

Café MEETS COCKTAIL BAR

Mixologists are embracing coffee and tea as versatile bar ingredients

BY SALLY KRAL

Today's bartenders are willing to experiment with just about any ingredient to make innovative cocktails. Practically every pantry in the U.S. contains either coffee or tea, if not both, so it's fitting that these beverages are finding their way into more mixed drinks. "Coffee and tea are such staples in most people's everyday lives that they were bound to be mixed in cocktails sooner or later," says Mary Valdez, beverage manager at 4 Saints, the rooftop restaurant and bar at the Kimpton Rowan hotel in Palm Springs, California. "In contrast to all the crazy and adventurous ingredients that bartenders are using on menus these days, coffee and tea are more approachable to the everyday patron. For example, if an avid coffee drinker who doesn't normally opt for cocktails sees a coffee cocktail on the menu, that will make it more appealing."

Michelle Salgado, principal bartender at El Velvet Elvis at the Pershing Inn in El Paso, Texas, agrees that adding tea or coffee to a cocktail makes it more relatable. "Coffee and tea are popular indulgences; combining them with another indulgence—cocktail drinking—catches everyone's attention," she says. Both tea and coffee have complex flavors and aromas, making them ideal for creating similarly intricate mixed drinks, notes Sarah Meade, owner of Here and Now cocktail bar in Los Angeles. "They're ingredients that you probably already have at home or at your bar and can easily be used to enhance an otherwise mundane cocktail," she says.

Ryan Arvin, bar director at Perno in Birmingham, Michigan, notes that cocktails featuring coffee or tea can be great ways to entice guests to try something different. "Coffee and tea are familiar flavors to most people, and mixing them with

PHOTOS BY (OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT) CESAR GUSTAVO PEREZ II; MICHAEL PASSARI; ANTHONY MORROW/PULP DETROIT



Bartenders are increasingly turning to coffee and tea to mix inventive cocktails. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pick Me Up In Jalisco at 4 Saints in Palm Springs, California and Valor y Valentía from El Velvet Elvis in El Paso, Texas feature coffee, while Flying Lotus from MO Bar + Lounge in Miami and Hot Tub's Too Hot from Perno in Birmingham, Michigan feature tea.



a unique spirit could be just what it takes for people to branch out and try something new,” he says. “Whether it be a warm cocktail, a spirit-forward cocktail, or a tiki cocktail, coffee or tea can be your secret weapon.”

Fragrant And Flavorful

With so many different styles and varieties of coffee and tea to choose from, bartenders have a plethora of flavor profiles at their disposal, all within a single ingredient. “When you’re bored with your typical cocktail ingredients, tea and coffee can open up so many creative doors,” says Sam Nelis, beverage director at Montpelier, Vermont-based distillery Caledonia Spirits, which produces the Barr Hill line of spirits. “The benefit of using teas is that you can acquire exotic aromas and flavors from faraway places in the world. Recently we paired a smoked lapsang tea with our barrel-aged Tom Cat gin—the char on the barrel works incredibly well with the smoked tea.” The cocktail Nelis is referring to is bartender Emma Sanford’s Leaving Hardwick (\$12), which is available at the distillery’s bar. It features Barr Hill Reserve Tom Cat gin, Carpano Antica Formula sweet vermouth, Bortolo Nardini amaro, and house-made smoked lapsang tea syrup.

Nelis adds that the bar team at Caledonia has also been experimenting with kegged cold-brew coffee, which is carbonated with nitrogen. “It adds an incredible texture to fizzes and flips,” he says, pointing to his Morning Fog cocktail (\$12), which is a flip-style drink blending the cold-brew coffee along with Barr Hill vodka, Italicus Rosolio di Bergamotto and Tempus Fugit Crème de Cacao liqueurs, coconut cream, whole egg, and a pinch of salt.

“I love using Chameleon cold-brew coffee,” El Velvet Elvis’ Salgado says. “It’s locally made here in Texas, they have different flavors to play with, and it’s concentrated so it won’t over dilute when we shake it in a cocktail.” Her Valor y Valentía (\$12) blends the cold brew with Flor de Caña 12-year-old rum, Licor 43 liqueur, house-made lemon cordial, and Ms. Better’s Bitters Miraculous Foamer. Salgado favors coffee and teas that are reflective of El Paso. “We often use hibiscus tea, or *té de Jamaica*, which is commonly found in our border town and reminds a lot of our customers of their abuelas who would make it for them,” she explains. The Roselle (\$12), created by beverage director Cesar G. Perez II, mixes Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon, Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur, Lustau Los Arcos Amontillado Sherry, hibiscus tea, lime juice, cane sugar simple syrup, and fresh mint leaves.

In addition to adding a flavor punch, tea is also a useful bar ingredient due to its long shelf life and cost effectiveness compared to fresh herbs and spices, notes Kabir Akbani, bartender at the Mandarin

Oriental Miami Hotel’s MO Bar + Lounge. “I created a Banana Julep for our cocktail menu and instead of muddling fresh mint I use mint tea, which helps to dilute the cocktail and at the same time gives it an intense mint flavor that combines well with the sugar, Bourbon, and banana liqueur,” he says. The drink (\$17) mixes Elijah Craig Small Batch Bourbon, Giffard Banane du Brésil banana liqueur, Demerara simple syrup, mint tea, and Angostura bitters. “Nowadays you can find many tea shops and tea sellers at farmers’ markets geeking out over their products and custom blends,” Akbani adds. “Previously tea was very simple and there were limitations to



El Velvet Elvis’ Madre Jessu (top left) contains Cheongsam Jade Oolong tea liqueur, while Here and Now’s Got My Mojo Working (top right) includes house-made sencha tea syrup, and Red Star Tavern’s Cold Awakening (above) features cold-brew coffee.

its flavors, but now you'll find tea makers really getting in depth with their product by making blends like spiced apple tea or caramel coffee tea."

For Pernoi, Detroit-based Eli Tea Bar created a custom tea blend comprising its Traverse City Cherry Festival tea plus chamomile, anise, and orange peel. This unique tea is used in Pernoi bartender Brad Bianchi's Hot Tub's Too Hot (\$17) along with Valentine Distilling's Liberator Old Tom gin, lemon juice, honey syrup, and Green Chartreuse liqueur-infused whipped cream. "Tea and gin are made for each other, and I've found that Japanese whisky also pairs brilliantly with tea," Arvin says. "We have a really popular Penicillin riff that includes calendula tea-honey syrup and Japanese whisky." The drink (\$14) was created by Arvin and features Suntory Toki whisky, house-made calendula tea-honey syrup, lemon juice, house-made ginger syrup, and a pinch of salt.

With the bold flavors found in coffee and many teas, Brandon Lockman, lead bartender at the Red Star Tavern at the Kimpton Hotel Monaco in Portland, Oregon, likes making coffee or tea the front-runners in a cocktail. "Showcasing their ability to be the main element in a cocktail is a challenge, but it can be very rewarding," he says. "Coffee has a



FROM LEFT: *The Spill The Tea* from 4 Saints and *Shen Nong's Elixir* from the Red Star Tavern both contain elements of tea. The first uses jasmine tea-infused Beefeater gin, while the latter features Rishi Jasmine Pearl tea.

Cocktail Recipes Featuring Coffee or Tea

SHEN NONG'S ELIXIR By Brandon Lockman

Ingredients:

1 ounce Woodford Reserve Bourbon;
1½ ounces Rishi Jasmine Pearl tea;
1 ounce apple cider;
½ ounce agave syrup;
Apple slice.

Recipe:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine Bourbon, tea, cider, and syrup. Shake and strain into a Collins glass. Garnish with an apple slice.

VALOR Y VALENTÍA By Michelle Salgado

Ingredients:

1¼ ounces Flor de Caña 12-year-old rum;
¾ ounce Licor 43 liqueur;
¼ ounce lemon cordial¹;
1 ounce Chameleon Mexican cold-brew coffee;
10 drops Ms. Better's Bitters Miraculous Foamer;
Lemon-sugar;²
Dehydrated lemon wheel.

Recipe:

Combine rum, liqueur, cordial, coffee, and foamer in a cocktail shaker. Do a quick dry shake, then add ice and shake until properly diluted. Strain into an ice-filled double rocks glass with a lemon-sugar rim. Garnish with a dehydrated lemon wheel.

SPILL THE TEA By Mary Valdez

Ingredients:

2 ounces jasmine tea-infused Beefeater gin³;
¾ ounce shiso yuzu syrup⁴;
¾ ounce fresh lemon juice;
1½ ounces club soda;
Lemon peel.

Recipe:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine gin, syrup, and juice. Shake until the tin is frosty on the outside. Strain into an ice-filled highball glass and top with club soda. Garnish with a lemon peel.

¹Squeeze 10-15 lemons (or use day-old juice to salvage), reserving the husks. Run juice through centrifuge to clarify. Measure the clarified juice and add an equal amount of natural cane sugar (e.g. 200-ml. juice to 200-mg. sugar). Blend until fully integrated.

²Put saved lemon husks into a dehydrator until desiccated. Blend until pulverized and mix with equal parts by weight natural cane sugar. Fold together.

³Place 3 bags of In Pursuit of Tea Jasmine Pearls tea in a 1-liter bottle of Beefeater gin and steep at room temperature overnight, then remove bags.

⁴Steep 10 shiso leaves in 14 ounces hot water for 8-10 minutes before adding 2 ounces yuzu juice and 16 ounces sugar. Whisk all ingredients together until sugar has dissolved, then let cool to room temperature. Once cooled, strain out the shiso leaves and bottle. Refrigerate for up to two weeks.



The Gardener cocktail (pictured) from New York City's Benoit includes Veuve Clicquot Champagne and vodka infused with white tea.

unique flavor; it can be acidic and bitter, nutty, or fruity. You've got a lot of options to play up—one combination of ingredients can highlight one note, while another combination highlights something completely different. As for tea, there's such a wide range of flavors to work with, but the flavors that I found are most successful in cocktails are the floral, fruity, nutty, and even savory notes of tea." His Shen Nong's Elixir (\$12) comprises Woodford Reserve Bourbon, Rishi Jasmine Pearl tea, apple cider, and agave syrup. His The Cold Awakening cocktail (\$12), meanwhile, features High West American Prairie Bourbon, Imbue Petal & Thorn aperitif wine, cold-brew coffee, maple syrup, heavy cream, and a pinch of salt.

Multipurpose Modifiers

Though both coffee and tea work well as the star flavor in cocktails, when used in smaller, thoughtful ways they can add more subtle character. "Making syrups from scratch, infusing spirits, and even creating house-made liqueurs are all great ways to use coffee and tea in cocktails," Caledonia Spirits' Nelis says. "We use fresh echinacea to make an echinacea tea liqueur and we pair it with our Barr Hill gin, elderberries, and raw honey. The relationship between tea and honey dates back hundreds of years, so it's an obvious match for us since we use raw honey in our spirits." The drink Nelis describes is bartender Mary Alberti's Respect Your Elderberry (\$11), featuring Barr Hill gin, house-made echinacea tea liqueur, house-made lemongrass tincture, lemon juice, elderberry-infused manuka honey, and hot water.

"What I really love about tea is that it's quick to prep and there's a lot you can do with it," MO Bar + Lounge's Akbani says. "You can use it in its natural form to add flavor and dilu-

tion in punches or you can use it to make syrups and spirit infusions. And it usually requires a smaller amount of product for prep—for example, two tablespoons of tea are more than enough to make one quart of syrup or to infuse a 750-ml. bottle of spirit." MO Bar + Lounge's bar manager Lora Nefiodchina's Flying Lotus (\$17) blends Russian Standard vodka, house-made jasmine green tea syrup, green apple purée, and lemon juice. For the Heaven Hill Bartender of the Year 2019 competition, in which Akbani was a finalist, he created the La Tarentella cocktail, made with Rittenhouse rye, Domaine de Canton, Averna amaro, homemade mint julep tea syrup, lime juice, hot water, and Dashfire Clove bitters.

House-made syrups and infusions have become increasingly popular behind the bar over the years—and tea and coffee are ideal ingredients for them. At Here and Now, bartender Sam Houston's Got My Mojo Working (\$13) comprises Jim Beam Bonded Bourbon and house-made sencha tea syrup. The Feelin' Good as Hell (\$15), meanwhile, features Plantation 3 Stars, XO 20th Anniversary, and O.F.T.D. Overproof rums, plus espresso-infused Coco Lopez cream of coconut, and pineapple and orange juices. Bartenders Taylor Cloyes and Makenzie Collard created the drink.

"The way coffee and tea are used in cocktails has definitely evolved," says Valdez of 4 Saints. "You more often see things like coffee-infused rums and whiskies, or even coffee-infused aperitifs that go beyond the classic Irish Coffee. And tea is one of my favorite things with which to infuse spirits—especially gin and vodka. I use herbal teas most often because they tend to be lighter and more floral, with subtle citrus notes." Her Spill the Tea (\$14) blends jasmine tea-infused Beefeater gin, house-made shiso yuzu syrup, fresh lemon juice, and club soda. At New York City restaurant Benoit, The Gardener (\$21) comprises Reyka vodka that's infused with Kusmi Tea's Alain Ducasse white tea, along with rhubarb purée, Peychaud's bitters, and Veuve Clicquot Champagne. "Tea is a great way to add clean flavors into cocktails without having to use a ton of sugar from syrups, and there are so many different blends of tea that are great for adding subtle nuance to something as simple as a Vodka Soda," Valdez adds.

When all else fails, there are many spirits companies that offer their own tea- and coffee-infused products. At the Heaven Hill Bartender of the Year 2020 Austin regional competition, El Velvet Elvis' Salgado won with her Madre Jessu cocktail (\$10), which blends Dubonnet Rouge Grand aperitif, Pama pomegranate liqueur, Lustau Los Arcos Amontillado Sherry, and Cheongsam Jade Oolong tea liqueur. At 4 Saints, Valdez's Pick Me Up in Jalisco (\$14) mixes Milagro Reposado Tequila, St. George Nola coffee liqueur, house-made cinnamon orgeat syrup, and La Colombe cold-brew coffee.

Here and Now's Meade favors Mr. Black Cold Brew Coffee liqueur. "The team behind this brand has been working hard to educate the hospitality industry as well as the general public not just about their liqueur, but coffee in general," she says. "The introduction of Mr. Black and other similar liqueurs has helped increase awareness of using these types of flavors in cocktails."

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