

Daytime Drinking

Brunch cocktails bring the fun

BY SALLY KRAL

Brunch, the meal typically enjoyed on weekends in the late morning or early afternoon, has become a staple throughout the hospitality industry, notes Danny Park, food and beverage director at Café Robey, located within the Robey Hotel in Chicago. “Brunch has obviously taken off, with some businesses even operating solely within the typical brunch hours,” he says. “When I’m working the floor during brunch, or enjoying brunch myself, the energy is completely different than breakfast and lunch. A typical breakfast is usually quick in-and-out and lunch is a combination of business and diners in a small social setting. With brunch it’s usually larger social groups with all sorts of food and beverages ordered.”

Perhaps the most defining feature of brunch is the cocktails that flow, giving this meal a fun and festive atmosphere. “People usually don’t drink brunch cocktails every day, so when they do it has a celebratory feeling,” says Slava Borisov, lead mixologist at Travelle at The Langham hotel in Chicago. “When you gather together with friends or family for brunch, it’s a special time to drink something outstanding.”

Caitlin O’Rourke, bar manager at Moonrise Izakaya in New York City, notes that brunch cocktails are often extravagant. “That can mean anything from a Mimosa, elegant in its simplicity, to a Bloody Mary with a whole fried chicken on it,” she says. “A cocktail before 5 P.M. always feels a little indulgent—a pleasure you allow yourself because you’ve been working hard and you deserve it.” Indeed, even if all you’re celebrating is the arrival of the weekend, brunch cocktails are there to put some pep in your step.



Moonrise Izakaya in New York City puts a Japanese spin on classic brunch drinks in the Momo-mosa (above), which uses carbonated Gekkeikan Junmai sake, and Hanako San (opposite), with flavors that emulate the Bloody Mary.

Fun And Fresh

There are two cocktails that have become synonymous with brunch and daytime drinking in general: the Mimosa, a blend of orange juice and sparkling wine, and the Bloody Mary, comprising vodka, tomato juice, and spices. “You’re always going to have the Mimosa and the Bloody Mary—they’re classics for a reason, and they’re not going anywhere,” says Josh Batista, who serves as beverage director at Moonrise Izakaya alongside O’Rourke. The venue’s own versions of these old standbys are quite unique: O’Rourke’s Momo-mosa (\$13) mixes house-carbonated Gekkeikan Junmai sake and house-made white peach syrup, and Batista’s Hanako San (\$13) features sundried tomato-infused Blank vodka and a house-made savory syrup that features many different Japanese ingredients you’d find in a dashi, resulting in flavors reminiscent of a Bloody Mary but distinctly unique.

“Now we’re seeing bartenders explode the idea of what a brunch cocktail is,” Batista adds. “They’re pulling every flavor they can think of from a breakfast menu and putting it in a glass.” His Wakey Wakey Eggs and Bakey (\$13) does just this, combining bacon fat-washed Santa Teresa 1796 rum, orange juice, maple syrup, and house-made kala namak (a kiln-fired rock salt) saline, garnished with an orange wedge and a bacon slice. His Vamanos Café (\$14), meanwhile, is a frozen café con leche (coffee with milk) spiked with Santa Teresa 1796 rum and topped with coconut whipped cream. Coffee-based cocktails will always have a place on brunch and daytime cocktail menus. At the Broken Shaker at the Freehand hotel in Los Angeles, bar director Christine Wiseman’s ‘Spro

PHOTOS BY (LEFT & OPPOSITE) MAX STONE





White spirits and fruit flavors are often combined in daytime cocktails like the Hibiscus Bliss (above) from Broken Shaker in the Freehand Hotel in Los Angeles and the Shiso, Youso (top right) from Yūgen in Chicago.

Martini (\$14) is a variation on the Espresso Martini, blending Grey Goose vodka, Frangelico liqueur, Tempus Fugit Crème de Cacao liqueur, espresso, Miracle Mile Chocolate Chili bitters, and a pinch of smoked salt.

“Brunch cocktails have definitely moved away from focusing so much on juice-based drinks,” Café Robey’s Park says. “Mixologists are putting their own creative touches on these drinks—from infusing flavors into syrups and spirits to harmonizing savory and sweet flavors together, there’s definitely a variation of what’s offered for brunch now.” The venue’s A Dip in the Pool (\$10) by bartender Vanessa Beaderstadt comprises Cruzan Strawberry and Plantation 3 Stars rums, house-made mint syrup, lime juice, Liquid Alchemist Strawberry Elixir, and soda water. “We like to use nice bold flavors that will give you the kick you need to wake up,” Park adds. “Whether it comes from a combination of ingredients and spices or house-infused syrups, using fresh and bright ingredients creates the best cocktails.”



At The Southern Gentleman in Atlanta, the Nick’s Garden (\$13) features Highclere Castle gin, tarragon-infused honey, blackberry purée, beet powder, and lemon juice, garnished with edible flowers. “Instead of the run-of-the-mill Mimosa, brunch drinks have become a lot more fun with different juices being incorporated—I’ve been seeing a push for more seasonal fruit juices and even savory ones,” says Saam Reza, beverage manager for Southern Proper Hospitality, which owns the venue. “We try to push our guests’ palates by using different spirits and liqueurs they wouldn’t normally consider for brunch but still are fun and exciting.”

Indeed, while white spirits paired with fruit juice has been the most common daytime drink combo in the past, no spirit or ingredient is truly off-limits at brunch these days. At Travelle, Borisov’s Tropical Storm (\$17) comprises Talisker 10-year-old single malt Scotch, passion fruit purée, house-made eucalyptus honey syrup, turmeric, coconut water, and soda water, topped with coconut flakes. At Yūgen in Chicago, bar manager Chelsea Napper’s Shiso, Youso (\$17) blends Mizu Lemongrass shochu, house-made shiso syrup, and Jean-Marc Montegottero calamansi vinegar, garnished with a candied shiso leaf. “Brunch drinks have become, for me anyhow, a really great chance to play around with every fruit and vegetable I can think of,” Napper says. Her Tochigi (\$17) mixes Plantation 5-year-old rum, Green Chartreuse liqueur, house-made strawberry syrup, Jean-Marc Montegottero calamansi vinegar, and coconut milk ice cubes. “I love anything bright that’s going to wake up my palate for brunch,” she says, adding that the Asian citrus Buddha’s hand is a current favorite of hers. “I’ve gotten to use it a lot more often at Yūgen—it makes for a really beautiful syrup.” Her I Wanna Hold Your Hand (\$17) comprises Milagro Silver Tequila, Mizu Lemongrass shochu, house-made Buddha’s hand syrup, lemon juice, and Topo Chico mineral water.

PHOTOS BY (LEFT) CHRISTINE WISEMAN; (RIGHT) MADISON OLSZEWSKI



The Wakey Wakey Eggs and Bakey (left) from Moonrise Izakaya highlights classic breakfast flavors like bacon, maple syrup, and orange juice. The Tochigi (center) from Yūgen showcases strawberry with coconut milk ice cubes and the Water Lily Pond (right) from Chicago’s Travelle features refreshing flavors with Ketel One Botanical Cucumber & Mint, Lillet Blanc aperitif, and Chase elderflower liqueur.



Bright And Bubbly

Napper adds that while brunch cocktails have become so much more than just orange juice and bubbles, the bubbles are definitely still flowing. “Effervescence is an important ingredient for me when it comes to brunch,” she says. “I love what bubbles add to most cocktails, making them feel lighter—like I could have two instead of one.”

Reza agrees that sparkling wine is a big go-to for daytime drinks. “F. Scott Fitzgerald said it best: ‘Too much of anything is bad, but too much of Champagne is just right,’” he says. At The Southern Gentleman, the Scarlett Belle (\$11) blends

strawberry-infused Tito’s vodka, lime juice, simple syrup, Fee Brothers Cherry bitters, and Benvolio Prosecco.

At Daisies in Chicago, assistant general manager and beverage director Kevin Murphy says that anything with bubbles is a hit with brunch guests. “We love combining our house-made shrubs and kombuchas with local sparkling wines,” he notes. His Persimmon Bloom (\$12) features Apologue Persimmon bittersweet liqueur, house-made rhubarb shrub, Mawby Blanc Brut sparkling wine, and club soda. “It’s great to use liqueurs and cordials as bases instead of your classic vodkas, gins, or whiskies—they pack flavor without as much alcohol

Brunch Cocktail Recipes

WAKEY WAKEY EGGS AND BAKEY

By Joshua Batista

Ingredients:

2 ounce bacon fat-washed Santa Teresa 1796 rum¹;
1 ounce orange juice;
½ ounce maple syrup;
1-2 drops kala namak saline (to taste)²;
Orange wedge;
Bacon slice.

Recipe:

In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, combine rum, juice, syrup, and saline. Shake and strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice. Garnish with an orange wedge and bacon slice.

TOCHIGI

By Chelsea Napper

Ingredients:

2 ounces Plantation 5-year-old rum;
½ ounce Green Chartreuse liqueur;
1 ounce house-made strawberry syrup³;
½ ounce Jean-Marc Montegottero calamansi vinegar;
Coconut milk ice cubes;
Cocktail umbrella.

Recipe:

In a cocktail shaker, combine rum, liqueur, syrup, and vinegar. Fill halfway with ice. Shake vigorously for 20 seconds and strain into glass of choice. Add coconut milk ice cubes and garnish with a cocktail umbrella.

WATER LILY POND

By Slava Borisov

Ingredients:

1 ounce Ketel One Botanical Cucumber & Mint vodka;
1 ounce Lillet Blanc aperitif;
½ ounce Chase elderflower liqueur;
2 ounces Bisol Jeio Prosecco;
Splash soda water;
Cucumber slice;
Mint sprig.

Recipe:

In an ice-filled mixing glass, combine vodka, aperitif, and liqueur. Stir and strain into an ice-filled wine glass. Top with Prosecco and soda water. Gently stir with a bar spoon and garnish with a slice of cucumber and a mint sprig.

¹Cook bacon, collecting rendered fat as you go. In a large mason jar (or any wide-mouth container that seals well), combine 120 grams bacon fat with 750-ml. rum and shake well. Allow the rum and bacon grease to sit at room temperature for an hour, shaking occasionally for the first 30 minutes. Transfer the jar to the freezer for 2-3 hours until the fat has frozen into a puck at the top; the rum should still be liquid. Poke a hole in the puck and pour the rum through a coffee filter into a bottle or jar for storage. Keeps in the refrigerator for 4-6 weeks.

²Kala namak is a volcanic salt from India that you can find online or at specialty spice purveyors. To make kala namak saline, combine 10 grams kala namak with 70 grams warm water and stir until dissolved.

³In a large pot, combine 2 pints hulled and quartered strawberries, 32 ounces water, and 4 cups granulated sugar. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to a simmer for about 10 minutes. Strain and allow to cool. Store in the refrigerator for up to 10 days.



While *The Southern Gentleman* in Atlanta features spirits like gin in brunch cocktails like the Nick's Garden (above), the venue often sticks to sparkling wine for daytime drinks such as the Scarlet Belle (left), which uses Prosecco.

content," Murphy adds. "Spritz-style drinks have become quite popular because they're low abv but still flavorful and intricate. People crave interesting flavors, not just booze."

Murphy adds that in general consumers are gravitating toward a more European approach to drinking: "They're embracing lower-octane drinks enjoyed throughout the day," he explains. And as Moonrise Izakaya's Batista notes, "When a trend pops up in nighttime cocktails, you're going to see it in daytime drinks as well—right now amaro is big, so we're seeing a lot of Spritzes on daytime menus." At Travelle, Borisov's Japanese Spritz (\$18) features shiso-infused Dolin Dry vermouth, Italicus Rosolio di Bergamotto bergamot liqueur, Akashi-Tai junmai daiginjo sake, Luxardo aperitif, Bisol Jeio Prosecco, and soda water, garnished with alyssum and viola flowers. "Our guests prefer low-abv libations such as Highballs and Spritzes," Borisov notes. "I typically use fresh, seasonal ingredients in my cocktails and brunch and daytime drinks are no exception." He adds that fresh cucumber, basil, thyme, mint, and tarragon are some of his favorites. His Water Lily Pond (\$17) comprises equal parts Ketel One Botanical Cucumber & Mint vodka and Lillet Blanc aperitif, plus Chase elderflower liqueur, Bisol Jeio Prosecco, and soda water, garnished with fresh cucumber and mint.

"The rising popularity of hard seltzers, low-abv drinks, and mocktails points to the fact that drinkers are gravitating toward lighter drinks during the day," says Wiseman of Broken Shaker. "Lately, I've been experimenting with botanical vodkas that are also lower in alcohol content—we recently added a drink featuring one of the new Grey Goose Essences flavors. Each bottle is infused with all-natural fruits and botanicals, making it super easy to use for simple daytime serves like a Vodka Soda or Spritz." Her Hibiscus Bliss (\$14) blends equal parts Grey Goose Essences White Peach & Rosemary and Martini & Rossi Riserva Ambrato vermouth, as well as house-made fennel syrup, grapefruit and lemon juices, and Golden State Jamaica cider. Her Spritz Party (\$14), meanwhile, comprises Bombay Sapphire gin, Lillet Blanc, St-Germain liqueur, pineapple and lemon juices, turmeric, and soda water. "Broken Shaker is a rooftop pool bar, so we have guests lounging here all day and I like to make sure they're having a good time while staying safe out in the sun," Wiseman adds. "Our cocktails are light and delicious so they can enjoy a few in one sitting—more than they could with, say, an Old Fashioned or Martini in the early afternoon."

From staples like the Bloody Mary and Mimosa to experimental and indulgent concoctions and low-abv options, the most important aspect of any daytime cocktail is that it's fun, according to Moonrise Izakaya's O'Rourke. "It should be a liquid escape from your life outside the brunch table," she says. "So when you're building a cocktail for daytime, you just have to find something that makes you happy, something that feels special or cachet or just a little bit extra, and then build it into a drink."

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