

# Cooking Up Cocktails

*This year's roundup of cocktail recipe books proves that craft mixology is here to stay*

BY SALLY KRAL

A decade ago, bartenders may not have been considered among the ranks of top chefs, but the mixology movement has drawn attention to the dedication and craft of today's drink slingers.

"History will undoubtedly refer to this past decade as the new golden age of the cocktail," says Brian Van Flandern, New York City-based mixologist and author of "Craft Cocktails." When compiling and testing recipes for his book, which hit shelves this past April, Van Flandern was meticulous in his approach. "Each recipe lists specific brands that I selected based on rigid criteria that included flavor profile, provenance, distillation techniques, terroir and history," he explains. "As a Michelin three-star mixologist, I visit distilleries all around the world and take the time to understand what makes individual spirits special."

Indeed, mixologists today are highly trained and educated, and they're devoted to expanding the knowledge of their craft. Such passion is prevalent in the current cocktail books being produced by top bartenders and mixologists nationwide. "Creating our book meant many early mornings and late nights," says mixologist Jeremy LeBlanc, who coauthored "The Best Craft Cocktails & Bartending with Flair" with food writer Christine Dionese. "But overall the experience was a ton of fun, and we'd do it all over again in a heartbeat."

From approachable and light to exotic and complex, the recipes highlighted in this year's cocktail books appeal to every experience level and taste preference.

## From Novice To Natural

While they may have differing themes or focuses, what many current cocktail books have in common is an aim to educate readers and encourage experimentation. "Topsy Texan: Spirits and Cocktails from the Lone Star State" by mixologist David Alan, for instance, introduces readers to a region of the country that

is often overlooked as a cocktail destination, while "Liquid Vacation: 77 Refreshing Tropical Drinks from Frankie's Tiki Room in Las Vegas" details the history of tiki cocktail culture in America and promotes the drinks made at the bar owned by author P. Moss.

Ten years of traveling to bars worldwide went into Tom Sandham's "World's Best Cocktails: 500 Signature Drinks from the World's Best Bars and Bartenders." The result is a global guide to the trendsetting drinks that have proven most popular and the mixologists behind them. "I tried to present a range that would satisfy most palates," Sandham explains. "But the aim of this book is in part to educate, so in addition to classics I include modern recipes that feature lesser used ingredients like Sherry, sake, cachaça and akvavit." The book features drinks from such mixologists as Kenta Goto, head bartender at New York City's Pegu Club, and Alex Day, a bartending consultant and co-owner of the Los Angeles hospitality group Proprietors LLC. Goto's Shiso No Natsu (\$14 at Pegu Club) features Kira sake, Plymouth gin, Noilly Prat dry vermouth and shiso leaves, and Day's Coffee Park Swizzle (\$14 at Death & Co. in New York City) is made with Lustau Los Arcos Dry Amontillado Sherry, Rhum Barbancourt 3 Star, fresh lime juice, ginger syrup, velvet falernum and Angostura bitters.

"Some of the modern drinks are very easy to replicate at home, while others take more skill," Sandham says. "The concept here was to make the book a resource that readers can go back to as they become more confident in their drinks making. Hopefully, by encouraging readers to play around with spirits in cocktails, I'll inspire a few people to try spirits they wouldn't otherwise."

In addition to ingredients that may be completely new to readers, some recipes in Sandham's collection show how certain spirits can be reintroduced to readers in a new way. "Tequila is a great example of a misunderstood spirit: Many



ABOVE: P. Moss took inspiration from his own bar for the book "Liquid Vacation: 77 Refreshing Tropical Drinks from Frankie's Tiki Room in Las Vegas." BELOW: For his book "Craft Cocktails," Brian Van Flandern (left) rigorously tested recipes for drinks like the Ode to Eau (right).



TOP: RYAN REASON; BOTTOM RIGHT: HARALD GOTTSCHALK







Mixologist Jeremy LeBlanc's King's Cross No. 1 (left) is made with King's County moonshine, muddled persimmon and ginger, orange juice and bitters, and his Mon Cheri Moscow Mule (center) comprises Tito's vodka, ginger beer, maraschino cherries, ginger, lime juice and bitters. Alex Day's Coffee Park Swizzle (right) blends Lustau Sherry, Rhum Barbancourt, lime juice, ginger syrup, velvet falernum and bitters.

people have had bad experiences with it and therefore don't drink it often," Sandham says. "But Julio Bermejo, Tequila ambassador and owner of Tommy's bar in San Francisco, was one of the first to use fresh agave syrup in Margaritas, and his Tommy's Margarita is one of the best drinks in my book." The drink (\$8 at Tommy's) comprises Arette Reposado Tequila, fresh lime juice and agave syrup. "It will get anyone enjoying Tequila in no time," Sandham says.

### Educational Entertainment

Tony Abou-Ganim, author of the book "Vodka Distilled: The Modern Mixologist on Vodka and Vodka Cocktails," also aims to change misconceptions—specifically about vodka. "I wanted to create an in-depth look at the subtle differences in history, taste, aroma, mouth feel and finish that each vodka offers and shed some light on the category, doing away with the myth that all vodkas are the same," he says. For each recipe in his book, Abou-Ganim recommends a specific vodka style for each and explains why that style goes well with the other ingredients in the cocktail. "I want to inspire readers to explore the characteristics of a specific brand and find a cocktail that works with and complements its particular profile," he explains.

For the classic cocktail Monkey Shine, Abou-Ganim recommends a mixed-grain vodka, such as Purity vodka, with Campari aperitif, Cointreau orange liqueur, pink guava nectar, simple syrup and fresh lemon juice. "I support tropical flavors with a

fruit-forward, clean, approachable vodka," he says. And for his Ruby cocktail, a potato vodka like Karlsson's Gold is blended with Aperol aperitif, St-Germain elderflower liqueur, fresh ruby red grapefruit and lemon juices, and egg white. "A potato base is ideal to help soften and moderate the drink's bitter and floral elements," Abou-Ganim explains.

In "Liquid Vacation," Moss exposes readers to the wide range of flavors, textures and strengths that different tiki cocktails can exhibit. "There's a tiki drink for every preference," he says. "It just depends on what flavor the reader wants, what texture and whether they want to sip a mild Lapu Lapu or get knocked out by the more potent Fink Bomb." A classic Southern California tiki drink from the 1950s, the Lapu Lapu (\$9 at Frankie's) features Bacardi rum, Whaler's Original Dark rum, passion fruit syrup, orgeat syrup, and pineapple and orange juices, while the Fink Bomb (\$9)—a Frankie's Tiki Room original created by bartenders Allison Hartling and Mike Richardson—is made with Stroh Original 160 Proof rum, Cruzan Coconut rum, Midori melon liqueur and pineapple juice.

### Personal Touches

In order to dedicate an entire book to the subject of cocktail culture, one must gain an appreciation of the classic recipes from the Prohibition Era. "The best bartenders know and understand classics before they experiment," Sandham says. "Bar culture today is necessarily rooted in these historic recipes."



Tony Abou-Ganim's Monkey Shine mixes Purity vodka, Cointreau liqueur, Campari aperitif and guava nectar.

In "Tipsy Texan," the Corpse Reviver 300 features Tennyson Absinthe Royale, St-Germain, Paula's Texas Orange liqueur and fresh lemon juice. "In this variation on the Corpse Reviver No. 2, absinthe replaces gin and St-Germain fills in for Lillet aperitif," Alan explains. "It's also a good gateway cocktail for exposing people to absinthe, which can challenge some palates."

Similarly, LeBlanc describes his Seared Peach Manhattan in the "Classics with a Twist" section of his book as "a perfect way to introduce whiskey to a newbie." The drink comprises Willett Bourbon, agave nectar, fresh lime juice, peaches, thyme and Angostura bitters. "Its smoky and sweet flavors take the shock away from most whiskeys, but still leave a crisp bite on the palate," LeBlanc notes. For another unique take on a classic, his Mon Cheri Moscow Mule features Tito's Handmade vodka, Bundaberg ginger beer, Luxardo maraschino cherries, fresh ginger, fresh lime juice and Fee Brothers Aromatic bitters.

It was a happy accident that led to Van Flandern's creation of his unique take on the classic Sidecar cocktail. "While bartending at Mario Batali's Esca restaurant in New York City, I accidentally grabbed butternut squash purée instead of quince paste when making a Quince Bellini and the result was delicious," he explains. "It inspired me to create one of my personal favorite recipes in the book, the Butternut-Squashed Sidecar." The drink features Martell Cordon Bleu Cognac, Cointreau, butternut squash purée, fresh lime juice, simple syrup, lemon juice and Dale DeGroff's Pimento Aromatic bitters.

The use of fresh ingredients to create variations on well-known drinks is a common practice among mixologists, who frequent local farmers markets as often as chefs do for their recipes. In "Tipsy Texan," Alan's Persimmon Margarita is a cold weather version of the summertime classic. "Persimmons are one of the hallmarks of fall," Alan says. "The waiting game can be almost unbearable, but once they are finally ripe, the reward justifies the wait. I like to press ripe persimmons through a fine-mesh strainer, discard the skin and seeds and shake the resulting pulp into my fall Margarita." In addition to persimmon, the drink includes Siembra Azul Reposado Tequila, Paula's Texas Orange liqueur and lime juice, served in a glass rimmed with cinnamon, sugar and cayenne.

LeBlanc's Rhubarb Mojito, meanwhile, takes the classic recipe and adds a homemade fresh rhubarb syrup and nutmeg for a hint of spice. And his Italian Old Fashioned blends Hudson Manhattan rye whiskey, fresh blood orange, maraschino cherries, basil leaves, red bell pepper, honey and Urban Moonshine Original bitters. "This unique cocktail is very much like Italian cuisine in that simple, fresh ingredients and an elaborate preparation make all the difference," LeBlanc explains.

### Only The Best

As cocktail culture has become increasingly mainstream, fresh, seasonal produce and artisanal ingredients are not only preferred among mixologists, but among consumers as well.

## Cocktail Book Recipes

### RUBY By Tony Abou-Ganim

**Ingredients:**  
1 1/2 ounces Karlsson's Gold vodka;  
1/2 ounce Aperol aperitif;  
3/4 ounce St-Germain elderflower  
liqueur;  
3/4 ounce fresh ruby red grapefruit juice;  
3/4 ounce fresh lemon juice;  
1 tablespoon egg whites.

**Recipe:**  
Combine vodka, Aperol, St-Germain, juices and egg whites in a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake thoroughly and strain into a chilled coupe glass.



### FINK BOMB

By Allison Hartling and Mike Richardson

**Ingredients:**  
1/2 ounce Stroh 160 proof rum  
1 ounce Cruzan Coconut rum;  
1 ounce Midori melon liqueur;  
3 ounces pineapple juice.

**Recipe:**  
Fill a 14-ounce double Old Fashioned glass with ice. Add Cruzan, Midori and pineapple juice, and then float the Stroh rum on top.



### SHISO NO NATSU

By Kenta Goto

**Ingredients:**  
1 1/2 ounces Kira sake;  
1 ounce Plymouth gin;  
1/2 ounce Noilly Prat dry vermouth;  
5 shiso leaves.

**Recipe:**  
Muddle four shiso leaves in a cocktail shaker. Add sake, gin, vermouth and ice and stir. Double strain into a Martini glass and garnish with remaining shiso leaf.







David Alan (top, with partner Joe Eifler) highlighted regional drinks like the Persimmon Margarita (right) and Fig Daiquiri (above) for his book, *“Topsy Texans: Spirits and Cocktails from the Lone Star State.”*

“The fresh movement has been gaining global popularity for quite some time now, with more and more people demanding fresh juices and house-made syrups, bitters and tonics in their cocktails,” Van Flandern says. He was among the first to experiment with house-made tonic water while he was working at renowned New York City restaurant Per Se nearly 10 years ago. “When my house-made tonic was mentioned in the New York Times’ four-star review of Per Se, it really launched my career,” Van Flandern recalls. “Now, many bars make their own tonics, and there are artisanal brands like Fever Tree and Q-Tonic.”

Van Flandern also incorporates his own infusions into cocktails. In *“Craft Cocktails,”* the Provençal features lavender-infused Plymouth gin, herbs de Provence-infused Noilly Prat dry vermouth and Cointreau. “Today’s best mixologists are emulating great chefs and sourcing local, fresh ingredients that tell a story,” Van Flandern notes.



In writing a cocktail book that focuses on a specific region, Alan was sure to highlight Texas-grown ingredients in many of his drinks. His Fig Daiquiri, comprising Caña Brava rum, simple syrup, fresh lime juice and fresh muddled figs, is one such cocktail. “Figs grow especially well in central Texas,” Alan says. “The taste of raw figs isn’t just fruity, but it’s earthy and vegetal as well. When used

in mixed drinks, the sweetness comes forward—any number of classic cocktails can benefit from the addition of a few ripe figs.”

For the Apple Blossom cocktail, Abou-Ganim makes his own apple-cucumber purée and ginger syrup and blends it with a mixed-grain vodka like Stolichnaya and fresh lemon. And LeBlanc’s King’s Cross No. 1 is made with King’s County moonshine, fresh muddled persimmon and ginger, orange juice and Urban Moonshine Citrus bitters. “People love this drink because it blends the fresh fall flavors of persimmon and ginger and also because it features moonshine, a revivalist spirit with rich history,” he explains.

If this year’s batch is any indication, cocktail books will continue to find a growing audience of dedicated consumers and mixologists. “Bartenders are more creative than ever today, and in turn consumers are getting exposed to very unique, complex and intriguing libations,” Abou-Ganim notes.

And as the popularity of mixology has increased, the job of cocktail making has become one of prestige and great skill. “It’s been many years since I committed myself to working in the booze business full-time,” Alan says. “It took a while, but even my mom seems to approve now.” **mw**

Sally Kral is a freelance writer based in Ithaca, New York.

TOP LEFT: MICHAEL THAD CARTER; RIGHT & BOTTOM LEFT: AIMEE WENSKIE