and a number of other prominent New Yorkers were attending. All of a sudden, it dawned on me that I was center stage and this was a captive audience. It was only a makeshift, poorly stocked bar, and I never really had to make anything that fancy, but there was something about being behind that bar that felt just right. I don't know how Muhammad Ali felt the first time he climbed into a ring, or how Louis Armstrong felt the first time he picked up a trumpet, but for me, I knew I was standing in a very familiar and cozy place. I was home.

In 1987, when Joe Baum opened the Promenade Bar in the newly restored Rainbow Room, I was offered the unique opportunity to create a classic bar in the old style. I was ten years into my bartending career with two great bars on my résumé, the original Charley O's and the Hotel Bel-Air. I had an intuitive understanding of what a great bar could be, but I still had much to learn about what made a great drink. What followed was a journey back in time to learn how to re-create the classic cocktails in the classic style. There wasn't anyone around who remembered how to do it. Using only fresh and natural ingredients meant doing away with fast and easy pre-made mixes and figuring out how to achieve just the right amount of sweet and sour, strong and weak. It meant searching for out-of-print cocktail books and experimenting with

hundreds of recipes, adjusting them to a modern palate and today's larger portions.

And so began my quest for just the right cocktails with just the right recipes. What I learned while rediscovering the lost art of bartending is what I will share in this book: a treasure of recipes that will tantalize your palate, enliven your parties, and inspire you to embark on your own journey to discover new and exciting ways to mix drinks.

Cheers!

**THE  
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BULL'S BLOOD AND MARTINI

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GRILLED DIVER SCALLOPS  
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MEDALLION OF VEAL  
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"TROPICAL FRUIT CRUISE"  
*3 desserts @ 2 each*

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Pastry Chef: Martin Howard  
Master Mixologist: Dale Degroff  
& Staff*



PART 1

THE CRAFT OF THE COCKTAIL

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THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
COCKTAIL

I learned about cocktails much the same way I learned to tend

bar. Certainly through research, but mainly through experience.

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My fellow bartenders taught me how to treat people, my customers taught me about life, and most important, my mentor, the great restaurateur Joe Baum, taught me how little I knew. Joe sparked my curiosity to find out what makes a great cocktail.

The cocktail is, in a word, American. It's as American as jazz, apple pie, and baseball; and as diverse, colorful, and big as America itself.

Indeed, it could even be argued that the cocktail is a metaphor for the American

people: It is a composite beverage, and we are a composite people.

Let's begin by looking at what preceded its invention.

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## THE EARLY DAYS

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Before Europeans settled in America, they had been cultivating beverage traditions for centuries. Southern Europeans, around the Mediterranean, produced wine and brandy, while distilled-grain spirits were part of the tradition and culture of the peoples who inhabited the northern tier of Europe, where it was too cold for wine grapes to grow. Interestingly, the distillates produced with fermented grape and grain mash were also revered for their “medicinal” qualities, and came to be known as aqua vitae in Latin, eau-de-vie in French, usquebaugh in Gaelic, and “water of life” in English. Naturally, as the technology of distilled spirits from grain and grape advanced, water of life could be produced more cheaply and in greater quantities, and eventually it was used to produce flavored cordials and liqueurs.

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#### COCKTAIL TRIVIA

On more than one occasion when I was behind the bar, I offered a bitters-soaked lime or lemon wedge dipped in sugar to bite into for a hiccup cure. Remarkably, most (but not all) of the time it worked. Try it.

Once the Europeans established themselves on this side of the Atlantic, they put to good use the beer- and wine-making skills they had brought with them from the Old World. They also brought the Old World opinion that drinking water was unwholesome, even dangerous. The early colonists were voracious experimenters, fermenting beverages from practically everything they could get their hands on: pumpkins, parsnips, turnips, rhubarbs, walnuts, elderberries, and more. They flavored their beer with birch, pine, spruce, and sassafras. They planted apple orchards everywhere from Virginia northward to produce cider and, more important, applejack, which provided the base for many early colonial drinks. Applejack was also popular because it could be made without the



use of expensive distilling equipment. Fermented apple juice, or hard cider as it was called, was left out in the cold in late fall and early winter. As layers of ice formed on the surface of the cider, they were skimmed off, removing the water content and thus concentrating the alcohol in the remaining liquid.

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Conversely, as trade between the Old and New worlds increased, Europe in turn discovered the plants and botanicals that the colonists were well on their way to exploiting. As early as 1571, a Spanish doctor named Nicolas Monardes published a document describing plants and medicines from the Americas that were being assimilated into daily life all over Europe. In Italy and France, these plants eventually found their way into fortified and flavored wines, such as vermouth and other apéritif wines. Ironically, these products made their way full-circle across the Atlantic, where they later played a pivotal role in the growth of the cocktail tradition.

That cocktail tradition began with rum. Distilling spirits began commercially in the New World in 1640 when Wilhelm Kieft, the director-general of New Amsterdam (now Manhattan), erected the first still in which to distill gin and a tavern in which to sell it. When Manhattan fell into the hands of the English, the still was used to make rum, the first internationally accepted spirit of the New World. But truth be told, rum was sort of an accident. Christopher Columbus introduced sugarcane to our hemisphere on his second voyage for the purpose, of course, of making sugar. Rum was made by the ever-industrious colonists as a way to utilize the molasses left over from sugar production—that is, rum was a by-product of sugar. But by the end of the seventeenth century, rum production dwarfed sugar production to such an extent that the British enacted laws requiring that a certain proportion of all sugarcane crops must be used to make actual sugar. Rum had become the base for many colonial beverages, especially punches, and was produced throughout the Caribbean, South America, and to a great extent even in New England.

The production of rum fueled the growing economy. By 1733 it surpassed all other exports from the colonies. At the time, New England rum distillers were purchasing the molasses from the cheapest sources in the Caribbean, which were more often than not French and Portuguese. As a result, the British rum distillers who were sourcing their own molasses were losing a market share to the upstart colonial distillers and their cheaper molasses, and hence cheaper rum. In retribution, the British passed the Molasses Act of 1733 to control and tax the flow of molasses into the colonies. The Sugar Act followed, and then in 1765 the Stamp Act, which required the use of a tax stamp on all transactions. These acts led to the founding of the First Continental Congress, and eventually to the Revolutionary War. So, you see, it was rum, not tea, that precipitated our break from Great Britain. (Well, maybe there were a few other minor concerns, but this is a book about cocktails, not textiles.)

The American victory over the British left the new republic deep in debt. To the astonishment of most of his colleagues in the new government, Alexander Hamilton, our first Secretary of the Treasury, decided to pay our war debts quickly by way of a federal excise tax on rum and spirits, which was passed by the Congress in 1791 and signed into law by President George Washington. Thus began the tradition of paying for our wars by taxing our spirits. This would prove handy when, just twenty years later, the new nation found itself at war again with Great Britain in 1812. For the second time in the nation's brief history, the British blockaded our coastline, cutting off trade with molasses producers in the Caribbean and all but finishing the dwindling rum distilleries. This led to a tidal increase in the domestic production of grain spirits, and eventually to the birth of the second American spirit, bourbon, our all-American corn whiskey.

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## COCKTAIL TRIVIA

Although Angostura Bitters has an alcohol base, like vanilla extract, it is considered a food additive and flavoring agent, not an alcoholic beverage. When used by the drop, it won't affect the alcohol content of a drink. Only persons with severe allergic reactions to alcohol should avoid flavoring with bitters.

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It was also during the period between these two wars that the word cocktail seems to have come into use. If you ambled into a colonial New England inn for a cold one, or just as likely a hot one, you'd probably order a ratafia, shrub, turnip wine, posset, pope, bishop, sack, flip, or an ale. Are any of these cocktails? Not really. But they were the progenitors of the cocktail, which made its official debut in print in 1806 in a publication called *The Balance and Columbian Repository*. In a letter to the editor, a reader had queried the meaning of a new word, cocktail. The editor wrote back:

“Cocktail is a stimulating liquor, composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water and bitters. It is vulgarly called a bittered sling and is supposed to be an excellent electioneering potion, in as much as it renders the heart stout and bold, at the same time that it fuddles the head...It is said also, to be of great use to a Democratic candidate because, a person having swallowed a glass of it, is ready to swallow anything else.”

The sarcastic last line of that reply addresses the practice of plying voters with alcohol, a tradition said to have begun with George Washington that did not end officially until Prohibition. The editor's reply also gives us for the first time a clear distinction between what constitutes a cocktail and separates it from all the concoctions that came before it: the addition of bitters. Bitters is a generic term for alcoholic beverages distilled or infused with plant or root

extracts. Native Americans taught the early settlers how to use indigenous plants for flavorings in beverages and for medicinal purposes. Eventually, Old World plants were incorporated into these heady infusions, some of which included gentian root, colombo root, cinchona bark (quinine), ground ivy, horehound, cassia, wormwood, and angostura bark and root. Historically, these infusions were promoted as medicine to beat the tax on alcohol, though they did serve as effective digestifs. What they really did, however, was enhance the flavor of mixed drinks to which they were added.

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#### COCKTAIL TRIVIA

Certain bitters have properties that may not be strictly medicinal but do settle the stomach or aid digestion. Angostura, the most well-known bitters today, was created in 1824 by a young German army doctor named J. G. B. Siegert, who volunteered to fight for Simón Bolívar and Venezuelan independence from Spain. He concocted the serum as a stomach tonic for Bolívar's jungle-weary troops.

The first commercially produced bitters was probably Peychaud's, made by Antoine Amédée Peychaud, a Creole immigrant to New Orleans who operated a pharmacy on the French Quarter's Royal Street from around 1793 through the 1830s. Peychaud himself made his bitters on a small scale but in 1840 the product was manufactured and sold nationally and internationally. With his background as an apothecary, Peychaud was a natural mixologist who delighted the friends who gathered for late-night revelry at his pharmacy. Peychaud would mix cognac and a dash of his secret bitters for his guests in a two-sided eggcup called a coquetier, pronounced "cock-tvav." Sound familiar? It is very likely that this

word evolved into the word cocktail in English, but there are countless other tales with the same claim. Regardless of what Peychaud called his concoction, it evolved into the anise-scented Sazerac—sans absinthe, of course.

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The transition from rum to whiskey was well under way long before the British again tried to choke off America's molasses supplies. The immigrants who fled the famines in the British Isles in the early eighteenth century found the New England states less than welcoming, and many of them settled along the frontier of western Pennsylvania. While the Quaker and Dutch colonists settled early on in Pennsylvania to escape the Puritan intolerance of New England, the hardy Scots pushed even farther west, opening up new wilderness and clearing lands for small farms. Naturally, many of them were schooled in the art of distilling whiskey from the old country, and brought small stills with them. Others simply built their own stills out of necessity, as whiskey was used in commerce in place of cash. Goods were purchased and debts were settled with Monongahela, as the whiskey came to be known, named for the river that marked the western frontier at that time.

Later, Hamilton's heavy tax on spirits drove many distillers out of the colonies altogether and to the frontier territories that would become Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and Indiana. These territories were ideal for whiskey production: The soil was rich, crop yields were higher than in the east, and there was a plentiful supply of pure mineral water bubbling up through the limestone shelf. Savvy settlers cleared the land and planted corn, which was indigenous and offered greater return per acre than other grains. From corn they made corn whiskey, which they barreled and sent down the river by barge to New Orleans. Depending on the distance and the water level of streams and rivers, the barrels of whiskey were sometimes in transit for many months. Completely by accident, whiskey makers discovered the benefits of barrel aging. Prior to the invention of the steam engine, all barge traffic on the river went in

one direction only—south toward the gulf—on flatboats and barges, very slowly. But with the advent of steam-powered riverboats and canals, in the middle of the nineteenth century, northern routes were opened to the lucrative eastern market. Whiskey production benefited from easier access to the big markets of the north and east. This development was followed by revolutionary advances in the technology of distilling (brilliantly documented in Michael Kraft's important book, *The American Distiller*, 1804), that led to the growth of large distilleries that replaced small farmers as the main source of whiskey from "the West." It was also at this time, around 1833, that the word Bourbon first appeared on whiskey labels, a tribute to the French who fought side-by-side with Americans in the Revolution. French names were popular throughout the colonies and the frontier. Everything from streets in New York City to cities on the frontier like Louisville and Lafayette were renamed to honor our French allies.

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# THE GOLDEN AGE

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When the war with Britain ended in 1815, spirits were heavily taxed again to pay for the war, but not for too long. In 1817, with the debt settled, all excise taxes on domestic spirits were repealed, and for over forty years—up until the Civil War—the spirits industry enjoyed a tax-free growth period. This finally set the stage for what would become known as the golden age of the cocktail. Bars and saloons flourished during this period. In 1832, the Pioneer Inns and Taverns Law created a new type of license that allowed inns to serve alcoholic beverages without being required to lease rooms. This made official what had been happening ever so quietly after colonial-era regulations relaxed after the Revolutionary War: The bar was officially open for business. The floodgates were now open.

The Industrial Revolution that swept the western world in the nineteenth century had a powerful impact on every facet of American life, and the alcoholic-beverage industry benefited greatly. Factories lured people to urban centers around the country and

fostered a sea change in the way people ate and drank and gathered. As cities grew larger, restaurants—without inns—became an important part of the urban landscape. Mass immigrations took place between 1820 and 1855, bringing people from Scotland, England, and Ireland and from Germany and other Central European countries directly to the bustling cities. Like the colonists before them, these new Americans brought with them their distilling and brewing skills and their love of the communal tradition of the public house and taproom.

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#### BARMAN AS POWER BROKER

Of the late-nineteenth-century barkeepers, Theodore Roosevelt said, “Bartenders form perhaps the nearest approach to a leisure class that we have at present on this side of the water. Naturally they are on semi-intimate terms with all who frequent their houses. There is no place where more gossip is talked than in bar rooms, and much of this gossip is about politics...that is the politics of the ward, not of the nation.”

The new immigrants typically lived in the worst areas of these urban centers. But many prospered by creating their own social clubs, stocked with gallons of illegal spirits that they occasionally sold to the neighborhood at large. These unlicensed establishments were a phenomenon referred to as “blind pigs” or “blind tigers.” The gimmick was that you paid a certain amount of money “to see the blind pig,” and as a bonus you were served a free drink. The goal of these wily merchants, of course, was to get enough people to pay to see the pig so that they could open legit establishments. These neighborhood bars and saloons, often two or three to a block, were central to community and precinct politics, serving as community living rooms where men gathered to talk politics.



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sample content of The Craft of the Cocktail: Everything You Need to Know to Be a Master Bartender, with 500 Recipes

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