

In Search of the Perfectly Balanced Manhattan

This came out of my recent exploration of the venerable Manhattan. A few weeks ago, we attended a dinner where the chef paired each course with a specific libation. He included an excellent Manhattan with a small batch bourbon and an Italian Vermouth. Inspired by this, I have determinedly pursued the perfectly balanced Manhattan.

“Well,” one may ask, “what makes any drink ‘perfect’?”

The answer is, of course, the one for whom the drink is made. Recipes for the Manhattan from the turn of the 20th Century, call for vermouth in a much higher ratio than those from the last 20 years. In fact, the vermouth in the Manhattan suffered the same fate as vermouth in the Martini – it practically vanished.



The Manhattan is a simple, yet complex drink. Some time back, I noted Gary Regan’s discussion of the Manhattan in his book The Joy of Mixology. He points out that the ratio of whiskey to vermouth varies with the chosen ingredients. Anywhere from 2:1 – 2:1/2 whiskey to vermouth. The stronger the flavors of the whiskey, the more vermouth it can handle. The goal is to construct a cocktail that balances the sweet spice of the base whiskey with the complexity of the vermouth.

With that goal in mind, creating your “perfectly balanced” Manhattan will require premium ingredients and some trial and error. In other words, purchase your favorite bourbon or rye

along with a good sweet vermouth and start mixing and tasting! I suggest that you start with a whiskey that you enjoy straight. I also suggest that you spring for a couple of different sweet vermouth's, maybe a French and an Italian.



Our Butler Al
serves a
wonderful
Manhattan!

Start building your drink with a high whiskey:vermouth ratio – say 2:1/2 or even 2:1/4. Chill with ice in a mixing glass and taste from a shot glass. You can then add a little more vermouth as you taste. When your ratio is getting close, start thinking about what bitters you would try and any sweetener the drink might need. To try bitters, taste the bitters on your finger followed by a sip from your shot glass. You can do the same with the sweetener.

When you think you are close, stir up a fresh drink and strain into a cocktail glass. What does your nose tell you? What is the first thing you taste with the first sip? What garnish will enhance these? The classic is a brandied cherry and possibly a citrus peel. Here I used Grand Marnier as the sweetener and brandied cherries for the garnish. I did not think that either orange or lemon oils added much.

For the vermouth I chose Carpano Antica, a sweet Italian. I found this quote concerning Carpano Antica from the Wine Enthusiast dated 2011: “This dark, mysterious vermouth is rich, complex and layered, boasting aromas of mint and other herbs, plums and figs, reminiscent of Madeira. The rich flavors are hard to pin down: cocoa, red wine, almonds, bitter marmalade, hints of spice and toffee all play across the palate, finishing with a bracing bitter edge. This delectable sweet vermouth would shine in a Manhattan.” I think that sums up the Carpano Antica!



So, here are my recipes:



Irish Manhattan

While rye and bourbon are the classics in the Manhattan, I don't see any reason not to try an Irish Whiskey. Specifically the Tullamore Dew 10 year old Single Malt. As I've noted before, the Tullamore Dew has the earthy, grassy flavors of Irish whiskey with the flavors of fruit, (apricot, pineapple, raisin) and wood. Just the depth of flavors that blend with vermouth.

- 1 1/2 oz. Tullamore Dew 10 year old Single Malt Irish



Whiskey

- 3/4 oz. Sweet Italian Vermouth
- 1 dash Grand Marnier (1/8 tsp)
- 1 – 2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters
- brandied cherries for garnish

1. Chill a cocktail glass with ice and water.
2. Stir to combine all ingredients, sans cherries, in a mixing glass with ice.
3. Strain into chilled cocktail glass and garnish with the cherries

Bourbon Manhattan



For the bourbon Manhattan, I used Russell's Reserve 10 Year Old. This is a bit of a lighter bourbon, but still has the sweet and spicy notes you expect from a quality aged bourbon. Note that in addition to using a higher ratio of vermouth, the recipe includes more Grand Marnier.

- 2 oz. Russell's Reserve 10 Year Old Bourbon
- 1 1/2 oz. Italian Vermouth (sweet)
- 1 tsp Grand Marnier
- 1 – 2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters

- brandied cherries for garnish

1. Chill a cocktail glass with ice and water.
2. Stir to combine all ingredients, sans cherries, in a mixing glass with ice.
3. Strain into chilled cocktail glass and garnish with the cherries

Rye Manhattan

Sazerac is my rye whiskey of choice. Made at the Buffalo Trace Distillery, it is spicy and sweet with flavors of orange peels, pepper and allspice. It blends very well with the Italian Vermouth. Note that this is the same recipe as the Irish Manhattan, just substituting the Irish Whiskey for the rye.



- 1 1/2 oz. Sazerac Rye Whiskey
- 3/4 oz. Italian Vermouth (sweet)
- 1 dash Grand Marnier (1/8 tsp)
- 1 – 2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters
- brandied cherries for garnish

1. Chill a cocktail glass with ice and water.
2. Stir to combine all ingredients, sans cherries, in a mixing glass with ice.
3. Strain into chilled cocktail glass and garnish with the cherries

When your guest asks for a Manhattan, he or she is probably expecting a drink that is long on the bourbon or rye and very short on the vermouth. It will be up to you to introduce them to your version of the perfectly balanced Manhattan!

Cheers!

Keeping it Simple

I like simple. Simple is good. Especially on a week night when I'm ready to hang out with my wife, who is also my best friend! We enjoy our cocktail hour with a few hors d'oeuvres. We have a variety of nibbles, (and cocktails), that we set out for ourselves, but the best are the simple selections of cheese, olives, nuts and a bit of dry sausage.



It doesn't have to be foie gras every night, or even hot hors d'oeuvres. Find something simple that you like and keep some on hand. Of course it goes without saying that they must go with cocktails!

Cheers!

Mixology Monday XCI Roundup of Shims

The Holidays are upon us, so get ready to entertain with some low octane, high taste cocktails. Take a look at this months Mixology Monday Roundup of shims.

Thanks again to Dinah Sanders of Bibulo.us for hosting this month's MxMo!

Cheers!

Pomegranate Hibiscus Shim



Mixology Monday

The Mixology Monday theme for this month comes from Dinah Sanders, author of *The Art of the Shim: Low-Alcohol Cocktails*

to Keep You Level. The concept of the “Shim”, a term coined by Dinah, is a complex and artful, yet low alcohol, drink. A few years ago, I worked on a number of nonalcoholic, “zero proof” drinks. However, the notion of a low alcohol cocktail was new to me. When I first ran across Dinah’s book, I thought the shim was a cool idea, and made it part of my collection. Now that it is the topic for this month’s MxMo, I have been pushed to explore the concept.

I first tried several fortified wines with various liquors, but nothing was exciting. What I settled on is the Pomegranate Hibiscus Shim, (partly I’m sure because I’m not



ready to give up summer). The ingredients: lemon juice, allspice dram and the hibiscus and pomegranate liquors, are brought together by the homemade grenadine. The drink tastes of pomegranate and citrus with floral notes laced with the allspice dram. You can close your eyes and think of the Islands ... or Fall, whichever you prefer!

I used homemade grenadine and allspice dram. Both of these can easily be purchased. Grenadine is supposed to be pomegranate syrup as apposed to whatever that bottled red liquid you find in the grocery store. My recipe for grenadine, see below, is basically simple syrup made with pomegranate juice instead of water. There are two additional ingredients: rose water (sub Fees Brothers Orange Flower Water) and pomegranate molasses available at Middle Eastern groceries or Amazon [here](#). You can also find small batch grenadine’s, such as Jack Ruby, at better liquor stores.



The allspice dram is from a recipe by Beachbum Berry. It is also simple but does require 6 – 8 weeks to make. Allspice dram, also known as Pimento Liqueur, is made by St. Elizabeth and Bitter Truth. Both are readily available. If you want to try the DIY version, It was published at [amountainofcrushedice](#) for a MxMo in 2008.



This drink does not contain any high proof liquor. It does have the allspice dram which comes in at 35% ABV. The Pomegranate Hibiscus Shim is less than 6% ABV.

Here is the recipe for the ***Pomegranate Hibiscus Shim***:



- 1 1/4 oz. lemon juice
- 3/4 oz. simple syrup
- 1/2 oz. Hibiscus liquor such as Fruit Labs
- 1/2 oz. Allspice Dram – homemade or St Elizabeth's
- 1/2 oz. Pomegranate Liqueur such as Pama
- 2 oz. club soda
- 1 dash Hella Bitters Citrus Bitters
- Lemon wedge and lemon peel for garnish

1. Build drink in a Collin's glass over ice
2. Express the oil from the lemon peel over the drink and discard the peel.

3. Serve with the lemon wedge as garnish

Grenadine

Grenadine is made from pomegranates, not cherries. It is supposed to be red. If you boil this, it will be brown. There is no need to reduce the juice on the stove. Heat it just enough to dissolve the sugar, no more. You can use Whey Low, but it will not be as sweet.



- 2 cups unsweetened pomegranate juice
 - 4 cups sugar or 2 cups Whey Low
 - 1 tsp. rose water sub Fees Brothers Orange Flower Water
 - 2 oz. pomegranate molasses
 - Handful dried hibiscus flowers (optional)
1. In a sauce pan, slowly heat juice and sugar, stirring constantly, until sugar is completely dissolved. Do not allow to boil.
 2. Add hibiscus flowers, if using, and simmer on very low for 10 min.
 3. Remove from heat, fish out and discard the Hibiscus leaves, and add rose water and molasses.
 4. Allow to cool and decant into a glass bottle.



5. Keep refrigerated.

Notes on the Second Corpse



I am, of course, referring to the Corpse Reviver (No. 2). Harry Craddock's original, as published in 1930, called for equal parts lemon juice, gin, cointreau and Kina Lillet with absinthe. Kina Lillet, which was less sweet and more bitter than the current Lillet Blanc, has not been produced since the 60's, (or maybe the 80's depending on who you're reading). So I have wanted to replace the Lillet with Cocchi Americano and Kina l' Avion d' Or. Naturally, these substitutions have been tried by others and published elsewhere. On further investigation, I have found that there were two types of Lillet produced in the 30's: one

for the French market and one for the English. So, it's hard to know which one Harry Craddock was using in 1930's London. Of course, none of this really matters unless you are a cocktail historian or really want to discover those original drinks. What does matter is which flavors you prefer.

As an Anesthesiologist, I am always focused on awakening the unconscious, so playing with the *Corpse Reviver* appeals to me. In that spirit, I tried each of the above, as follows:

- 1 oz. Plymouth Gin
- 1 oz. Cointreau
- 1 oz. lemon juice
- 1 oz. either Lillet Blanc, Cocchi Americano or Kina l' Avion d' Or
- Rinse of Lucid Absinthe (Craddock's original recipe called for 2 dashes which would be about 1/4 tsp)

1. Shake the first 4 ingredients with ice
2. Rinse a chilled cocktail glass with absinthe and drain
3. Double strain the contents of the shaker into the chilled, absinthe rinsed glass.

Tasting notes:



With the Lillet Blanc, the initial nose is anise and lemon. The flavor throughout is herbal and sweet lemon. Very refreshing. The anise aroma fades quickly, but the herbal notes of the absinthe blends well with the Lillet.



Using the Cocchi Americano, the initial nose is the same as above, as is the initial flavors of herbs and sweet lemon. The bitterness of the Cocchi Americano comes through in the middle and overpowers the herbal and sweet notes. The bitterness quickly fades leaving a finish that is strictly lemon.



The Kina l' Avion d' Or created a drink that is entirely different. The initial nose is a lemon and anise with a grassy tone. The flavor is mildly bitter lemon with an underlying earthiness. Very nice and very different.

In summary, I prefer the Lillet to the Cocchi Americano. It makes a more complex drink. The Kina, as noted, creates a markedly different flavor profile, which I also like. While I enjoy absinthe, I think it can easily overpower this cocktail.

This is why I reduced it to a rinse. As always, use premium liquors. The Lillet Blanc and Cocchi Americano have become fairly common and should be available in any good liquor store. The Kina l' Avion d' Or may be harder to find.

The Corpse Reviver (No. 2) is a wonderful drink and I strongly encourage you to try making one, which ever way you like.

Just keep in mind Harry Craddock's warning, published with the original recipe: "Four of these taken in swift succession will unrevive the corpse again"

Cheers!