

Spice It Up

Cocktails with a kick of spice are in high demand

BY SALLY KRAL



Spicy notes add depth to cocktails like *The Ahumado* (pictured), made with mezcal, blood orange liqueur, lime, and bell and jalapeño peppers.

What begins as a culinary trend always seems to find its way to the bar. As American consumers grow increasingly adventurous in their eating habits, they're demanding more interesting flavors in their drinks as well. "People have been evolving both as foodies and cocktail enthusiasts," says Maxwell Parise, lead bartender at Miami restaurant and bar Toro Toro. "Bartenders must innovate and experiment with different, unexpected combinations in order to stand out and keep the cocktail trend evolving."

Spices—from fiery hot peppers to aromatic baking spices—have been a major asset to mixologists as they bring excitement and intrigue to the drinking experience. "Today, American palates are more adventurous and consumers are more curious than they were in the past," says Jordan Corney, bartender at

Bohanan's Prime Steaks and Seafood in San Antonio. He adds that in Texas, spicy food and drinks have always been popular thanks to the influence of Mexican culture, but that they're still relatively new to the rest of the country. "People want to experience flavors from different cultures when they go out, and many spicy flavors weren't on the American consumer's radar for a long time," he explains. "Now they've finally got a little spice in their lives, and they're loving it."

Palate Pleasers

One cocktail in particular can be considered the original spicy drink: the Bloody Mary. "It's probably the world's most popular spicy cocktail," says Beam Suntory master mixologist Bobby Gleason, adding that since most consumers are familiar with

the traditionally vodka-based cocktail, he likes to change it up. "My favorite way to make a Bloody Mary is with Jim Beam Bourbon. I call it the Bloody Beam." The drink features Jim Beam Bourbon, V8 Original 100-percent vegetable juice, Worcester sauce, Tabasco Original Red hot sauce, fresh ground pepper, onion and garlic salts, and basil leaves. "The Bourbon adds a meatiness to the cocktail and really changes people's perception of the Bloody Mary," Gleason says.

Classic, time-honored cocktails provide the perfect starting point for mixologists to introduce consumers to unfamiliar ingredients and flavors. At Toro Toro, the Spicy Gingersnap Mojito (\$10) gives the traditional fruity, rum-based drink a spicy twist of pepper, ginger and cinnamon. It features Art in the Age and Domaine de Canton ginger liqueurs, house-made jalapeño syrup, and lime juice, with a cinnamon and sugar rim. "Some of our guests are surprised by how enjoyable spicy cocktails can be," Parise says. "I love changing people's perceptions."

Perhaps the most common spicy twist on a classic cocktail is the pepper-infused Margarita, typically featuring jalapeño. "Not long ago, spicy Margaritas were coming into fashion, and now guests ask for them whether they're on the menu or not," says Eric Tecosky, bartender at Jones Hollywood in Los Angeles and owner of Dirty Sue Premium olive juice. "We're in an era where customers are all about cocktails, and once they've tried the standard recipes, people are ready for new things, often turning to spicy drinks." At Down N' Dirty Tacos and Tequila Bar in Miami, the Cucumber Jalapeño Margarita (\$24 a 32-ounce serving) comprises Tanteo Jalapeño Tequila, Grand Marnier orange liqueur, Monin Cucumber syrup, Ocean Spray sour mix and fresh lime juice, with a jalapeño salt rim.

Patrón Tequila ran a contest this year to determine the most popular style of Margarita and asked consumers to pick their favorite from seven different recipes. Corney's spicy Rosa Picante Margarita (\$12 at Bohanan's) took the prize, deeming it "Margarita of the Year." The cocktail blends Patrón Silver Tequila, Patrón Citrónge Lime liqueur, rose water, and house-made jalapeño oil and ginger syrup. "It's an approachable Margarita variation, yet also has nice depth of flavor with jalapeño, ginger and floral notes," Corney says. He adds that he chose jalapeño because it's more universally appealing, whereas habanero and serrano peppers can be overwhelmingly hot for some consumers. "Jalapeño has that perfect balance of heat and flavor that everyone can enjoy," he explains.

Caliente Cocktails

The jalapeño-based spicy Margarita certainly reigns on current bar menus, but Illegal mezcal house mixologist Gilbert Marquez urges cocktail drinkers to be open to more adventurous and exotic peppers. "The spicy Margarita is the most-requested spicy cocktail and opens up the opportunity to be creative and expose people to different flavors," he explains. His El Poblano cocktail comprises Illegal, lime juice, simple syrup and muddled poblano peppers, with a chipotle-salt rim.



TOP: At Toro Toro in Miami, the Spicy Gingersnap Mojito highlights pepper, ginger and cinnamon. ABOVE: Jordan Corney mixes his Rosa Picante Margarita, which features jalapeño oil. BELOW: The Cucumber Jalapeño Margarita showcases hot flavors.





Mixologists can bring the heat to cocktails in several different ways. The Hot & Dirty cocktail (left) features jalapeño- and habanero-infused vodka, while the Rosa Picante Margarita (center) includes jalapeño oil and the Venceremos (right) is made with hot sesame oil.

“The smoky elements of the mezcal are complemented by the pepper,” Marquez says. “Bitter, sweet, fruity and vegetal flavors all work well with spices.”

At Bohanan’s, the Coachwhip (\$12) blends Patrón Silver with mezcal (brand varies), fresh lime juice, simple syrup, and muddled watermelon and serrano pepper. “It’s refreshing yet fiery,” Corney says. At Toro Toro, the most popular spicy cocktail

is The Ahumado (\$13), which mixes Del Maguey Vida mezcal, Solerno blood orange liqueur, lime juice, agave nectar, and muddled bell peppers, garnished with jalapeño slices.

Jones Hollywood’s Tecosky likes to infuse spirits with peppers, which results in a subtler spice flavor compared to including whole peppers in a drink, which can sometimes be overpowering. His Hot & Dirty cocktail (\$12) blends

Spicy Cocktail Recipes

HOT & DIRTY By Eric Tecosky

Ingredients:

3 ounces jalapeño- and habanero-infused Tito’s Handmade vodka¹;
 Splash Dolin Dry vermouth;
 ½ ounce Dirty Sue olive juice;
 3 cucumber slices;
 Pinch ground black pepper.

Recipe:

Add vermouth to a chilled cocktail glass. Swirl around the glass and toss excess vermouth. In a cocktail shaker, muddle 2 cucumber slices. Add vodka, olive juice and ice and shake well. Fine strain into a cocktail glass and drop a pinch of ground black pepper on top. Garnish with a cucumber slice.

ROSA PICANTE MARGARITA By Jordan Corney

Ingredients:

2 ounces Patrón Silver Tequila;
 ½ ounce Patrón Citrónge Lime liqueur;
 ½ ounce house-made ginger syrup²;
 1 barspoon house-made jalapeño oil³;
 Dash rose water;
 Rose petal sea salt⁴;
 Rose petal;
 Jalapeño slice.

Recipe:

Combine Tequila, liqueur, syrup, oil and rose water in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake until well chilled and strain into a coupe glass rimmed with rose petal sea salt. Garnish with a rose petal and jalapeño slice.

VENCEREMOS By Gn Chan

Ingredients:

1½ ounces Bacardi Carta Blanca rum;
 ½ ounce Kalani coconut liqueur;
 1 ounce pineapple juice;
 ½ ounce cucumber juice;
 Splash lime juice;
 Dash hot sesame oil;
 Pineapple leaves.

Recipe:

Combine rum, liqueur, juices and oil in a cocktail shaker with ice and shake vigorously. Strain into a cocktail glass over fresh ice and garnish with pineapple leaves.

¹Add 2 sliced, de-seeded jalapeño peppers and 2 sliced, de-seeded orange habanero peppers to 1 liter Tito’s vodka. Cap bottle and let sit for at least 24 hours. When desired heat level is reached, strain vodka using a cheese cloth or coffee filter.

²Slowly combine 1 liter fresh ginger juice with 4 cups white granulated sugar, stirring to dissolve. Taste and add more sugar to taste if necessary.

³Combine 10 jalapeños, cut lengthwise and de-seeded, with 1 cup sunflower oil in a saucepan and simmer for 10 minutes over medium heat. Remove from heat, let cool, and then pour into a jar and refrigerate overnight. Strain out solids with a fine strainer and rebottle, storing for up to 30 days on the shelf or 60 days in the fridge.

⁴Dehydrate organic rose petals at 120 degrees for 12 hours. Crush petals and combine with sea salt.



jalapeño- and habanero-infused Tito's Handmade vodka, Dolin Dry vermouth, Dirty Sue Premium olive juice, fresh cucumber and ground black pepper.

Beam Suntory's Gleason says his favorite spicy element in cocktails is Tabasco hot sauce. "Tabasco has several sauces of varying heats, from the gentle Green and Chipotle to the Original Red and Habanero," he notes. "Tabasco is aged in Bourbon barrels, so it has a built-in affinity for Jim Beam." Gleason's Red Hot Stag features Jim Beam Red Stag black cherry-flavored Bourbon, mango and lemon juices, and Tabasco Original. "Combinations like mango or passion fruit with a hint of spice are great ways to bring various peppers into a cocktail," Gleason says. His Dancing with the Devil cocktail comprises Jim Beam Devil's Cut Bourbon, John DeKuyper & Sons O3 orange liqueur, passion fruit juice, fresh lemon sour and Tabasco Original.

Sugar And Spice

Gn Chan, bartender at Angel's Share in New York City, also notes that tropical flavors are a natural pair with spices, as evidenced by classic tiki drinks. "Lots of tropical fruits and spices easily mix together—the light sweetness of the fruit harmonizes with the spiciness," he says. Inspired by the Piña Colada, Chan's Venceremos cocktail (\$15) features Bacardi Carta Blanca rum,



Baking spices add warmth to cocktails as well. El Gaucho (top) combines Bourbon with fall flavors like cinnamon and apple, while the Hottie Choco Toddy (above) blends rum, chocolate and cinnamon.

Kalani coconut rum liqueur, pineapple, cucumber and lime juices, and chili-infused hot sesame oil. Chan won this year's Bacardi Legacy Global Cocktail Competition in April with this recipe. "I like using hot sesame oil in cocktails because it offers a spicy, aromatic element," he adds.

Beam Suntory's Gleason notes that beyond peppers and hot sauces, baking spices like cinnamon, nutmeg and clove are popular cocktail ingredients, particularly when used with darker, aged spirits. "The vanilla notes in Jim Beam Black work especially well with baking spices in cocktails like a Bourbon Milk Punch or simply with hot chocolate," he says. At Repour Bar in Miami, the Hottie Choco Toddy (\$12) blends Afrohead Briland 07 Premium Aged rum with hot chocolate and a cinnamon stick.

"I like to serve after-dinner guests an Arbol Old Fashioned that combines Roca Patrón Añejo, Patrón XO Café Incendio chili-chocolate liqueur, Angostura bitters and orange zest," says Corney of Bohanan's, where the drink is \$15. "The spicy dessert cocktail is a rising trend—chocolate and chili are great together."

New York City bar Porchlight's fall cocktail menu features drinks that incorporate baking spices. "For fall, my imagination is often captured by spices ranging from cinnamon and allspice to cardamom, clove and nutmeg," says head bartender Nicholas Bennett, who cocreated the menu with general manager Michael Shain. The Harvest Moon Cocktail (\$15) comprises Laird's apple brandy, maple syrup, lemon juice, egg white and a house-made allspice-cinchona tincture, and the Vinho Quente (\$15) features Cimarrón Blanco Tequila, Clear Creek Distillery Douglas Fir brandy and a house-made spiced Riesling syrup. Meanwhile, the Three Rings (\$15)

is an Old-Fashioned variation, made with Wild Turkey Bourbon, Laird's apple brandy, Cruzan Black Strap rum, and house-made "black hand" bitters, which feature cardamom.

Similarly evoking classic fall flavors, El Gaucho (\$16) at PM Fish and Steak House in Miami comprises Booker's Bourbon, muddled apples and a house-made cinnamon-honey reduction. "Cocktails that tend to be slightly sweet or bright can really be balanced with a bit of spice," Jones Hollywood's Tecosky says. "As long as bartenders continue to offer balanced spicy cocktails, the category will keep growing. This trend is here to stay." **mw**

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