

Supplies:

- barware: cocktail glass, coupe, jiggers, mixers, barpoon, julep strainer
- spirits (williams): rye, bitters, vermouths, Grand Marnier, gomme (class-made), sugar cubes
- spirits (home): Luxardo Maraschino, lots of bitters
- citrus: lemons and orange
- sundries: ice chest, ice, two water pitchers, paring knife, cutting board, medicine dropper

1 Bitters

Aromatic bitters are a non-potable, often high-proof liquid created by macerating botanicals (roots, herbs, barks, and spices) in alcohol. The alcohol is essential since it can effectively extract flavors that, say, water simply cannot. Bitters impart complexity, nuance, and flavor to a cocktail. Taken alone, they are often *very* bitter and unappetizing, but in a cocktail they help highlight the spirit and often marry ingredients. For example, in the Manhattan, aromatic bitters help bridge the rye to the sweet vermouth, connecting the spiciness of the spirit to the complex sweetness of the vermouth.

History

Regan [5] contains a concise history of bitters which I'll review here.

As for Angostura, the basic story is that Dr. Johann Gottlieb Benjamin Siegert, a Prussian army doctor, ended up in Angostura, Venezuela. There he studied botanicals for their medicinal qualities and created the tonic we now call Angostura Bitters. Originally, the bitters were used to treat stomach ailments and scurvy aboard ships. Angostura is now produced in Trinidad which is off the coast of Venezuela. The recipe is a well-kept secret although the root of gentian, a flowering alpine plant, is listed on the packaging.

Peychaud's bitters were developed in 1838 by Antoine Amedie Peychaud Jr. for medicinal purposes in his New Orleans apothecary. Peychaud used his father's recipe. The bitters are essential to the Sazerac and the Vieux Carre cocktail. Peychaud's bitters are now produced by the Sazerac Company. The recipe is a well-kept secret. Only "herbs and spices" appears as an ingredient.

The exact history of orange bitters appears somewhat unknown. They appeared sometime in the 18th century and were pivotal to pre-prohibition cocktails [2]. A pre-prohibition martini contained a few dashes of orange bitters.

Ingredients

Wondrich [6] contains original recipes for Boker's, Stoughton's and Jerry Thomas' own decanter bitters. Dr. Adam Elmegirab has recently recreated Boker's and The Bitter Truth (of Germany) has their own take on Jerry Thomas' decanter bitters. But what exactly are the roots, herbs, barks and spices in bitters and how does one effectively macerate them to draw out flavors that enhance cocktails?

Food and Wine contains three receipts for bitters which are an attempt to loosely mimic the three leading styles: Aromatic (in the style of Angostura), Aromatic Creole (in the style of Peychaud's), and Orange. A glossary of standard bitters ingredients is available on the Food and Wine website:

<http://www.foodandwine.com/articles/gastronaut-how-to-make-bitters#bitters-glossary>

Besides gentian root, several other botanicals of note include cinchona bark, the natural source of the anti-malarial quinine found most frequently in tonic water. Cinchona also appears in many aperitif wines like Cocchi Americano and (the now unavailable) Kina Lillet. Cassia bark has a cinnamon flavor and quassia is a bitter herb native to South America.

2 Rye

To review, by law in the United States [1], all whiskey must be

- made from a grain mash;
- distilled at less than 190 proof;
- possess the taste, aroma, and characteristics generally attributed to whiskey;
- stored in oak containers (except that corn whisky need not be so stored); and
- bottled at not less than 80 proof.

As with bourbon, rye whiskey must contain a minimum of 51% rye, be distilled at less than 160 proof and be aged for a minimum of two years in new charred oak barrels.

The *mash bill* for whiskey is the percentage breakdown of grain. Most ryes follow a similar mash bill: 60% rye, 35% corn, 5% barley although recently several ryes like bulleit (and other brands starting with the 95% LDI/MGP rye mash) and Vermont's Whistle Pig have been pushing the rye envelope. Whistle pig is 100% rye.

3 Aromatic Cocktails

As with Embury [3], we'll define aromatic cocktails broadly as any spirit forward cocktail that employs some aromatic modifier, be it digestive bitters, aromatic bitters, or aromatic wine. Our focus today will be on aromatic whiskey cocktails.

Improved Whiskey Cocktail

- 2 oz. bourbon
- 1 tsp gomme syrup
- 1/2 tsp maraschino
- 1/8 tsp absinthe
- 2 dashes Boker's bitters

stir and strain into a well-chilled old fashioned glass. Garnish with a lemon twist. The improved whiskey cocktail should be compared against the whiskey cocktail (no absinthe, sub curaçao for maraschino and no fancy glass and the *fancy* whiskey cocktail which is just the whiskey cocktail in a fancy glass with a little more effort on the garnish. Also, [6] explains that *dashes of this and that* eventually led to the Old-Fashioned which is sort of a blue-collar version of the above (sugar instead of syrup, built in the glass over ice, served with a small spoon, no absinthe or maraschino or curaçao, and definitely no fruit salad or muddled orange and cherry like one might see today).

Sazerac

- 2 oz. rye
- 1 tsp gomme syrup
- 2-3 dashes Peychaud's bitters

Stir and strain into a well-chilled, absinthe-rinsed old fashioned glass. Garnish with a lemon twist. The classic way of making this drink involves muddling the sugar and bitters first and discarding the lemon peel after the twist. Jerry Thomas offers a slightly different approach: add lemon rind to the mixture initially—it will get strained out [6]. Meehan and Gall [4] uses 3 oz. of rye (probably because a 2 oz. drink looks really small even at a serious cocktail lounge), a demerara cube, and a mixture of Peychaud's and Angostura bitters.

Manhattan

- 2 oz. rye
- 1 oz. sweet vermouth
- 2 dashes bitters

stir and strain into a well-chilled coupe. Optionally garnish with a brandied cherry (I like Luxardo) but avoid neon bomb maraschino cherries at all costs! Meehan and Gall [4] call for Wild Turkey and Martini sweet vermouth (my favorite is Rittenhouse 100 and Carpano Antica). Regan [5] likes bourbon in his manhattan, but personally I find it too sweet next to the sweet vermouth—rye is spicy and that spice marries well to the sweetness of Italian vermouth.

I love Manhattan variations. Check out the Liberal, the Green Point, the Fort Point, the Brooklyn, the Red Hook, the Carroll Gardens, the Bushwick, and the Bensonhurst. Most of these recipes are available at

<http://ohgo.sh/archive/brooklyn-cocktail-variations-red-hook-greenpoint-bensonhurst-recipe/>

and

<http://ohgo.sh/archive/brooklyn-cocktail-variations-cobble-hill-carroll-gardens-bushwick-recipe/>

References

- [1] T. Alcohol and Firearms. Electronic code of federal regulations. Title 27: Part 5: Subpart C, 2011.
- [2] P. Clarke. Bittersweet symphony. <http://www.imbibemagazine.com/Cocktail-Bitters>.
- [3] D. A. Embury. *The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks*. Doubleday, 1948.
- [4] J. Meehan and C. Gall. *The PDT Cocktail Book*. Sterling Epicure, 2011.
- [5] G. Regan. *The Joy of Mixology*. Clarkson Potter, first edition, 2003.
- [6] D. Wondrich. *Imbibe!* Perigren (A Division of Penguin), 2007.