

In Search of the Perfectly Balanced Manhattan

This came out of my recent exploration of the venerable Manhattan. The combination of whiskey and vermouth has not been my personal favorite. 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!

Key Lime "0"

This should be served flaming. Either double the recipe and serve in a scorpion bowl, or float an inverted lime half with 151 rum soaked piece of bread. You can sub the Key Lime Bitters with orange bitters.



Key Lime '0'

- 2 oz. Mount Gay Gold Rum
- 1 oz. Orange juice
- 1 oz. [Passion Fruit Syrup](#)
- ½ oz. Pineapple
- 1/2 oz. [Grenadine](#)
- ½ oz. [Orgeat](#)
- ¼ oz. [Falernum](#)
- 2 dashes key lime bitters
- 8 oz. crushed ice

1. Shake all ingredients with crushed ice
2. Pour unstrained into tall glass

Tequila Traditional al Cubo

- 1 part Rémy Martin Cognac
- 1 part Zaya Aged Rum
- 1 part Añejo Tequila
- 2 dashes Angostura Bitters
- 2 dashes Bitter Truth Chocolate Bitters
- 2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters
- 1 part [Tequila Old Fashioned Simple Syrup](#)

1. Chill an old fashioned glass with ice and water
2. Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass and stir with ice
3. Strain over fresh ice in chilled glass
4. Garnish with a thick orange zest and a cherry

Spam-aríta

- 1.5 oz. Milagro Plata Tequila
- ½ oz. St. Germain Elderflower Liqueur
- 2 oz. [lemon sour](#)
 - or: 1 1/3 oz. lemon juice and 2/3 oz. simple syrup (1/3 oz = 1 tsp.)
- dash Regan's Orange bitters
- dash Angostura Orange Bitters

1. Chill cocktail glass with ice and water
2. Add all ingredients to shaker
3. Shake well with ice 10 – 15 sec.

4. Strain into chilled glass
 5. Garnish with lemon peel
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Gary's Dry Martini

The original martini contained a lot of vermouth, even equal to or more than the gin, and orange bitters. But over time, the vermouth became a drop or two or just a rinse, and the orange bitters were lost entirely. This is my version of that classic martini. I use St. George Botanivore Gin and Dolin Vermouth. The Botanivore has a nice herbal flavor without a lot of juniper. Also, use fresh good vermouth, it will cost \$12.95 instead of \$9.95. Vermouth goes bad overnight after opening unless you refrigerate it. Then it will last a week or so, (All right, dig that old bottle out of your cabinet you opened 5 years ago and throw it out!)

I like my Elliott's Apothecary Orange Bitters, (I wonder why?), but Fee Brothers works well. Also, the garnish is essential. The olive and the lemon zest impart a very different character to the drink. I suggest you try this drink both ways.

- 1 1/2 oz. St. George Botanivore Gin
- 3/4 oz. Dolin Dry Vermouth
- a short dash of orange bitters
- 1 jalapeno stuffed olive or a lemon zest for garnish

1. Chill a martini glass with ice and water
2. Add all ingredients, except the olive, to a mixing glass and stir with ice
3. Strain into chilled glass and garnish with the olive on a fancy pick or the lemon zest

Strait's Sling

This is a very old drink and was probably the precursor to the Singapore Sling

- 2 oz. Plymouth Gin
- 1 oz. lemon juice
- ½ oz. cherry brandy
- 1/2oz. Benedictine
- dash Angostura Aromatic Bitters
- dash Angostura Orange Bitters

1. Chill a Collins glass with ice and water
2. Add all ingredients to a shaker and shake with ice
3. Strain into a chilled Collins glass over fresh ice

Alaska Cocktail



Another classic, pre-prohibition

cocktail. I have no idea what it has to do with Alaska! As Paul Clarke points out: "[The Savoy Cocktail Book](#), where this drink appeared in 1930, is less than helpful in illuminating the drink's origins: 'So far as can be ascertained this delectable potion is NOT the staple diet of the Esquimaux. It was probably first thought of in South Carolina hence its name,' according to the book." I suggest trying this with Hendrick's gin. The Yellow Chartreuse really plays with Hendrick's botanicals. However, for a more original version use a London Dry, such as Ford's. Where ever its origin and whichever gin, the Alaska Cocktail is worth trying.

- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Hendrick's or Ford's Gin
- $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. Yellow Chartreuse
- Dash Orange Bitters

1. Chill a cocktail glass with ice and water
2. Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass and stir with ice
3. Strain into chilled glass
4. Garnish with lemon twist

Cheers!

Petruchio Cocktail

- 1 oz. Plymouth Gin
- 1 oz. Aperol
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. Lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. 2:1 simple syrup

- Dash orange bitters
- 1 egg white or 3 Tbl. Pasteurized egg whites

1. Chill cocktail glass
 2. Add all ingredients to a shaker and dry shake to break down egg whites
 3. Add ice and shake well 10 – 15 sec.
 4. Strain into chilled glass
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Casino Cocktail

- 2 oz Plymouth gin
- $\frac{1}{8}$ oz lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{8}$ oz Luxardo Maraschino Liqueur
- 2 dashes orange bitters

1. Chill a cocktail glass with ice and water
 2. Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass and stir with ice
 3. Strain into chilled glass
 4. Garnish with a cherry
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Cubed Old Fashioned

- 1 part cognac
- 1 part aged rum
- 1 part aged bourbon
- 2 dashes Angostura Bitters
- 2 dashes Bitter Truth Chocolate Bitters

- 2 dashes Angostura Orange Bitters
- 1 part [Old Fashioned Simple Syrup](#)

1. Chill an old fashioned glass with ice and water
2. Combine all ingredients in a mixing glass and stir with ice
3. Strain over fresh ice in chilled glass

Garnish with a thick orange zest and a cherry