



ERIC ALPERIN AND DEBORAH STOLL



# UNVARNISHED

A GIMLET-EYED LOOK  
AT LIFE BEHIND THE BAR

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## COLD AS ICE

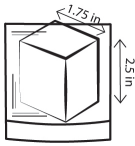
From most durable to least, here's how cocktail styles stack up:

- SPIRITS SERVED NEAT: bulletproof, since there's no ice to melt and become added water.
- OLD-FASHIONED/ON THE ROCK-STYLE DRINKS (drinks served over one large rock): durable, since there are only large surfaces of a single melting cube to affect them.
- TOM COLLINS-STYLE AND SHAKEN DOWN DRINKS (drinks shaken with ice and served long over a spear of ice or down on a rock of ice): less durable.
- CRACKED-ICE COCKTAILS (drinks served over hand-cracked ice): even less durable because of the additional surface area of the many pieces of cracked ice.
- FIXES/JULEPS/SWIZZLES/COBBLERS (drinks served over pebbles): fragile, due to all the surface area of the crushed ice.
- "TRADITIONAL" SOURS (drinks shaken with egg white): more fragile, having only minimal ice crystals from being shaken and served without ice. Note: the sour is slightly more

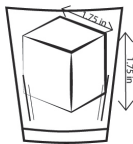
durable than the daiquiri in texture and appearance, due to the binding properties of the egg white.

- DAIQUIRIS, GIMLETS, AND "NONTRADITIONAL" SOURS (drinks shaken with ice and served straight up): even more fragile.
- MARTINIS AND MANHATTANS (drinks stirred with ice and served straight up): the most fragile, since they have no ice crystals, citrus pulp, or air bubbles to help retain their chill, nor are they served over block ice, so they will grow warmer the fastest.

## THE GREATEST HITS AS PENNY POUND ICE SEES IT



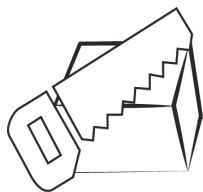
**THE ROCK:** The Rock is our bread and butter and was designed to be larger than a standard two-by-two-inch because it needed to sit taller in the glass but not hit you in the face when you took a swig. Ideal for all drinks on the rock or shaken down.



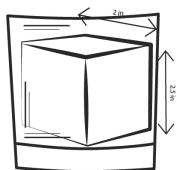
**THE STONE:** Perfect for a sipping spirit or smaller glassware.



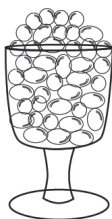
**THE SPEAR:** Best for drinks served long and tall.



THE CINDERBLOCK: For the DIY bar, bartenders can chip pieces off the block, giving their ice an irregular, handcrafted appeal.



THE NORMANDIE: Bigger than the Rock for those larger-than-life glasses. Named after the Normandie Club,\* which had bigger glasses and needed a fatter piece of ice.



PEBBLES: Use in juleps, mojitos, mai tais, cobblers, and fixes.

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\* Opened in 2015 by Proprietors LLC and 213 Hospitality, a neighborhood cocktail bar in the heart of Koreatown, housed inside the landmark Hotel Normandie.

## METHODS AND RECIPES

I'm not going to pretend I've invented unique techniques and brought them to L.A. That an entire history didn't exist long before I showed up—places like Musso & Franks, the Tonga Hut and the Brown Derby, Tiki Ti, the Frolic Room, and Duke's. All Sasha and I did was recognize an opportunity to revitalize something we loved, in a city we hoped would embrace us.

There will be no extemporaneous history on cocktails or cocktail culture in this chapter; I leave that to David Wondrich. There will be no deep dives into shaking, stirring, and jiggering, because that has been eloquently covered by Dale DeGroff, Jim Meehan, Jeffrey Morgenthaler, and YouTube. No investigations into spirits, how they're distilled, or the way different flavor profiles and ABVs affect the balance of a drink will grace these pages, since F. Paul Pacult, Steve Olson, Doug Frost, and Thad Vogler have written definitively on these subjects. And finally, there will be no lessons on Superbags, rotovaping, or immersion circulators, as Alex Day and Dave Arnold are much cooler with those tricks than I am—and also, those techniques don't exist at The Varnish.

What I *do* want to do is drill down on the importance of code—a

code championed at Milk & Honey and furthered by every member of its extended family. I want to clarify our doctrine for building drinks by the round, demystify the Mr. Potato Head method, hit on the basics we live by, and leave you with the 100-plus recipes a bartender heading into their first shift at The Varnish should know. So without further ado, we call to the stage . . .

## MR. POTATO HEAD

Remember Mr. Potato Head? That beige plastic spud your grandmother bought you for your third birthday? He or she (there was also a Mrs. Potato Head) may have started off with red shoes, a mustache, and a black hat, but maybe you grew tired of that version and swapped out the black hat for a pink one, or paired your potato's tux with a sparkly tiara. It was crazy times!

Well, crazy as they were, today those potato-swapping antics apply to cocktails and, as coined by Phil Ward of Death & Co, are called the Mr. Potato Head method.

Here's how it works. Start with a classic recipe:

### **Daiquiri**

2 ounces white rum

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

By swapping out the rum for gin, voilà:

### **Gimlet**

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

Substitute the simple syrup with honey syrup and you get:

### **The Business**

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

Swap the gin back to rum with a little less lime juice, you got yourself a:

### **Honeysuckle**

2 ounces white rum

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

Switch out white rum for Jamaican rum, add two dashes of Angostura bitters, and there's your:

### **Brooklynite**

2 ounces Jamaican rum

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Replace the Jamaican rum with an equal-split spirit base of tequila and mezcal, an additional dash of bitters, and you are now the proud owner of the:

### **Oaxacanite**

1 ounce blanco tequila

1 ounce mezcal

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice



$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup  
3 dashes Angostura bitters

These six cocktails are all based on the daiquiri and gimlet template. Plug and play away, but remember that you can't put ears in noses, which is to say you can't replace two ounces of rum with two ounces of lime juice and only one ounce of rum—you would be messing with the template and your drink would be unbalanced. The Mr. Potato Head method is ideal for coming up with new cocktails or simply categorizing and recalling variations on existing cocktails.

Here are some examples using martinis and manhattans, which are the same drink style—boozy and stirred up—using different base ingredients in the same three-ounce total proportion. They follow the same build as above, but by Mr. Potato Heading the modifiers (vermouths, liqueurs, and bitters) you can create new variations.

### **Martini**

2 ounces gin  
1 ounce dry vermouth

Add Benedictine and bitters, pull back on the dry vermouth, and you have a:

### **Poet's Dream**

2 ounces gin  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce dry vermouth  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Benedictine  
2 dashes orange bitters

Replace the dry vermouth and Benedictine with two different modifiers and you get the:

### **Deep Blue Sea**

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cocchi Americano

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce crème de violette

2 dashes orange bitters

If you look back at the martini spec and swap out gin for rye, trade dry vermouth for sweet, and add some bitters, which are considered a seasoning, you have a:

### **Manhattan**

2 ounces rye whiskey

1 ounce sweet vermouth

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Trade the one ounce of sweet vermouth for a total one ounce of dry vermouth, Picon, and Maraschino and there's your:

### **Brooklyn**

2 ounces rye whiskey

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce dry vermouth

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce house Picon

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

And for one more manhattan variation, let's bring back the sweet vermouth, some Cherry Heering, and a dash of absinthe for a:

### **Remember the Maine**

2 ounces rye whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce sweet vermouth

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Cherry Heering

1 dash absinthe

All cocktails have some form of booze, modifying ingredients, and ice/water. Once you combine them, using varying techniques, you create different cocktail styles, of which there are five main ones.

- OLD-FASHIONED/ON THE ROCK is boozy, built in the glass and served over a rock of ice.
- MARTINIS AND MANHATTANS are stirred, silky, and served up.
- THE SOUR involves shaking citrus, sugars, and traditionally egg white and is served up or on a rock.
- THE HIGHBALL involves nonalcoholic mixers like citrus, juices, sugars, and always bubbles and is served long.
- THE FIX involves citrus and sugars and is served over crushed or cracked ice.

I've added an additional section in the recipes for cream-based, dessert, flips (egg-yolk-based), and hot drinks that live just outside the main styles above.

Basically, a drink's "style" describes its dominant feature, the way it's prepared, and the way it's served. When guests don't know what they want to drink, a server might help by asking, "Would you like something shaken or stirred? Citrusy and refreshing? Sweet or herbaceous? Boozy and complex?" In this way, they're able to narrow down what style of cocktail they're inclined to drink.

There are also cocktail "branches," which are a way of organizing the different cocktails within those five styles. Each branch of cocktail has a parent cocktail. For instance, a gimlet is the matriarch and the Business is part of its family. The manhattan is the patriarch and the Brooklyn is a variation or offspring. You might hear a service bartender calling out to the personality bartender:

"Yo! What's in the Business again?"

"It's a gimlet, but with honey syrup!"

And the service bartender can easily Mr. Potato Head the honey syrup for simple syrup and thus create the Business.

A guest might say, “I loved your house martini. Can I get a variation?”

The server could offer them a Poet’s Dream, which is a martini with a little Benedictine and orange bitters.

A cocktail server might yell across the well to the bartender, “What’s in a London Buck again?”

And the bartender will likely reply, “Duh. It’s a Moscow Mule with gin.”

This allows the cocktail server to return to their table and explain that the drink is something the guest is familiar with, but using gin instead of vodka.

Michael Madrusan, a good friend and Milk & Honey veteran, spent years putting together an all-encompassing “branches” compendium, creating an organized way for bartenders to think about cocktail variations. If you live by the branches, recipes no longer feel like random numbers, which can make bartending seem overwhelming.

Here are a few more examples that illuminate Mr. Potato Head + styles + branches.

OLD-FASHIONED	OLD-FASHIONED	AMERICAN TRILOGY	SMUGGLER'S NOTCH
	2 ounces bourbon whiskey	1 ounce rye whiskey and 1 ounce applejack brandy	2 ounces aged rum
	3 dashes Angostura bitters	2 dashes orange bitters	2 dashes orange bitters
	1 white sugar cube	1 brown sugar cube	1 brown sugar cube
			Absinthe mist

ON THE ROCK	NEGRONI	MY OLD PAL	WHITE NEGRONI
	1 ounce gin	1 ounce rye whiskey	1½ ounces gin
	1 ounce Campari	1 ounce Campari	¾ ounce Suze gentian liqueur
	1 ounce sweet vermouth	1 ounce sweet vermouth	¾ ounce blanc vermouth

MARTINI	MARTINI	GIN & IT	FAIR & WARMER
	2 ounces gin	2½ ounces gin	2 ounces white rum
	1 ounce dry vermouth	½ ounce sweet vermouth	½ ounce sweet vermouth and ½ ounce curaçao

MANHATTAN	MANHATTAN	ROB ROY	GREENPOINT
	2 ounces rye whiskey	2 ounces Scotch whisky	2 ounces rye whiskey
	1 ounce sweet vermouth	1 ounce sweet vermouth	½ ounce yellow Chartreuse and ½ ounce sweet vermouth
	2 dashes Angostura bitters	2 dashes Angostura bitters	1 dash orange bitters and 1 dash Angostura bitters

TRADITIONAL SOUR	WHISKEY SOUR	PISCO SOUR	HARVEST SOUR
	2 ounces bourbon whiskey	2 ounces pisco	1 ounce rye whiskey and 1 ounce applejack brandy
	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice
	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce simple syrup	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce simple syrup	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce simple syrup
	1 egg white	1 egg white	1 egg white
	Angostura bitters	Angostura bitters	Angostura bitters and Peychaud's bitters
		Cinnamon	Cinnamon

NONTRADITIONAL SOUR	FITZGERALD	BEE'S KNEES	GOLD RUSH
	2 ounces gin	2 ounces gin	2 ounces bourbon whiskey
	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce lemon juice
	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce simple syrup	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce honey syrup	$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce honey syrup
	Angostura bitters		

HIGHBALL	MOSCOW MULE	DARK 'N' STORMY	FLU COCKTAIL
	2 ounces vodka	2 ounces Gosling's Black Seal rum	1 ounce rye whiskey and 1 ounce Cognac
	1/2 ounce lime juice	1/2 ounce lime juice	1/2 ounce lime juice
	3/4 ounce ginger syrup	3/4 ounce ginger syrup	3/4 ounce ginger syrup
	Top with soda water	Top with soda water	Top with soda water

FIX	FIX	BRAMBLE	BRAZILIAN FIX
	2 ounces spirit of choice	2 ounces gin	2 ounces cachaça
	3/4 ounce lemon juice	3/4 ounce lemon juice	3/4 ounce lime juice
	3/4 ounce simple syrup	3/4 ounce simple syrup	3/4 ounce honey syrup
		4 blackberries	1/4 ounce yellow Chartreuse

## BUILDING DRINKS BY THE ROUND\*

When a tableful of people orders drinks, chances are everyone will not order the same thing. How do you know what to make

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\* An edited and extended version of the original *Milk & Honey Service Manual*, written by Sasha Petraske and the staff of Milk & Honey for public domain, 1999–2009.

first? Does it matter? In the inimitable words of a writing teacher I know, “The answer is always YES!”

A cocktail is changeable. It is always in the process of getting warmer and, if it contains ice, more watery. Most customers will finish a drink that has become warm and watery, but they will not enjoy it as much. The goal is to deliver a drink to the customer in its coldest state, so they finish it while it’s alive.\* Since certain drinks decay much faster than others, texture- and temperature-wise, you must understand the durability of each style of cocktail in order to understand which might “die” sooner, as explained in chapter 5.

When you first start bartending, it will seem easier to build one drink at a time, but think through all repeating ingredients in a round and find where you can exercise economy of movement. If you’re making two cocktails that have lime juice and simple syrup, you should reach for those ingredients only once. If two of the cocktails you’re building require gin, you should be reaching for that bottle only once. And since we all fuck up sometimes, start building your drinks with the cheapest ingredients first and move up to the more expensive. If you screw up and have to toss your batch, you won’t end up tossing the pricey booze, only the citrus and syrups.

When shooting for balanced cocktails, it’s best to train yourself to use jiggers.† Once you become adept at hitting the measurements,

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\* When the legendary Harry Craddock, of the Savoy Hotel, was asked how quickly one should drink a cocktail, he replied, “Quickly, while it is still laughing at you.” It was Sasha’s belief that he was referring to the movement on the surface of a well-shaken, straight-up cocktail—if you shake hard enough, with cold enough ice, you will see bubbles forming and popping, and ice crystals swirling and shifting.

† Varying jiggers have measurement lines from 1/4 ounce all the way up to 2 1/2 ounces. In our recipes, we reference “scant,” which is a little shy of what the measurement calls for, and “heavy,” which means a hair’s breadth more than what is listed. We also use a 3/8-ounce measurement that doesn’t exist as a line on a jigger but means half of a 3/4-ounce measure.



you'll want to learn to maximize the use of your jiggers before discarding them. For example, you can overlap all citrus juices in the same jigger for a round of drinks. If there's three-quarters of an ounce of each citrus juice called for in a round of cocktails, you should start with lime, then lemon, then orange, then finish with grapefruit, all in the same three-quarter-ounce side of the jigger. I wouldn't reverse that order, though—the pulp of orange and grapefruit is larger and sweeter than lime or lemon. Make a fun game out of exhausting your jigger. Don't beat yourself up when you fuck up.

WITH SUGARS, START WITH SIMPLE SYRUP, then honey syrup, and end with ginger syrup, but again, not the other way around—ginger is the most complex of the three, and starting with it will cross-contaminate the purity of the honey or simple.

For any spirit served neat or on the rock, a fresh jigger is always used so that it's clean and pure, but when round-building cocktails, you can overlap accordingly: pouring any spirit into a jigger that has just measured vodka is always kosher. So if you're making three cocktails, and two of them have two ounces of gin each and the other one has two ounces of vodka, grab and pour the vodka first, followed by the gin.

Añejo/aged/dark rums are fine to follow in the same jigger after white rum, and agricole rum, thanks to its earthy and funky profile, is good to go after pouring añejo/aged/dark rums. It's also acceptable to pour bourbon after rye, and Scotch after bourbon. Gin and agave spirits, because of their strong flavor profiles, tend to end a jigger's life, requiring you to rinse it out before using it again. Lastly, be cautious of more complex modifiers like Benedictine, amari, Campari, Cointreau, absinthe, and Maraschino. Their flavors and textures are so unique and concentrated, they

will contaminate the jigger, preventing any further overlapping of ingredients, unless that jigger is being used for the same cocktail.

If you can weave all this together for two cocktails, there's no reason why you can't take on a round of four, and soon six, moving the process along at a faster clip. It might seem aggressive for a home bartender, but this multitasking method will give you more hang time with your guests at your next party and less time stuck in the weeds.\*

Below is the twelve-point sequencing to complete every possible style of drink.<sup>†</sup> It is a complex system based on simple, thoughtful, and deliberate moves, and illustrates how to set up your vessels, what to jigger first, what ice to use and when, and how to shake, stir, and serve.

- 1 Lay out the appropriate pieces of equipment for each drink on the work area, left to right, in the order you plan to build the drinks—for built-in-the-glass drinks, the appropriate glass; for shaken or stirred, the appropriate shaker<sup>‡</sup> or mixing glass. This should also be the way the drinks are written on the order chit. Place all nonliquid modifying ingredients—sugar cubes, bitters,<sup>§</sup> mint, limes—in the 18-ounce short side of the

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\* When you realize you can no longer keep up with service, i.e., “Oh fuck, I’m drowning!”

† Except hot drinks.

‡ When placing your tins down, put the 28-ounce tin behind the 18-ounce tin so the 18-ounce tin is closest to you. Joined together, these two tins create a seamless seal ideal for shaking with block ice. This is our house cocktail shaker.

§ Bitters can be tricky to manage in a traditional bottle. Not enough of a dash comes out when it’s a new bottle, and too much splats out when the bottle is two-thirds empty. We employ the use of Japanese bitters bottles that are shaped with a long neck or barrel that allows for the same amount of bitters to be dashed out of the metal tip each time. Three dashes from a Japanese bitters bottle is equal to one good recipe dash.

shaking tin or mixing glass, or, in the case of an old-fashioned/on-the-rock-style drink, directly in the drinking glass. Put egg whites or yolks in the larger 28-ounce side of the shaking tin so they don't interact with the citrus that will be poured into the shorter tin, until it's time to shake everything together.

- 2 Add citrus (no need to wash jigger between juices as long as you pour lime, then lemon, followed by orange, then grapefruit).
- 3 Add sweeteners/syrups: sugar, honey, ginger, orgeat.
- 4 Muddle by pressing down more than twisting. You want to wake up the ingredients, not turn them into a compost heap. Nothing needs to be muddled for more than two or three seconds. When muddling citrus wedges and chunks, you're "juicing with a muddler"—squeeze the juice out, then you're done.
- 5 Add more complex modifiers, such as vermouths, fortified wines, Campari, Cointreau, curaçao, Maraschino, Benedictine, crème de violette, amaro.
- 6 Add base alcohol. To review: spirits served on their own must be jiggered using a clean measure, but for a mixed drink involving citrus, there's no need to rinse the jigger between different rums or whiskeys. End with the strongest flavor. So jigger vodka, then white rum, then dark rum. Rinse your jigger or grab a new one and jigger gin or tequila. Then grab a new jigger and jigger rye, then bourbon, then Scotch.
- 7 Prepare any garnish cut to order that is not already in the mise en place, e.g., apple slices, twists, and any fruit requiring toothpicks for the rim of the glass.
- 8 Pull beer and white and rosé wines out of the cooler/refrigerator and pour into their appropriate glass on the tray. Pour bottled beer only two-thirds of the way. Place bottle next to glass. Pour red wine.

- 9 Now that *everything* that can be completed before icing is done, ice the most durable cocktails first, the most fragile last. Refer to chapter 5.
- a) Pour two-ingredient highballs (gin and tonic/rum and Coke) and spirits neat and on the rock.
  - b) Ice your stirred, straight-up cocktails (martini/manhattan). Use the spoon to lower the first medium-size piece of ice into the mixing glass to avoid splashing; the rest can be cracked in your hand into smaller pieces and shards and tossed in. Fill to the top with cracked ice. Start your stir, then leave the spoon in the glass. Stir intermittently as you go about building the rest of the round and make sure to plunge the ice at the top down into the mixing glass so that it hits the liquid. Add more cracked ice as needed if the liquid starts to dominate the ice.
  - c) Ice your stirred-in-the-glass cocktails (old-fashioned/negroni), using a spoon to lower the rock into the glass.
  - d) For your shaken down/long drinks (Gold Rush/Tom Collins), remove double rocks and highball/collins glasses from glass froster or freezer. Shake with one rock of ice for your shaken and down. For highballs, shake with a smaller piece of ice, since the addition of soda water means they don't require as much dilution.
  - e) Ice any "peasant"-style cocktails\* (caipirinha/Gordon's Cup/smash) with cracked ice in the shorter eighteen-ounce tin, then seal the shaker with the larger twenty-eight-ounce tin and toss five times before dumping into

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\* In Brazilian Portuguese, *caipira* is slang to describe rural dwellers not used to big-city life, aka peasants. This evolved into referring to any drink made in the same style as a caipirinha, a "peasant cocktail."

a double rocks glass. Use a barspoon to “clean up” any muddled ingredients that look sloppy on the top by pushing them down.

- f) For crushed-ice drinks (julep/mai tai/fix), dry-shake\* and pour into their appropriate vessel, then top with crushed ice, which will provide all the meltage you need. For drinks with muddled mint, use a barspoon to clean up, pushing the mint to the lower third of the glass. Then use a barspoon or swizzle stick between your two hands, like a caveman trying to spark a fire, to integrate the crushed ice and ingredients and create a light frost on the sides of the glass.
- g) For your shaken, straight-up cocktails (daiquiri/whiskey sour/French 75), remove glassware from froster and place on the work area or, if possible, directly on the serving tray. Dry-shake any cocktails with egg or cream to emulsify.† Add a single rock of ice and shake for temperature and dilution. Listen to your ice hurtling back and forth in the tin. Toward the end of the shake, you want to hear the single rock explode a little.
- h) Immediately after your shake is done, you want to strain into a chilled glass. Always close the gate on the Hawthorne strainer completely, right up against the edge of the tin, so when you pour you see two even streams that flow like liquid fangs. This minimizes the size of the ice

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\* When you dry-shake a drink, you’re shaking it without ice to mix the ingredients without adding dilution. When you’re done, be careful when cracking open the shaker to add ice—ingredients like egg white expand when combined with other ingredients and may pop the tins apart.

† When you emulsify something, you mix two divergent liquids together, which thicken and become one. Like when you make a salad dressing of oil and vinegar, or in the case of a cocktail, you mix egg, citrus, and sugar to get a meringue-like/frothy texture.

crystals in the drink—if large slivers or chunks of ice are on top of the cocktail, the first taste will be of water; if there are no crystals at all, the cocktail will get warm sooner. Start the strain slowly and end with the tin inverted and empty by the end.\*

- i) Remove glassware for stirred-up drinks from the froster/freezer and strain cocktails using the julep strainer. Using the same strainer, scoop out any ice shards floating on top.
  - j) Float whipped cream<sup>†</sup> for White Russians, Dominicans, etc.
- 10 Top off soda water in highballs, pour Champagne by the glass, top off any Champagne cocktails, and pour last third of bottled beer. Foam should be over the rim of the glass when it is handed to the guest.
- 11 Add garnishes and straws,<sup>‡</sup> if not already done, at two o'clock on the rim of the glass. Make sure all drinks are evenly spaced on the tray, clockwise in the order they are listed on the chit, with a lit candle in the center.
- 12 Clean your work area, equipment, and bar, then check to see who needs your attention. Start next round.

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\* When shaking multiple straight-up cocktails, minimize the amount of time between each strain by partially shaking each drink, setting it down, shaking another partially, and then finishing off the first. If you're making more than three different straight-up cocktails, set the shakers down on ice. Try to strain off honey, pineapple-juice, and egg-white cocktails first, since they have a more forgiving structure, thanks to the combination of their ingredients and aeration. You must always “wake up” a shaker that you have set down before straining, which simply means to give it one more quick shake.

† To make whipped cream, add a few ounces of manufacturing/heavy whipping cream to an eight- to twelve-ounce squeeze bottle. Shake vigorously until frothy (about 20 seconds), then pour a thin layer over the cocktail in a clockwise fashion. The cream should float on the top.

‡ Preferably reusable.

Building drinks by the round allows a bartender to work “in the zone,” dropping into an unconscious state and next thing you know, six hours have flown by. In the 1970s, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist at the University of Chicago, traveled the world conducting what would become one of the largest psychological surveys. He interviewed people of all creeds, colors, genders, and classes, and asked them when they were happiest and performed their best. The word that kept popping up was “flow,” aka when your actions and decision-making process fall seamlessly into a fluid or “flowy” state of being.

Whatever kind of bartender you want to become—hotshot pro, home-based host, part-time slinger—I’d wager that if you practice building drinks by the round, one day soon, you’ll find yourself quite unwittingly in the flow.

## BARTENDER’S CHOICE

The Varnish is rooted in classic cocktails. Our menus feature a bouquet of six drinks—five representing a different style from one of the main branches, and the sixth is a Bartender’s Choice. As noted in chapter 1, Bartender’s Choice was created at Milk & Honey where there was no menu. Sasha said this was because he didn’t want a cocktail list the size of a high school chemistry textbook overwhelming guests and gridlocking service. He told others he didn’t make menus because he didn’t have the money to print them up. The truth is likely a combination of the two.

What a guest receives as a Bartender’s Choice is based not only on their responses to exploratory questions, but on what plays well with the rest of their table’s order, or the orders of the people around them. It’s not about wow-ing with some off-the-wall creation, but delivering just the right delicious drink in a timely man-

ner, with a little variation and originality.

As explained in the Mr. Potato Head section, a manhattan lover would likely dig a Brooklyn variation. A staunch gimlet drinker might be down with the Business, and an old-fashioned loyalist would definitely drink a Monte Carlo or Fancy Free. Some guests can be exacting in their descriptions of what they want; others are open to being surprised and will try anything. Some people have no idea what they want or how to navigate the options. Finding out what people usually drink is a good baseline for making something that will either meet or exceed their expectations. We have a saying that frees up the minds of tentative or difficult guests: “If you don’t like it, we’ll drink it and make you something else.”

Who can argue with that?





# RECIPES



## HOUSE-MADE STUFF

Developed by Sasha and refined over the years by the revolving staffs at Milk & Honey, Little Branch, and successive family bars, our syrups were created when we didn't have access to certain ingredients or when what was available didn't balance properly with our recipes.

**Note:** Any syrup that should be refrigerated has an approximate two-week shelf life. Those that are heavily booze-based are good almost indefinitely.

**Nerd alert:** For the sake of consistency we purchased a Brix meter (or refractometer) which measures the total dissolved solids in a drop of liquid by shining a light through it. For our purposes, the Brix meter quantifies the ratio of total dissolved sugars in any given syrup and calculates a percentage, which is the number you will find attached to these recipes. They're easy to use and you can pick one up online.

Specific brands listed are what we think work best. If you can't find them, by all means use what is available.

#### SIMPLE SYRUP—Brix 43%

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In a sealable container, take 32 ounces (1 quart) hot water and add  $3\frac{1}{3}$  cups (750 grams) superfine sugar. (This recipe falls into the 1:1 category of sugar syrups, but ours is a little “weaker” than a 50:50 ratio, so it is a little less sweet than a traditional 1:1.)

Cover container and shake vigorously, transfer to a glass bottle, and store in refrigerator.

#### HONEY SYRUP—Brix 60%

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Mix 3 parts orange blossom honey with 1 part hot water. Example: For 32 ounces (1 quart) syrup, combine 24 ounces honey and 8 ounces hot water. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle in refrigerator.

#### GINGER SYRUP—Brix 43%

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For every 32 ounces (1 quart) fresh ginger juice, add 3 cups (675 grams) superfine sugar. Stir until sugar is completely dissolved. Store in a glass bottle in refrigerator. For our ginger juice, we use fresh gingerroot and masticate it in a Breville Juice Fountain Elite 800JEXL.

#### CURAÇAO—Brix 40%

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Combine 16 ounces Grand Marnier and 16 ounces simple syrup (equal parts). Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

#### GRENADINE—two methods—Brix 50%

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1. Add 8 ounces pomegranate concentrate (we use Sadaf or FruitFast) to 24 ounces simple syrup. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle in refrigerator. Make sure to use a concentrate, which has acidity, and not pomegranate molasses, which is already sweetened.

2. Reduce 32 ounces (1 quart) pomegranate juice by half in a saucepan over a low flame until it is about 16 ounces and then add 1 cup (225 grams) superfine sugar. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle in refrigerator.

---

#### CRÈME DE VIOLETTE (Violette Liqueur)—Brix 34%

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Combine 8 ounces Monin Violet Syrup, 8 ounces simple syrup, and 16 ounces spirit (vodka or gin). Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

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#### FRUIT CUP (our house Pimm's)\*—Brix 24%

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Combine 12 ounces Beefeater London Dry Gin, 12 ounces Carpano Antica Formula Sweet Vermouth, 6 ounces Grand Marnier, and 4 ounces Cherry Heering liqueur. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

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#### HOUSE ORANGE BITTERS

---

Combine 7 ounces Bittermens Orange Cream Citrate and 3 ounces vodka. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

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#### HOUSE PICON—Brix 40%

---

Combine 24 ounces Bigallet China-China Amer,  $6\frac{3}{4}$  ounces Suze gentian liqueur, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (115 grams) superfine sugar. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

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\* Pimm's is a British gin-based liqueur with bitter herbs and citrus, also known as a "fruit cup" because it's meant to be mixed in a long drink with an effervescent mixer and fruit garnish.

#### VARNISH ORGEAT—Brix 50%

---

Combine  $5\frac{1}{2}$  cups (44 ounces) simmering water with  $2\frac{1}{4}$  cups (315 grams) fresh raw almonds (skins on). Remove from heat but leave covered. Steep for 30 minutes; blend thoroughly; strain through a fine-mesh sieve\* and press until the almond meal is dry; add enough water to resulting almond milk so that volume is 32 ounces (1 quart); be careful not to count the foam from the blending in this measurement. While still hot, add:

2 cups (450 grams) superfine sugar  
2 cups (500 grams) raw cane (turbinado) sugar  
1 teaspoon (6 grams) kosher salt  
 $1\frac{1}{4}$  ounces amaretto liqueur  
1 ounce Cognac  
20 drops rose water or to taste

Stir thoroughly until all sugar is dissolved and let cool uncovered. Store in a glass bottle in refrigerator.

#### LIME CORDIAL—Brix 40%

---

Place the peels of 12 limes into a sealable quart container; add  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups (340 grams) superfine sugar, cover, and shake. Let sit 24 hours unrefrigerated. Add 16 ounces fresh lime juice and shake or stir to dissolve sugar completely; let sit 24 hours refrigerated. Strain and add  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces navy-strength gin to preserve. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle in refrigerator.

---

\* Preferably a chinois.

#### RASPBERRY SYRUP—Brix 43%

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Lightly muddle 12 ounces raspberries with 16 ounces simple syrup. Let sit for 24 hours. Stir, then strain off raspberries and store in a glass bottle in refrigerator.

#### CAFÉ VARNISH—Brix 43%

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Combine 13 ounces Bittermens New Orleans Coffee Liqueur, 17 ounces Caffé Lolita coffee liqueur, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (115 grams) superfine sugar. Stir thoroughly and store in a glass bottle.

#### COCONUT CREAM—Brix 50%

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Combine one 15-ounce can of Coco Lopez Cream of Coconut (shake well before opening), one 12-ounce can of Nature's Charm Evaporated Coconut Milk (shake well before opening),  $1\frac{1}{3}$  cups (300 grams) superfine sugar, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce 151 white rum to preserve. In a sealable container, shake all ingredients vigorously, transfer to a glass bottle, and store in refrigerator.

## FRESH JUICES

Lime, lemon, orange, grapefruit . . . celebrate the pulp! In our opinion, it adds flavor and texture, which is the reason we never double-strain cocktails at The Varnish. I've had some tasty double-strained cocktails at other bars, but that's not how we do things. Do, though, remove any seeds or skins that sneak their way into the juice. Be careful if you use an electric juicer—when you hold the half-cut citrus on the reaming cone, don't let it grind too long or you'll get the bitterness of the pith in your juice. We have always used the tabletop Ra Chand J210 manual citrus juicer which allows us to squeeze with the correct pressure, and if necessary we can squeeze more *à la minute* during service if we run out without making too much noise.

We also make pineapple juice, which should be masticated in the juicer. Best to juice extra-ripe pineapples to capture more of their natural fruit sugars. Don't strain it, but let the juice settle and skim the foam off the top.

Technically, citrus juices should be used for only one night of service, then tossed at 2 a.m.

## COCKTAILS

These 115 recipes are what new employees need to come armed with before their first solo shift at The Varnish. They represent a framework of cocktails that touch upon the relevant styles, branches, techniques, past menus, and common orders that occur at the bar. We are not a bar program of constant cocktail innovation. Creativity for us is a mindful meditation on how to execute cocktails and their ingredients consistently, ten thousand times over. The Varnish originals on this list came from tried-and-true R&D and follow the branch templates used in our bar family. Attributed originals from our friends and colleagues might vary slightly due to our in-house ingredients, but we proudly serve them. The Mr. Potato Head options listed beneath certain cocktail recipes are bonus and exemplify the wider range of options. There are specific brands listed for certain modifiers (amaris, vermouths, and liqueurs) because either the cocktail cannot be made without it or the selection is what we stand behind at The Varnish. You're welcome to experiment with any substitutes. Enjoy, catch a buzz, and if you get too drunk and pass out on your kitchen floor, no judgment.

### Old-Fashioned and On the Rock— Boozy and Built in the Glass

#### AFRICAN FLOWER

---

2 ounces (heavy) bourbon whiskey

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce CioCiara amaro

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce crème de cacao

1 dash orange bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Becky McFalls, Little Branch

## AMERICAN TRILOGY

---

1 ounce rye whiskey  
1 ounce applejack brandy  
1 brown sugar cube  
2 dashes orange bitters  
1 barspoon soda water

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Soak brown sugar cube with orange bitters in a whiskey glass. Add a barspoon of soda. Muddle into a paste. Measure rye whiskey and applejack brandy into the glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Richard Boccatto and Micky McIlroy, Milk & Honey

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Harvest Old-Fashioned:* Sub one dash Angostura and one dash Peychaud's bitters for orange bitters and add both a lemon and an orange twist. (Sasha Petraske, Milk & Honey) *Note:* When two twists are used to garnish a drink, they are called "rabbit ears," in reference to how they are placed in the glass.

## BETTER & BETTER

---

1½ ounces mezcal  
½ ounce Smith & Cross Jamaican rum  
¼ ounce Falernum

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Jan Warren, Dutch Kills



## CHET BAKER

---

2 ounces aged rum  
2 barspoons sweet vermouth  
1 barspoon honey syrup  
2 dashes Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Sam Ross, Milk & Honey

## DON LOCKWOOD

---

1 ounce Islay Scotch whisky  
1 ounce bourbon whiskey  
 $\frac{3}{8}$  ounce maple syrup  
1 dash Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters  
1 dash Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Abraham Hawkins, Dutch Kills

## FANCY FREE

---

2 ounces (heavy) bourbon whiskey  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce (scant) Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur  
1 dash orange bitters  
1 dash Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

## IMPROVED WHISKEY COCKTAIL

---

2 ounces (heavy) rye whiskey

1/2 ounce (scant) Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

2 dashes Peychaud's bitters

2 dashes absinthe

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

## McKITTRICK

---

2 ounces (heavy) bourbon whiskey

1/2 ounce (scant) Pedro Ximénez sherry

2 dashes Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

*Attribute:* Theo Lieberman, Milk & Honey

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Outlander:* Sub Scotch whisky for bourbon whiskey and garnish with both a lemon twist and a brandied cherry. (Mikki Kristola, The Varnish)

*Highlander:* Sub Scotch whisky for bourbon whiskey, Cherry Heering for Pedro Ximénez sherry, remove mole bitters, and sub a lemon twist for brandied cherry. (Eric Alperin, The Varnish)

## MONTE CARLO

---

2 ounces (heavy) rye whiskey

1/2 ounce (scant) Benedictine

2 dashes Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Kentucky Colonel:* Sub bourbon whiskey for rye whiskey.

*Benedict Arnold:* Sub Scotch whisky for rye whiskey.

*Monte Carlos:* Sub reposado tequila for rye whiskey. (Chris Bostick, Half Step)

## NATIONAL VELVET

---

2 ounces (heavy) blended Scotch whisky

1/2 ounce (scant) Café Varnish

2 dashes Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Max Seaman, The Varnish

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Revolver:* Sub bourbon whiskey for Scotch whisky and orange bitters for mole bitters. (Jon Santer, Prizefighter)

## NEGRONI

---

1 ounce gin

1 ounce Campari

1 ounce Carpano Antica Formula Sweet Vermouth

*Glassware:* Rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a rocks glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*My Old Pal:* Sub rye whiskey for gin and sub lemon twist for orange twist.

*Quill:* Negroni with an absinthe rinse.

*Famiglia Reale:*  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Negroni with 1 ounce Champagne, garnish with a grapefruit twist. (Sam Ross, Attaboy)

*Americano Cocktail:*  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces Campari and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces sweet vermouth without gin, served long over a spear, add soda water and an orange wedge garnish. *Note:* This option would now live in the highball family.

## NICE LEGS

---

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Barolo Chinato

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Suze gentian liqueur

*Glassware:* Rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a rocks glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Chris Bostick, Half Step

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Paige Ellis:* Sub bourbon whiskey for gin. (Chris Bostick, Half Step)

## OAXACA OLD-FASHIONED

---

1½ ounces reposado tequila

½ ounce mezcal

1 barspoon agave syrup

2 dashes Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Garnish with a flamed orange twist dropped into the drink.

*Attribute:* Phil Ward, Death & Co

## OLD-FASHIONED

---

2 ounces bourbon whiskey

1 white sugar cube

3 dashes Angostura bitters

1 barspoon soda water

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Soak white sugar cube with Angostura bitters in a whiskey glass. Add a barspoon of soda water. Muddle into a paste, without completely dissolving; this helps integrate the sugar/bitters into the booze. Measure bourbon whiskey into the glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

## POP QUIZ

---

2 ounces (heavy) bourbon whiskey

½ ounce (scant) Ramazzotti amaro

1 teaspoon simple syrup  
2 dashes Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Devon Tarby, The Varnish

---

## SKIP JAMES

---

2 ounces brandy  
2 barspoons Barolo Chinato  
1 barspoon maple syrup  
1 dash Angostura bitters  
1 dash Peychaud's bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Bryan Tetorakis, The Varnish

---

## SMUGGLER'S NOTCH

---

2 ounces aged rum  
1 brown sugar cube  
2 dashes orange bitters  
1 barspoon soda water

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange twist and absinthe mist

*Method:* Soak brown sugar cube with orange bitters in a whiskey glass. Add a barspoon of soda water. Muddle into a paste. Measure aged rum into the

glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish. Finish off with a spritz of absinthe.

*Attribute:* Eric Alperin, The Varnish

## TALENT SCOUT

---

2 ounces (heavy) bourbon whiskey

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce (scant) curaçao

2 dashes Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Whiskey

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a whiskey glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Spanish Town:* Sub aged rum for bourbon whiskey, no bitters, and sub grated nutmeg for lemon twist garnish.

*Kentucky River:* Sub crème de cacao for curaçao and peach bitters for Angostura bitters.

## WHITE NEGRONI

---

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Dolin Blanc Vermouth

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Suze gentian liqueur

*Glassware:* Rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Grapefruit twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a rocks glass. Add ice rock and stir seven times. Express oils from a grapefruit twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Wayne Collins, created at Vinexpo, Bordeaux, France

*Note:* Originally created with Lillet Blanc, but at The Varnish we use a blanc vermouth.

### Mr. Potato Head

*Spring Blossom:* Sub mezcal for gin and add 2 dashes of Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters. (Gordon Bellaver, The Varnish)

## Martinis and Manhattans— Stirred Up and Silky

### ARCHANGEL

---

2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounces gin

<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounce Aperol

1 bruised cucumber slice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Lightly bruise a cucumber slice in the bottom of a chilled mixing glass. Measure remaining ingredients. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Richard Boccatto and Micky McIlroy, Little Branch

### ASTORIA

---

2 ounces Dolin Dry Vermouth

1 ounce Old Tom gin

2 dashes orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Olive

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with an olive.

*Note:* This reverse vermouth/gin ratio is from *The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book*.



## ASTORIA BIANCO

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce Dolin Blanc Vermouth

2 dashes orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Jim Meehan, PDT

## BAMBOO

---

1½ ounces Dolin Dry Vermouth

1½ ounces oloroso sherry

1 teaspoon Pedro Ximénez sherry

1 dash orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish.

*Note:* Nowadays you see this drink made with fino sherry, which can be tough to keep fresh, so we started using an aged/oxidized oloroso and a Pedro Ximénez, which is a sweet cream sherry. Also, it is believed to have been historically made this way.

## BOBBY BURNS

---

2 ounces Scotch whisky

½ ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino

¼ ounce Benedictine

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Shortbread cookie

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a shortbread cookie on a side plate or, if possible, laid across the rim.

---

## BOULEVARDIER

---

1½ ounces bourbon whiskey

¾ ounce Campari

¾ ounce Carpano Antica Formula Sweet Vermouth

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Left Hand:* Add Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters and garnish with a brandied cherry. (Sam Ross, Attaboy)

*Right Hand:* Sub aged rum for bourbon whiskey, add Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters, and garnish with an orange twist. (Micky McIlroy, Attaboy)

---

## BROOKLYN

---

2 ounces rye whiskey

½ ounce Dolin Dry Vermouth

¼ ounce Amer Picon

¼ ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Blue Collar:* Sub sweet vermouth for dry vermouth and add 2 dashes of orange bitters and sub a lemon twist for brandied cherry. (Michael Madrusan, The Everleigh)

## COLONIAL TIES

---

1 ounce rye whiskey  
1 ounce Jamaican rum  
1 brown sugar cube  
2 dashes orange bitters  
1 barspoon soda water  
Absinthe

*Glassware:* Chilled whiskey

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Soak brown sugar cube with orange bitters in a chilled mixing glass. Add a barspoon of soda water and muddle into a paste. Add rye whiskey and Jamaican rum and stir with cracked ice. Strain into a chilled whiskey glass rinsed or atomized with absinthe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish placed on the rim of the glass.

*Attribute:* Eric Alperin, The Varnish

## DEEP BLUE SEA

---

2 ounces gin  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cocchi Americano  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce crème de violette  
2 dashes orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

## FAIR & WARMER

---

2 ounces white rum  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce curaçao

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

**Mr. Potato Head**

*El Presidente:* Sub dry vermouth for sweet vermouth, add a dash of grenadine, sub orange twist for lemon twist.

---

## GREENPOINT

---

2 ounces rye whiskey

1/2 ounce yellow Chartreuse

1/2 ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino

1 dash orange bitters

1 dash Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Micky McIlroy, Attaboy

---

## MANHATTAN

---

2 ounces rye whiskey

1 ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino

2 dashes Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

**Mr. Potato Head**

*Rob Roy:* Sub Scotch whisky for rye whiskey.

*Perfect Manhattan:* Split sweet vermouth into equal parts sweet and dry vermouth. Sub lemon twist for brandied cherry.

## MARTINI

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce Dolin Dry Vermouth

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist or olive

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with either an olive or expressed lemon twist per guest request.

*Note:* Garnished with a pickled onion a Martini becomes a Gibson.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Amsterdam:* Add orange bitters and garnish with lemon twist.

*Gin & It:* Sub  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce sweet vermouth for dry vermouth, increase gin to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ounces, and express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

*Dirty Martini:* Split dry vermouth to equal parts dry vermouth and Dirty Sue olive brine.

*Vodka Martini:*  $2\frac{1}{4}$  ounces vodka,  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce dry vermouth.

## POET'S DREAM

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Dolin Dry Vermouth

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Benedictine

2 dashes orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

## REMEMBER THE MAINE

---

2 ounces rye whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cocchi Vermouth di Torino

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Cherry Heering

1 dash absinthe

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

## SAZERAC

---

2 ounces rye whiskey or Cognac (or equal parts, which is an example of a split-base cocktail)

1 white sugar cube

2 dashes Peychaud's bitters

1 barspoon soda water

Absinthe

*Glassware:* Chilled whiskey

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Soak white sugar cube with Peychaud's bitters in a chilled mixing glass. Add a barspoon of soda water and muddle into a paste. Add spirit of choice and stir with cracked ice. Strain into a chilled whiskey glass rinsed or atomized with absinthe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish placed on the rim of the glass.

## SKID ROW

---

2 ounces Bols Genever

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Ramazzotti amaro

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce apricot liqueur (Rothman & Winter)

1 dash orange bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a flamed orange twist dropped into the drink.

*Attribute:* Eric Alperin, The Varnish

## TRADITIONAL GIMLET

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime cordial

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lime twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with an unexpressed lime twist in the shape of a spiral on the rim.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Viva Villa:* Sub blanco tequila for gin and garnish with sea salt.

*Bennett:* Add 2 dashes of Angostura bitters.

## TUXEDO NO. 2

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Dolin Dry Vermouth

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

2 dashes orange bitters

Absinthe rinse

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist and brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except absinthe) into a chilled mixing glass. Add cracked ice and stir. Strain into a chilled coupe rinsed or atomized with absinthe. Express oils from a lemon twist, then use as garnish and finish off with a brandied cherry.

## The Sour—Shaken and Refreshing

### DAIQUIRIS AND GIMLETS

#### THE BUSINESS

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lime wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a lime wedge.

*Attribute:* Sasha Petraske, Milk & Honey

#### DAIQUIRI

---

2 ounces white rum

1 ounce (scant) lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

#### Mr. Potato Head

*Mint Daiquiri:* Shake with 4–6 mint leaves and garnish with a mint leaf.

*Strawberry Daiquiri:* Shake with a muddled strawberry and garnish with strawberry.

*Raspberry Daiquiri:* Shake with 2–3 muddled raspberries or sub raspberry syrup for simple syrup and garnish with a raspberry.

*Captain's Blood:* Add a dash of Angostura bitters and sub Jamaican rum for white rum and garnish with a lime wedge.



## GIMLET (FRESH)

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce (scant) lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lime wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a lime wedge.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Southside:* Shake with 4–6 mint leaves and garnish with a mint leaf.

*Eastside:* Muddle and shake with 3 cucumber slices and 4–6 mint leaves, garnish with a cucumber slice.

*Commodore:* Sub bourbon whiskey for gin and add 2 dashes of orange bitters.

## HEMINGWAY DAIQUIRI

---

1½ ounces white rum

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

1 ounce grapefruit juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lime juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

## HIGH FIVE

---

1½ ounces gin

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Aperol

1 ounce grapefruit juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lime juice

1/2 ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* High five to your guest

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. High fives all around!

*Attribute:* Alex Day, Death & Co

---

## HONEYSUCKLE

---

2 ounces white rum

3/4 ounce lime juice

3/4 ounce honey syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Grandpa:* Sub applejack brandy for white rum.

*Brooklynite:* Add 2 dashes of Angostura bitters and sub Jamaican rum for white rum.

*Red Grasshopper:* Sub blanco tequila for white rum and dust with cayenne powder. (Michael Madrusan, The Everleigh)

---

## JACK ROSE

---

2 ounces applejack brandy

3/4 ounce lime juice

3/4 ounce grenadine

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Apple slice

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with an apple slice.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Sky Pilot:* Sub equal parts Jamaican rum and applejack brandy.

## LAST WORD

---

1 ounce gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce green Chartreuse

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*The Final Ward:* Sub rye whiskey for gin, yellow Chartreuse for green Chartreuse, and lemon juice for lime juice. (Phil Ward, Death & Co)

## OAXACANITE

---

1 ounce blanco tequila

1 ounce mezcal

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

3 dashes Angostura bitters

Grapefruit twist

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker along with grapefruit twist. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

*Attribute:* Ben Long, John Dory Oyster Bar

*Note:* Shaking a cocktail with a grapefruit twist in the tin is a technique we refer to as making it “regal.”

## OLD MAID

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

3 cucumber slices

4–6 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Cucumber and mint sprig

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Muddle cucumbers and mint. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass over a rock. Garnish with a mint sprig threaded through a cucumber slice on the rim.

*Attribute:* Sam Ross, Attaboy

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Russian Maid:* Sub vodka for gin.

*Mexican Maid:* Sub tequila for gin.

Kentucky Maid: Sub bourbon whiskey for gin.

French Maid: Sub Cognac for gin.

Scottish Maid: Sub Scotch whisky for gin.

## LA OTRA PALABRA (THE OTHER WORD)

---

2 ounces mezcal

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce yellow Chartreuse

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

1 barspoon agave syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and

shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass.

*Attribute:* Eric Alperin, The Varnish

## PINEAPPLE DAIQUIRI

---

2 ounces white or dark rum

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce pineapple juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

## SMOKE & MIRRORS

---

1 ounce blended Scotch whiskey

1 ounce Islay Scotch whisky

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

3–5 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Mint sprig and Absinthe mist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Muddle mint leaves. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into chilled double rocks glass. Garnish with a mint sprig and spray of absinthe.

*Attribute:* Alex Day, Death & Co

NONTRADITIONAL—WITHOUT EGG WHITE

AVIATION

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{8}$  ounce crème de violette

$\frac{3}{8}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a brandied cherry.

BEE'S KNEES

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a lemon wedge.

CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES

---

2 ounces Cognac

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce green Chartreuse

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist over

the top and discard.

## CORPSE REVIVER NO. 2

---

1 ounce gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cointreau or Combier

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Lillet or Cocchi Americano

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

1 dash absinthe

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

## ENZONI

---

1 ounce gin

1 ounce Campari

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

6 Concord grapes

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Orange wedge and grape

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Muddle grapes. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass over an ice rock. Garnish with an orange wedge and a grape.

*Attribute:* Enzo Errico, Milk & Honey

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Garibaldi:* Sub rye whiskey for gin and 1 ounce lime juice for lemon juice. (Richard Boccato, Dutch Kills)

## FITZGERALD

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Angostura bitters

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a dash of Angostura bitters.

*Attribute:* Dale DeGroff, Rainbow Room

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Holland Razor Blade:* Sub Bols Genever for gin and cayenne powder for Angostura bitters.

## GOLD RUSH

---

2 ounces bourbon whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass over an ice rock. Garnish with a lemon wedge.

*Attribute:* T. J. Siegal, Milk & Honey

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Golden Delicious:* Sub applejack brandy for bourbon whiskey. (Jim Kearns, Milk & Honey)

*Louisiana Purchase:* Sub Cognac for bourbon whiskey. (Michael Madrusan, The Everleigh)



## MARGARITA

---

1½ ounces tequila

1 ounce Cointreau or Combier

¾ ounce lime juice

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Cracked

*Garnish:* Lime wedge; sea salt optional

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass with cracked ice. Garnish with a lime wedge.

*Note:* If salt is requested, moisten half of a chilled glass's rim with a lime wedge and then roll the outside of the rim through a plate of sea salt. Clean up any salt that has made its way into the glass. Make sure to salt only half of the rim.

## NAKED AND FAMOUS

---

1 ounce mezcal

¾ ounce Aperol

¾ ounce yellow Chartreuse

¾ ounce lime juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

*Attribute:* Joaquín Simó, Pouring Ribbons

## PAPER PLANE

---

1 ounce bourbon whiskey

¾ ounce Aperol

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Amaro Nonino

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

*Attribute:* Sam Ross, Attaboy

## PENICILLIN

---

2 ounces Scotch whisky

$\frac{3}{8}$  ounce ginger syrup

$\frac{3}{8}$  ounce honey syrup

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

1 barspoon Islay Scotch whisky (float)

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Rock

*Garnish:* Candied ginger

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except Islay Scotch whisky) into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass over an ice rock. Float a barspoon of Islay Scotch whisky over the top. Garnish with a skewer of candied ginger.

*Attribute:* Sam Ross, Attaboy

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Phoenix Down:* Sub applejack brandy for Scotch whisky and sub a spray of absinthe for Islay float. (Daniel Eun, The Varnish)

## SIDECAR

---

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces Cognac

1 ounce Cointreau or Combier

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lemon juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

**Mr. Potato Head**

*Chevalier:* Add Angostura bitters.

*Chelsea Sidecar:* Sub gin for Cognac.

*Royal Jubilee:* Sub applejack brandy for Cognac.

*Between the Sheets:* 1 ounce Cognac, 1 ounce Cointreau or Combier, and 1 ounce lemon juice.

*Brandy Crusta:* Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur, pull back to  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of Cointreau or Combier, and sugar half of the coupe's rim.

*Southern Cross:* Sub  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce aged rum and  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cognac for full  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces Cognac.

*XYZ:* Sub aged rum for Cognac.

## SUGARPLUM

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce grapefruit juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce grenadine

1 teaspoon lemon juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

*Attribute:* Joseph Schwartz, Milk & Honey

**Mr. Potato Head**

*Blinker:* Sub rye whiskey for gin.

## TOMMY'S MARGARITA

---

2 ounces tequila

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce agave syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Cracked

*Garnish:* Lime wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled double rocks glass with cracked ice. Garnish with a lime wedge.

*Attribute:* Julio Bermejo, Tommy's Mexican Restaurant

## VODKA DAISY

---

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces vodka

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce curaao

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

1 splash soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda water) into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard, for shorter duration than usual. Strain into a chilled coupe and top with a splash of soda. Express oils from a lemon twist over the top and discard.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

Sub any spirit for vodka to get another Daisy variation.

## WARD 8 NO. 2

---

2 ounces rye whiskey

1/2 ounce lemon juice

1/2 ounce orange juice

1/2 ounce grenadine

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe.

## WATER LILY

---

1 ounce gin

3/4 ounce Cointreau or Combier

3/4 ounce crème de violette

3/4 ounce lemon juice

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Express oils from an orange twist over the top and discard.

*Attribute:* Richard Boccato, Dutch Kills

## ≡ TRADITIONAL—WITH EGG WHITE ≡

## CHANTICLEER

---

2 ounces gin

3/4 ounce lemon juice

3/4 ounce simple syrup

3–4 raspberries

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Raspberry

*Method:* Muddle raspberries in a cocktail shaker. Add remaining ingredients and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass. Garnish with a raspberry.

---

## CLOVER CLUB

---

2 ounces gin

1/2 ounce lemon juice

3/4 ounce grenadine

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass.

---

## HARVEST SOUR

---

1 ounce rye whiskey

1 ounce applejack brandy

3/4 ounce lemon juice

3/4 ounce simple syrup

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Angostura bitters, Peychaud's bitters, and grated cinnamon

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass. Garnish with a design or streak of Angostura bitters and Peychaud's bitters over the top. Grate fresh cinnamon over the top.

---

## PINK LADY

---

1 ounce gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce applejack brandy

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce grenadine

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass.

## PISCO SOUR

---

2 ounces pisco

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Angostura bitters and grated cinnamon

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a sour glass. Garnish with a design or streak of Angostura bitters over the top. Grate fresh cinnamon over the top.

## WHISKEY SOUR

---

2 ounces bourbon whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

1 egg white

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Angostura bitters

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a sour glass. Garnish with a design or streak of Angostura bitters over the top.

### Mr. Potato Head

*New York Sour:* Same as whiskey sour but strained over a rock in a chilled double rocks glass with a red wine float.

## Highballs—Served Long with Bubbles

### —<sup>24</sup>/<sub>5</sub> COLLINS <sup>15</sup>/<sub>5</sub>—

#### GRAPEFRUIT COLLINS

---

2 ounces gin  
1 ounce grapefruit juice  
<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ounce lemon juice  
<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ounce simple syrup  
2 dashes Peychaud's bitters  
Soda water  
*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge and brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a lemon wedge and a brandied cherry.

#### TOM COLLINS

---

2 ounces gin  
<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounce lemon juice



$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge and brandied cherry

*Method* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a lemon wedge and a brandied cherry.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*John Collins:* Sub genever for gin.

*Mike Collins:* Sub Irish whiskey for gin.

Colonel Collins: Sub bourbon whiskey for gin.

Pierre Collins: Sub Cognac for gin.

Sandy Collins: Sub Scotch whisky for gin.

Stay Up Late: Sub  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce Cognac and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces gin for full 2 ounces gin, and sub orange wedge for lemon wedge.

## **RICKEYS**

### **GIN RICKEY**

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Lime wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a lime wedge.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Southside Rickey:* Shake with 4–6 mint leaves and sub a mint sprig garnish for lime wedge.

*Eastside Rickey:* Southside Rickey with muddled cucumber and garnished with a mint sprig and cucumber.

*Tritter Rickey:* Southside Rickey with 3 dashes of absinthe. (Michael Tritter, Milk & Honey)

*Ivy Fizz:* Southside Rickey but sub vodka for gin.

## **MEXICAN FIRING SQUAD**

---

2 ounces tequila

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce grenadine

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Orange wedge and brandied cherry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with an orange wedge and a brandied cherry.

## **LA PALOMA (FRESH)**

---

2 ounces blanco tequila

1 ounce grapefruit juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce simple syrup

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Grapefruit wedge and sea salt

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda, garnish with a grapefruit wedge, and sprinkle sea salt on top.

## ROME WITH A VIEW

---

1 ounce Campari  
1 ounce Dolin Dry Vermouth  
1 ounce lime juice  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup  
Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Orange wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with an orange wedge.

*Attribute:* Micky McIlroy, Attaboy

## VATICAN CITY

---

1 ounce Suze gentian liqueur  
1 ounce Dolin Blanc Vermouth  
1 ounce lime juice  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup  
Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Grapefruit twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and express oils from a grapefruit twist,

then use as garnish.

*Attribute:* Mikki Kristola, The Varnish

## ✦ BUCKS ✦

### FLORADORA

---

2 ounces gin

1/2 ounce lime juice

1/2 ounce ginger syrup

1/2 ounce simple syrup (or sub raspberry syrup for simple syrup and forgo the fresh raspberries)

3–4 raspberries

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Ginger candy and raspberry

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a skewered ginger candy and a raspberry.

### GIN-GIN MULE

---

2 ounces gin

1 ounce lime juice

1/2 ounce ginger syrup

1/2 ounce simple syrup

Mint

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Ginger candy and mint sprig

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a skewered ginger candy and a mint sprig.

*Attribute:* Audrey Saunders, Pegu Club

## MOSCOW MULE

---

2 ounces vodka

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce ginger syrup

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lime juice

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Ginger candy

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a skewered ginger candy.

### Mr. Potato Head

*Palma Fizz:* Add a spray of rose water. (Sasha Petraske, Milk & Honey)

*London Buck:* Sub gin for vodka.

Dark 'n' Stormy: Sub Gosling's Black Seal rum for vodka.

Cablegram: Sub rye whiskey for vodka.

Flu Cocktail: Sub equal parts rye whiskey and Cognac for vodka.

El Diablo: Sub blanco tequila for vodka and finish off with a crème de cassis float.

## NEW ORLEANS BUCK

---

2 ounces aged rum

1 ounce orange juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce ginger syrup

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* Ginger candy and orange wedge

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker. Add a smaller rock of ice and shake for 5 seconds. Strain into a chilled collins glass with an ice spear. Top with soda and garnish with a skewered ginger candy and an orange wedge.

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## RANGOON

---

2 ounces Pimm's or fruit cup

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce ginger syrup

Lime wedge

Lemon wedge

Blackberry or raspberry

2 cucumber slices

Sprite

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Spear

*Garnish:* 3 Cucumber slices

*Method:* Muddle berries, citrus, and cucumber in a chilled collins glass without ice. Add Pimm's and ginger syrup. Add ice spear and stir several times. Top with Sprite. Garnish with 3 cucumber slices.

## ✦ TRADITIONAL FIZZES—WITH EGG WHITE ✦

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### GIN FIZZ

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

1 egg white

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled fizz

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled fizz glass. Top with soda.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Alabama Fizz:* Shake with 4–6 mint leaves and garnish with a mint leaf.

## RAMOS GIN FIZZ

---

1½ ounces gin

¾ ounce lemon juice

¾ ounce lime juice

½ ounce simple syrup

½ ounce heavy cream

1 egg white

5 dashes orange flower water

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled fizz

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add 2 ounces pebble ice and shake until completely dissolved. Strain into a chilled fizz glass. Top with soda. Express oils from an orange twist and then use as garnish. Serve with a straw.

*Note:* There is an ongoing debate about how long one must shake a Ramos to allow the egg and cream to froth properly. This is the only cocktail we shake with pebble ice in order to achieve the desired texture.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Southern Whiskey Fizz:* Sub applejack brandy for gin and remove orange flower water.

## SILVER FOX

---

1½ ounces gin

¾ ounce lemon juice

½ ounce orgeat

1 egg white

Soda water

½ ounce amaretto (float)

*Glassware:* Chilled fizz

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker (except soda and amaretto) and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled fizz glass. Top with soda and float amaretto.

*Attribute:* Richard Boccatto, Milk & Honey

## SILVER LINING

---

1½ ounces rye whiskey

¾ ounce Licor 43

¾ ounce lemon juice

1 egg white

Soda water

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except soda) into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled collins glass with ice spear. Top with soda.

*Attribute:* Joseph Schwartz, Milk & Honey



## ✧ CHAMPAGNE ✧

### AIRMAIL

---

1 ounce light rum

1/2 ounce lime juice

1/2 ounce honey syrup

Champagne

*Glassware:* Chilled Champagne flute

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except Champagne) into a cocktail shaker. Shake ingredients together for 5 seconds with a smaller rock of ice and strain into a chilled Champagne flute. Top with Champagne.

#### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Blackmail:* Add a muddled blackberry. (Little Branch)

### FRENCH 75

---

1 ounce gin or Cognac

1/2 ounce lemon juice

1/2 ounce simple syrup

Champagne

*Glassware:* Chilled Champagne flute

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except Champagne) into a cocktail shaker. Shake ingredients together for 5 seconds with a smaller rock of ice and strain into a chilled Champagne flute. Top with Champagne and express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

## HARRY'S PICK-ME-UP

---

1 ounce Cognac

1/2 ounce lemon juice

1/2 ounce grenadine

Champagne

*Glassware:* Chilled Champagne flute

*Garnish:* Lemon twist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except Champagne) into a cocktail shaker. Shake ingredients together for 5 seconds with a smaller rock of ice and strain into a chilled Champagne flute. Top with Champagne and express oils from a lemon twist and then use as garnish.

## The Fix—Crushed and Cracked Ice

### ≡ PEASANTS AND SMASHES ≡

## CAIPIRINHA

---

2 ounces cachaça

3/4 ounce simple syrup

6 lime quarters

1 white sugar cube

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Cracked

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* Muddle together in a cocktail shaker the lime quarters, sugar cube, and simple syrup. Add cachaça and cracked ice. Shake five times and dump into a chilled double rocks glass.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Brazilian Mojito:* Add muddled mint.

*Caipiroska:* Sub vodka for cachaça.

## GORDON'S CUP

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

5 lime quarters

4 cucumber slices

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Cracked

*Garnish:* Sea salt

*Method:* Muddle together in a cocktail shaker the lime quarters, cucumber slices, and simple syrup. Add gin and cracked ice. Shake five times and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Garnish with a pinch of sea salt.

*Attribute:* Sasha Petraske, Milk & Honey

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Gordon's Breakfast:* Add 2–3 dashes of Cholula Hot Sauce and 3 drops of Worcestershire sauce.

*El Guapo:* Add 2–3 dashes of Cholula Hot Sauce and sub tequila for gin. (Sam Ross, Attaboy)

## WHISKEY SMASH

---

2 ounces bourbon whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

3–4 lemon quarters

4–6 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Cracked

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge and mint sprigs

*Method:* Muddle together in a cocktail shaker the mint, lemon quarters, and simple syrup. Add bourbon whiskey and cracked ice. Shake and strain into a chilled double rocks glass over fresh cracked ice. Garnish with a lemon wedge and mint sprigs.

*Attribute:* Dale DeGroff, Rainbow Room

*Note:* This drink can also be strained over crushed ice.

### Mr. Potato Head

Sub any spirit for bourbon whiskey to get another smash variation.

## ≡ JULEPS, COBBLERS, AND SWIZZLES ≡

### BRAMBLE

---

2 ounces gin

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

4 blackberries

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Blackberry

*Method:* Muddle together in a cocktail shaker the blackberries, lemon juice, and simple syrup. Add gin. Dry-shake all ingredients and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Top with pebble ice and lightly swizzle. Garnish with a blackberry. Add topping of pebble ice.

*Attribute:* Dick Bradsell, London

### Mr. Potato Head

*Rumble:* Sub white rum for gin and sub raspberries for blackberries.

### BRAZILIAN FIX

---

2 ounces cachaça

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce honey syrup

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce yellow Chartreuse (float)

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except yellow Chartreuse) into a cock-

tail shaker. Dry-shake and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Float yellow Chartreuse. Garnish with mint sprigs. Add topping of pebble ice.

*Attribute:* Eric Alperin, The Varnish

## FIX

---

2 ounces spirit of choice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Lemon wedge

*Method:* Dry-shake all ingredients in a cocktail shaker and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Garnish with a lemon wedge. Add topping of pebble ice.

## GEORGIA JULEP

---

2 ounces Cognac

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce peach liqueur

1 brown sugar cube

6–8 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Julep tin

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs and powdered sugar

*Method:* Muddle the brown sugar cube, mint, and peach liqueur together in a julep tin. Add Cognac. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Garnish with mint sprigs and powdered sugar. Add topping of pebble ice.

## MAI TAI

---

1 ounce Coruba dark rum

1 ounce Appleton Estate V/X aged rum

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce lime juice

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce (heavy) orgeat

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce (scant) curaçao

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs

*Method:* Dry-shake all ingredients in a cocktail shaker and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Garnish with mint sprigs. Add topping of pebble ice.

## MINT JULEP

---

2 ounces bourbon whiskey

$\frac{1}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

1 white sugar cube

6–8 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Julep tin

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs and powdered sugar

*Method:* Muddle the white sugar cube, mint, and simple syrup together in a julep tin. Add bourbon whiskey. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Garnish with mint sprigs and powdered sugar. Add topping of pebble ice.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Prescription Julep:* Sub  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce rye whiskey and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces Cognac for full 2 ounces bourbon whiskey.

## MOJITO

---

2 ounces white rum  
1 ounce lime juice  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup  
1 brown sugar cube  
8–10 mint leaves

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs

*Method:* Gently muddle the brown sugar cube, mint, lime juice, and simple syrup together in a cocktail shaker. Add white rum. Dry-shake and dump into a chilled double rocks glass. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Garnish with mint sprigs. Add topping of pebble ice.

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## ‘OUMUAMUA (OH-MOO-AH-MOO-AH)

---

1 ounce aged rum  
1 ounce oloroso sherry  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces pineapple juice  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce coconut cream  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce lime juice

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs and absinthe mist

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Whip with  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce pebble ice. Dump into a chilled collins glass and top with pebble ice. Garnish with mint sprigs and mist absinthe over the top.

*Attribute:* Bryan Tetorakis, The Varnish

## PIÑA COLADA

---

1 ounce aged rum

1 ounce white rum

1½ ounces pineapple juice

½ ounce coconut cream

¼ ounce lime juice

Angostura bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Pineapple chunk and umbrella

*Method:* Measure all ingredients (except Angostura bitters) into a cocktail shaker. Whip with ½ ounce pebble ice. Dump into a chilled collins glass and top with pebble ice. Add 4–5 dashes of Angostura bitters on top and garnish with a pineapple chunk and an umbrella.

## QUEENS PARK SWIZZLE

---

2 ounces white rum

1 ounce lime juice

¾ ounce simple syrup

1 white sugar cube

8–10 mint leaves

Angostura bitters

Peychaud's bitters

*Glassware:* Chilled collins

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Mint sprigs

*Method:* Gently muddle the white sugar cube, mint, lime juice, and simple syrup together in a cocktail shaker. Add white rum. Dry-shake and dump into a chilled collins glass. Top with pebble ice and swizzle. Generously add 5–6 dashes each of Peychaud's bitters and Angostura bitters over top. Add topping of pebble ice. Garnish with mint sprigs.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Hyde Park Swizzle:* Sub gin for white rum. (Alex Day, Death & Co)



## SHERRY COBBLER

---

2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounces oloroso sherry

<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounce curaçao

1 orange wedge

1 lemon wedge

*Glassware:* Chilled double rocks

*Ice:* Pebble

*Garnish:* Orange wedge and powdered sugar

*Method:* Squeeze and drop the orange wedge and lemon wedge and measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Dry-shake, dump into a chilled double rocks glass, and top with pebble ice. Garnish with an orange wedge and powdered sugar.

## ☞ CREAMS AND FLIPS (AFTER THE FACT) ☜

### BRANDY ALEXANDER

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1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ounces Cognac

1 ounce crème de cacao

<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounce heavy cream

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* Nutmeg

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with grated nutmeg.

#### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Alexander:* Sub gin for Cognac.

*Coffee Alexander:* Sub Café Varnish for crème de cacao.

### CAFÉ CON LECHE FLIP

---

1 ounce Gosling's Black Seal rum

<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> ounce Café Varnish

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce simple syrup

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce cream

1 egg yolk

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Nutmeg

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass. Garnish with grated nutmeg.

*Attribute:* Sam Ross, Milk & Honey

## DOMINICANA

---

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces aged rum

$1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces Café Varnish

Whipped cream (float)

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* In a chilled mixing glass, stir aged rum and Café Varnish over cracked ice. Strain into a chilled coupe and float whipped cream on top.

## NEW YORK FLIP

---

1 ounce bourbon whiskey

$\frac{3}{4}$  ounce port

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce cream

$\frac{1}{2}$  ounce simple syrup

1 egg yolk

*Glassware:* Chilled sour

*Garnish:* Nutmeg

*Method:* Measure all ingredients into a cocktail shaker and dry-shake. Add a rock of ice and shake hard. Strain into a chilled sour glass. Garnish with grated nutmeg.

## WHITE RUSSIAN

---

1½ ounces vodka

1½ ounces Café Varnish

Whipped cream (float)

*Glassware:* Chilled coupe

*Garnish:* None

*Method:* In a chilled mixing glass, stir vodka and Café Varnish over cracked ice. Strain into a chilled coupe and float whipped cream on top.

## ❧ HOT STUFF ❧

## HOT BUTTERED RUM

---

1½ ounces aged rum

¾ ounce honey syrup

1 pat of butter

Hot water

*Glassware:* Insulated glass

*Garnish:* Nutmeg

*Method:* Measure the rum and honey syrup directly into an insulated glass. Add the pat of butter and fill glass halfway with hot water. Stir with a bar-spoon until the butter is emulsified. Top with hot water. Heat with a steam wand if hotter temperature is desired. Grate fresh nutmeg on top.

## HOT TODDY

---

1½ ounces bourbon whiskey

¾ ounce honey syrup

2 lemon wedges

Hot water

*Glassware:* Insulated glass

*Garnish:* Nutmeg and cinnamon

*Method:* Measure all liquid ingredients directly into an insulated glass. Squeeze both lemon wedges and drop into the glass. Top with hot water. Heat with a steam wand if hotter temperature is desired. Grate whole nutmeg and cinnamon on top.

### **Mr. Potato Head**

*Fireside Toddy:* Sub  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce aged rum and  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounce Cognac for bourbon whiskey and throw a star anise and two cloves in along with the lemon wedges.

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## IRISH COFFEE

---

1½ ounces Irish whiskey

2 brown sugar cubes

Espresso or strong brewed coffee

Hot water

Whipped cream (float)

*Glassware:* Insulated glass

*Garnish:* Orange twist

*Method:* Measure Irish whiskey and place brown sugar cubes directly in an insulated glass. Add shot of espresso and top with hot water, leaving some room for the whipped cream. If using drip coffee, omit the water. Mix with a barspoon to dissolve the sugar cubes. Heat with a steam wand if hotter temperature is desired. Float cream on top. Express oils from an orange twist over the top and discard.



In the end, I love simplicity. It's what I strive for in my bar, as well as in life. But simplicity is not to be confused with thoughtlessness, and complexity is not to be confused with genius: a daiquiri is lime juice, sugar, and rum, and as long as those three simple ingredients are fresh, measured, and shaken with good block ice, there is no reason to search for a more "interesting" offering.

# HOUSE RULES

## MORE VARNISH BAR SLANG—USE IT AT HOME!

- LUBE 'EM UP: Give 'em a shot.
- OTF: On the fly; need it fast.
- GOODNIGHT MOON: A customer's last drink.
- FOR A COP: Don't fuck it up.
- SLEEPERS: A table that won't leave.
- MONEY SHOT: Seriously discount a tab.
- CHEESEBURGERS: What you say when the health department shows up unexpectedly. Throw away the raw eggs immediately.
- SNAIQUIRI: A half daiquiri for staff or a VIP.
- JIBRONI: A half negroni, in the same vein as a snaiquiri.
- FAMILY MEAL: A meeting at the bar where the staff shoots snaiquiris or shots at the start of service and intermittently throughout the night. They are a way to unite, a reminder that we're all in this together, for better or for worse, for the next seven hours.
- ASIAN EQUATION: Saturday night bartender team consisting of Daniel Eun and Eugene Shaw.
- TARBY PARTY: Friday night bartender team for anyone working alongside Devon Tarby.
- POOH BEAR: Nickname for bartender Chris Ojeda, who was

methodical but slow as honey.

- “EVEN A BLIND HOG’LL FIND AN ACORN EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE”: A popular Bostickism from Chris Bostick, former bartender and GM. Usually uttered as a backhanded compliment when you finally got your shit together.
- “ATREYU!”: A server taking a heavy tray with both hands calls out to the bartender to put up a new tray for the next round.
- SEE SEE: Put on end-of-night playlist. A reference to the song “See See Rider.”
- “PAPA HIELO!”: The literal Spanish translation is “daddy ice,” which sounds like a Biggie lyric, but by which we mean “Get more ice.” Coined for Varnish barback Carlos Lopez-Flores who has worked at the bar since day one, and sober no less. Carlos is the backbone of The Varnish, and the framed article hanging on the wall by the front door from an issue of *Life & Thyme* magazine celebrates him as one of the industry’s unsung heroes.
- DON’T SARI THEM: Do not give resting bitch face.

## AFTERWORD

A bar without people is a room waiting, in suspended animation, for something to happen, for secrets to spill and liquor to swill. Only when it is filled with bartenders, servers, barbacks, and hosts; musicians, regulars, lovers, and neighbors; industry denizens and husbands and wives, does a bar come alive.

In celebration of those who have lit up The Varnish for the past ten years, this space is for them—for their stories to be told in their own words, in the way they remember it going down.

JEREMY KASTEN, VARNISH REGULAR, 2009–2016

Gather round, kids—that’s right, onto the bed. All three of you. Who wants to hear a story? Daddy’s on his third whiskey and ready to tell a tale! Oh, no—I told you all about Mommy and Daddy’s first date *last* week. And we told the story of Mommy and Daddy’s wedding just a few days ago. How about the story of Mommy and Daddy’s *first* first date? That’s right. There was a first date Mommy and I almost never talk about. Do you know why it’s a good story? That’s right! It was a disaster.

Does anyone remember where Mommy and Daddy lived before we became farmers and moved to the countryside? That’s right.

Down. Town. Los. Angeles. And downtown wasn't like a food court at the big, big mall like it is now. It was a crazy, exciting place. And a dangerous place. And it was filthy. Boy, was it filthy. You've never smelled such smells. Pee-ew! Exactly!

Now, in those days, Daddy did lots of silly things because of pain-go-bye-bye juice. And because of cocaine. Everyone in downtown did! It was so much fun, and it was so crazy and chatty! Well, back then there were only a few places Daddy could leave his loft to be naughty and fancy—one of them was a magical place where you were expected to be *both* near blackout drunk and charming. Which was Daddy's specialty back then! It was called—that's right!—*The Varnish*. And do you know how you got into this bar? You vanished *into* The Varnish! Through a *secret door* . . . in the *back of another* bar! I know! Grown-ups *are* crazy!

And when you vanished behind that door, there was a tiny room, and in that room were the tiniest, strongest drinks in tiny, glistening glasses, and in that room were hardly *any* bridge-and-tunnel people in sneakers. Which was *very* unusual for Los Angeles.

Well, as you know, when I first met your mommy, she was a server at a fancy restaurant and it was brunch and Daddy had been up all night. Now. When your daddy saw your mommy, she was poured into her crisp shirt and tiny slacks, as if Fay Wray got poured into a slip. Mommy's Louise Brooks bob blinded in movie-star platinum. And broken-gravestone-chipped red paint on her nails. Man, was Mommy hot. And sassy. And what did Daddy do? That's right! Daddy *did* fall in *love* and asked her over and over to go on dates. The more Mommy said she was too busy, the more Daddy brought dates *into* Mommy's restaurant. And do you know what? It finally worked. Mommy agreed to meet Daddy after her work in the magical bar with the secret door.

Well. You can imagine the look on Daddy's face when Mommy



floated in wearing a party dress, lots of pearls, and long opera gloves. And with her, the handsomest, most charming, *skinniest* male-model-looking fellow you've ever seen. Mommy told Daddy he was her "friend" visiting from out of town. So do you know what Daddy did? That's right! He got a really strong drink from his friend the server whose name was Kimmy. And then he asked her for *another* really strong drink! And then he asked for *another*. And soon Daddy didn't care what happened! And *oh my, it's time for you two to leave? It's so early! Nearly closing? You're kidding! Well, by all means. This has been lovely. I think I'll stay for just one or six more, but I'll walk you two out.*

The next thing Daddy remembers is standing in the brisk November air outside the bar that hid the magical Varnish bar, with the streets streaked with gritty L.A. rain and pee-pee. And suddenly Daddy didn't feel so funny or loud. He felt small. And lonely. Daddy remembers thinking, *Well. That's where that ends.*

And do you know what he did?

Daddy went back into the bar. Through the door in the back where he vanished into the tiny, magical room. And asked his friend Kimmy for another really strong drink. And no doubt Kimmy told Daddy a lie she'd told lots of customers before.

*A disaster? It looked to me as though she liked you a lot. Oh, come on! She was laughing the whole time. Call her tomorrow. Do you want another one?*

And that's the story of Mommy and Daddy's *first* first date.

MATTY EGGLESTON, VARNISH BARTENDER, 2009

Comparable to foggy recollections of a strong night out, my memories of The Varnish are both distant and distinct, but not a workday goes by that isn't influenced by my time there. Like that oft-quoted

aphorism about folks not remembering what was said or done but remembering how they *felt*, being asked to join the opening team was a benchmark career moment.

The Varnish was so much about bartending that I loved at the time: the precision of the room, the backbar, and the stations. The cocktail specs. The crew. The first jangly notes of “Straight, No Chaser” as the door was unlocked. Slipping a None but the Brave or a Champs-Élysées into the mix for Bartender’s Choice. A garishly big knot for the necktie. The healthy level of nerdery. Stuff that’s everywhere now. Or come and gone already. The whole wheel is turning around again on what is *de rigueur*, but at The Varnish it was fresh and deeply rooted, and the thing we made was tuned as tightly as possible to ensure a roomful of people got loose on cocktails.

And it was fun.

REBEKKA JOHNSON, VARNISH BARTENDER/  
SERVER/HOST, 2009–2013

I was a loser working at a small chain-style brewery that had fourteen different kinds of salad dressing and an always creamy soup of the day. I had moved to Los Angeles from New York City three months before and was trying to navigate Hollywood while slinging beers and fried chicken salads. My best friend and comedy partner Kimmy Gatewood invited me to grab a cocktail at her new job. So on a day off, still smelling like ranch and strawberry blonde beer, my husband and I went to The Varnish for the first time. There is something magical about candlelight and crystal lamps; I felt transported back in time to a fictional pre-Prohibition bar—bartenders wearing suspenders or pencil skirts with red lips. I knew I wanted to be a part of this drunk old-timey family.

Kimmy introduced me to Eric, and I immediately confessed I

had to work there. He took my number and called me the next day to give me a job. He said he liked my 917 number and New York attitude.

I had to battle to keep that attitude in check when dealing with impatient people at the door pretending to be investors and rude men who didn't like that we served daiquiris in a "girly" coupe glass. But mostly, I had fun. Probably too much fun. Sometimes the fun made it hard to count out the money at 2 a.m. Even though I had come to L.A. for a life in comedy, The Varnish was never just a day job (or night job). It was a cool place to work. A place I was proud to invite my manager and agents to. A place I went to immediately after performing on *Conan*, in full hair and makeup, to work behind the bar. A place that invited me and Kimmy to sing our original 1940s-style comedy songs one New Year's while taking a break from serving the best cocktails in town. Ryan Gosling used to frequent The Varnish and became a fan of our comedy group, The Apple Sisters. He went on to ask us to open for his band and produce our album. It was a magical time.

Four and a half years later, my comedy career was starting to take off. I was the producer and director of *Speakeasy* with Paul F. Tompkins. I was acting and writing but still cocktailing one day a week. I finally quit when I was two months pregnant with my son and would nearly throw up from the sight of whiskey. And there was so much whiskey.

I've had so many full-circle moments connected to The Varnish: I waited on Alison Brie and now I wrestle her on *GLOW*. I waited on Sandra Oh on a slow Halloween night (dressed as a Dark 'n' Stormy), and this year at the SAG Awards we were both nominated. I chatted with her on the bathroom line. When I mentioned that I waited on her so many years back, she was pumped. She loved The Varnish and loved that I was there then, and here now.

It's been five years and I still feel at home in the bar, and Kimmy and I still brag about working there, offer to make executives drinks at pitch meetings.

Is that weird? Who cares. I'm cool now. Don't you think I'm cool?

(BTW: I still smell like ranch. Ranch and whiskey.)

#### SIMON FORD, FOUNDER OF THE 86 CO. AND FORDS GIN

For me, The Varnish was the bar Los Angeles was waiting for when it finally opened its doors in 2009. In my opinion, The Varnish brought a slice of New York drinking class to Los Angeles at a time when it needed it most, and it had a dream team to get it going—Sasha Petraske, his friend Eric Alperin, and Cedd Moses, a downtown L.A. visionary with a great eye for design and a passion for the types of bars and drinks Eric and Sasha were known for. As soon as I heard of its opening, I was there. A lot. It was my home away from home whenever I visited Los Angeles, the kind of place I knew I would get a perfect drink and was guaranteed to avoid that classic L.A. velvet rope bullshit and pretentiousness that was such a big part of the city at that time (although I did secretly enjoy those places as a guilty pleasure every now and again). I would find myself hanging around at the end of the night, hoping to grab late-night tacos somewhere with them after they had closed. It was like the bar on TV's *Cheers* for me, where the bartenders knew my name and what I liked to drink.

Knowing all of this, it should come as no surprise that I have many great memories and associations with The Varnish, and it is also a bar that had a great influence on me. Every time I stepped behind the bar I was taken aback at how well designed it was, and how intuitive. Everything was where you would expect it to be, and even though I didn't ever work there, I found everything I

needed to make a drink quickly and easily. So much thought had gone into every tiny detail. It isn't a flashy bar though—it's purposeful, like a classic vintage car everyone wants because no one ever improved on its design. The Varnish was an instant classic. It was also a big influence on me when I was creating my gin. Sasha had already helped me create the recipe, but when I was working on the bottle's design and labels, it was a day spent with Varnish bartenders that set things in stone: the ridges on the neck of the bottle came from Eric showing me his "London pour"—it became evident that we needed to make the shoulders of the bottle more ergonomic so it would be comfortable to hold when pouring. The Varnish's attention to detail was passed on to me, and to this very day people thank me for the bottle's design.

MIKE BITTON, FRIEND OF TWENTY-PLUS YEARS,  
BARTENDER AT THE SLIPPER CLUTCH

I remember when Eric was working at Osteria Mozza, I must have been going there anywhere from one to three times a week, and you know I had the mad hookup. So my first thought when I realized Eric was leaving Mozza to open The Varnish was, *Well, there goes my fuckin' hookup.*

Obviously, I'm only kidding. Sort of. The fact that my homeboy was opening his own spot really made me happy and proud. And who knew that this little spot in the back of Cole's would actually change my life in the most profound and positive way, 'cause seven years later, Eric, Richie, and the 213 family opened a bar called The Slipper Clutch. Not only did they give me a job, they gave me a whole new family and social life. Aside from opening a dope fuckin' place with such drive and a fun crowd, they gave me a family—Christina Ray, who I work with, has become my sister, and Josh, Kevin, John, Armando, Gustavo, and Dustin.

I make a good living there now, but more important, having this crew in my life makes me feel extremely happy, makes me excited to go to work, which I never had in my life. And I also found that I'm good at what I do—I'm forty-eight years old, and this is my first gig in the service industry, and because of The Varnish (where it all started), I've found my calling in life.

Oh, and I am also an ex-heroin addict and Eric knew me then, so the fact that he can see me at my lowest and now see me at my highest is amazing. And remember I said I was upset about losing the hookup at Mozza? Well, now that I'm in the industry, I'm pretty fuckin' hooked up everywhere.

RICHARD BOCCATO, PROPRIETOR, DUTCH KILLS,  
FRESH KILLS, HUNDREDWEIGHT ICE,  
BAR CLACSON, AND THE SLIPPER CLUTCH

On Saturday, April 7, 2012, me and Eric Alperin rode our motorcycles from Baja California up to Los Angeles. We parked the bikes in the garage behind The Varnish and settled in at the bar for the night. A kid who used to work for me was tagging along. About an hour or so before closing time, the Shields brothers showed up—Zach and Ben Shields are tough as nails. Both accomplished and uncompromising artists. They were accompanied by an attractive blond woman to whom Zach was married at the time. And they'd brought their tattoo guns.

In the storage room behind the bar, while service was still in swing, Eric got a tattoo that resembles a death mask of a cat's face. The kid who used to work for me got a tattoo; I forget what it was. When it was my turn, I relaxed my arm on a prep table above a chest freezer and watched as Ben carefully scratched away. He drew the face of Fritz the Cat, from the Ralph Bakshi movie, on the underside of my left forearm, just south of my elbow. His whiskers

are delicate and lifelike. He wears a mischievous grin and a bow-tie. Niki came back to let us know that the last-call patrons had left, and we all spilled out into the bar.

The show was over. The lights were up. No music. The guy working the door locked up and brought his friend into the bar to get a tattoo on his neck as me, Eric, and the kid who used to work for me drank Tecates and mezcal. Niki was counting the register with a lit cigarette in her mouth, wincing through the smoke as the paper money slowly slid through her fingers from one hand to the other. The young lady to whom The Varnish's GM, Max, was married at the time was reclining on a table with her pants down as Zach outlined a chipmunk high up on her thigh. She was giggling. A tobacco haze was hanging in the air. Needles were buzzing. I remember seeing Zach's wife rummaging through her purse. Soon she was really going at it, looking for something that should've been there. She started saying something about how the door guy's friend had taken her wallet, and Zach's tattoo gun stopped buzzing, mid-chipmunk.

The door guy's friend wasn't in the room. He wasn't in the bathroom where Charles Bukowski and Mickey Cohen once pissed. Zach and Ben both reached into their respective bags, and each pulled out something similar. I didn't see what it was. Then they left the bar, and Eric followed, shouting on his way out, "Richie, you're in charge!"

I swallowed some Tecate backwash, stood up, and told everyone, "Let's clean this bar!" Because that's what you do when after-hours is over. You clean the fucking bar.

A few weeks later, back in New York, I went to a movie on the Upper West Side.

After it ended, I stayed in my seat to watch the credits roll. Ben Shields's name made its way up the screen, under the title "Tattoo Designer." I looked down at Fritz on my arm and thought, *There's*

*a young lady out there in Los Angeles tonight with a headless chipmunk hiding just above her panty line.*

JAMIE ELMAN, VARNISH PIANIST, 2009–PRESENT

It's not hyperbole to say that The Varnish changed my life. I was thirty-two and had been working in Hollywood as an actor since I was twenty-three. I had never had a professional music gig in my life, although I had played piano and sang on TV in a couple of shows over the years. Lifelong “hobbies” of mine, my passion, sure, but not my career.

Most of my piano playing in L.A. was with a great group of guys that I jammed with on Saturdays in a pool house out in North Hollywood. We called ourselves PoolHouse—appropriate, since we never played anywhere else.

The guy who invited me to these stoney sessions was the drummer, Johnny Sneed. Like me, Johnny wasn't a “professional” musician but rather someone who just loved to play. So when I got a call from someone named Eric Alperin, telling me he got my number from Johnny, I was immediately nervous.

“Did Johnny tell you about my playing? Cuz we really just jam and I'm sort of a blues guy, not really a professional. It would probably be best if you heard me play first? Like an audition? . . .” I stammered.

“Sure man, if you wanna swing by here, come on down,” he replied.

That was my first time in downtown in the eight years I'd lived in L.A. It was grand and dirty and felt like a different planet, even though I lived in Silver Lake, just fifteen minutes away.

Inside The Varnish, the bar was in pieces. Eric was dragging benches around the room. The lighting fixtures were not in yet,



and in the middle of the room was a battered old upright. Eric was friendly but distracted. I played a few songs I thought would be appropriate as he took phone calls and moved stuff around.

After about fifteen minutes, I said, “Something like that?”

“Sure, sounds good,” Eric replied.

February 24, 2009. Opening night of the bar. I was overwhelmed with excitement and nausea all day. When I walked in, I was expecting a small group. It was packed. I was freaking out. I felt like a fraud. I was wearing a shirt/tie/vest combo, with a cheesy fedora—I *may never be asked back*, I thought, *but at least I look the part*.

The bar was gorgeous. It was so cool. I tried not to attract much attention. Prayed that no one would talk to me or make any requests. Was comforted that it was too loud for anyone to notice I repeated the same songs all night. Driving home, exhausted and relieved that it was over, I assumed I wouldn’t be asked back, but when I checked in with Eric, he told me to start that Monday.

“Really? Cuz, like, it’s my first gig and I’m just not sure—”

“It’s gonna be great man,” I remember him saying. “We’ll figure it out together.”

On my two hundredth Monday, I invited all the people who had ever sat in with me to come celebrate my self-proclaimed milestone. About fifteen different players swapped in and out that night—one of my favorite moments in my nearly twenty years in L.A.

Eric told me recently that I “have a lifetime residency.”

I intend to take him up on that.

KIMMY GATEWOOD, VARNISH SERVER/HOST, 2009–2011

My job interview with Eric was at the bar counter at Cole’s French Dip. I ordered a grilled cheese and soup. Eric didn’t seem like the bar owner of what would start the cocktail revolution in L.A. He

was just a dude with unkempt hair and a lot of passion. We talked comedy, writing, and dreams of making movies. Next thing you know, I was training as a host and waitress, under the care of Deb Stoll, who I knew from New York.

I found out I was the first “external hire” who wasn’t family or “cocktail family.” I felt so proud of myself for that but had no idea how important and special this family was going to be.

In the early days, we did everything by hand, from making the cocktails (always) to chopping ice to writing the drink orders to counting the cash. We had to taste and describe every single drink that was in the phone-book-size book of classic cocktails. And then as new bartenders would come in and create their own cocktails, we had to remember all of theirs. At some point in the night, I would lose track of how many drinks I had served and how many I had marked off and how many had been paid for, so I’d just guess around ten drinks. Sometimes I’d overcharge and undercharge customers by accident, but no one seemed to care. Poor Eric would be there *every night*, reining us in, tasting the drinks and making us laugh. Or he would be stuck in the smelly, smelly back room, doing paperwork for his employees, who kept very bad books. I learned: *Don’t put your stuff in the back room if you have to be somewhere*—if the back door was locked, someone was either doing drugs, making out, or getting oral. I never partook in any of those shenanigans, and looking back . . . I’m still okay I didn’t. The back room smelled like French dip, lemons, and trash!

Some Yelp reviewer gave me a scathing review, accidentally calling me Kippy. It was truly a crowning moment, because you know what? They were fucking wrong.

My favorite thing ever was naming drinks. Alex Day came up with a drink and asked me what to call it. I told him “the High Five.” He asked why. I told him because of the garnish—a high five. One day I’ll win an Oscar, but naming the High Five will still top

it. (Unless the Academy is reading this, in which case I retract that last sentence.)

It's weird to look back and realize I was in the L.A. cocktail revolution when it was happening. We were having so much fun at work. We would drink too much, dance around, sit with the customers, yammer on for hours about cocktails, and pretend we were showing discipline when we wouldn't serve cocktails after 1:30 a.m., but do a hundred shots, open beers, and smoke cigarettes in the back.

I got to hang out with famous chefs and celebrities who wanted to try the best cocktails in the city. I met and served Jonathan Gold, who invited me to sing at an event, and he put The Apple Sisters on a spread in *LA Weekly*. We sang songs on the piano with Ryan Gosling and Olivia Wilde. We threw back beers with Ludo and his entire kitchen staff after they opened up their first L.A. restaurant.

The two years that I was there, we developed a tight-knit family that fed the nightlife in Los Angeles. I love The Varnish and my Varnish fam.

ALEX DAY, VARNISH BARTENDER, 2010–2011,  
CO-OWNER, PROPRIETORS LLC AND DEATH & CO.

It started like any other shift at The Varnish: I sauntered in around 4 p.m., iced coffee half empty and the last lingering bits of a hang-over on the tip of my brain. I recall beginning the normal routine: ice always came first. Back in those days, we cut from big blocks frozen overnight in massive chest freezers that filled the bar's tiny office from wall to wall. I'd listen to LCD Soundsystem or the Shins or whatever else I was into back then. The music didn't really matter, but it was critical for keeping pace and moving through the task, my mind wandering to thoughts of life and purpose and a

place in the world as my ice pick precisely skewered frozen water in rhythm.

All those beautiful pictures of cocktails served on a perfect, clear cube? Yeah, there's a lot of working shit out in the process to get there. Namaste.

Once we finished with the ice, the lights were dimmed, the candles were lit, and we were off. The first few hours were typical enough. Rounds of old-fashioneds and daiquiris, Queens Park Swizzles and negronis, and always a few early-evening martinis for the classy crowd. Around the tipping point, in walked a couple flanked by friends—the guy young and brunette and extremely handsome in a perfectly fitted suit; the woman petite, with a flowing dress, a determination in her step. We all recognized them immediately.

I took them in for a moment, then realized Devon was waiting impatiently for her drinks on the other side of the service pass, snapped out of it, and got back to work.

The Varnish stops for no one.

At last call, everyone shuffles out the door, but the couple stays. “You guys want anything else?” someone asks. “Sure!” One last round for Drew Barrymore and Justin Long, who, I soon learn, came to us directly from a movie premiere that had bombed fantastically—their big onscreen co-starring role together. Despite this, they're having a blast, in the throes of a romance, our drinks helping alleviate their disappointment.

The couple abandons the solitude of their table to join the staff. As was our custom in those days, a few shots and some beers sped up cleaning and paperwork (maturity has proven this less than correct), but it was also a time to air the night's stresses, let out the chaos of the night, reflect together, get a little tipsy, and come down off the high of making other people happy. They joined us, polite and engaged, chatter and banter in equal measure. *Why are these drinks so good? How long did it take to learn this?* We slough it

*off—It's really easy, just a few things to memorize, attention to detail, great ice, no big deal.*

Fueled by laughter and mezcal, I invite Drew behind the bar. Someone grabs ice from the office and we get to it. *Here's how you hold a jigger. Here's what it means to be accurate. Here's how we shake. No, no, shake harder—it's block ice. Harder!*

And then Justin takes his turn. More cocktails are made. Things get fuzzy. I make a joke that Drew is the only person around smaller than I am, and before I know it she's climbing around my torso. It is one of the strangest and funniest things anyone has done in my life, the type of innocent playfulness that speaks to a person's true self and heart. Eventually the laughter slows and sharper minds put a halt to the booze, we bid farewell, and the evening ends, as it always must.

That night wasn't memorable because two famous people stayed up late with a few rowdy bartenders and servers. The night certainly wasn't memorable because we stuck around and drank until an hour we shouldn't even admit. That happened all the time. That night in 2010 when Drew and Justin joined us into the quiet hours was one of the most memorable Varnish shifts because it set in stone in my mind the immense power a bar has to bring people together, no matter who they are, away from worry, and set them free, if only for a few precious hours.

ERIC NEEDLEMAN, PARTNER, 213 HOSPITALITY

I can't recall the first time I stepped into The Varnish for a drink, but it was surely sometime in its first year, 2009. I wasn't a cocktail neophyte, but I very much believed the drink was all about the ingredients and the technique with which it was made. In fact, The Varnish did use only high-quality ingredients and a very curated spirit selection, many of which I hadn't seen elsewhere, to accommodate

its small backbar. The tenders there were quite proficient, measuring amounts accurately and using proper technique when stirring and shaking. The drinks were delicious, and I chalked it up to those two factors: good ingredients and good technique.

Then I began to notice others in Los Angeles making “proper” cocktails, no doubt at least partly inspired by visits to The Varnish. It was at that point I realized that anyone could buy those ingredients, anyone could refer to books for classic recipes, and anyone could learn the basic techniques for making a good cocktail. And the drinks were good . . . but not quite as good as the same ones at The Varnish.

As I spent more time there and helped open Half Step, their sister bar in Austin, Texas, I began to learn the subtle details. First, technique is more than just shaking and stirring properly. I learned that the order in which a round of drinks is made matters. I learned that making your own ice in large, pure blocks provides a colder drink with much less dilution. And I learned that it’s important how glassware is handled so body heat doesn’t warm up that drink.

Guests don’t notice these things, but they sure contribute to why that drink tastes so damn good. More than that, though, it’s the experience of The Varnish that makes the difference. It’s the host who greets you upon entry, acknowledging your presence and immediately providing a sense of welcome. The warm glow of the lights throughout, creating an intimate and comforting environment. The standing bar with extra-wide arm cushions, the custom insulated garnish trays that maintain fresh products within arm’s reach of the tenders, and the soft leather cushions you sink into when sliding into a booth.

These are all acts of intention. Every last one of them, in the spirit of presenting the best version of a cocktail and creating the best possible environment in which to enjoy it.

So are the drinks at The Varnish made with great ingredients and proper technique? Absolutely.

Is that why the drinks always taste better there? Not one bit.

KATE GRUTMAN, FRIEND AND FORMER CO-WORKER

In 2012, I was at Tales of the Cocktail in New Orleans as a rep for Anchor Distilling Company under Southern Wine & Spirits, and The Varnish won Best American Cocktail Bar, and E, A, J, and I got so turnt and on the shoulder (plastered/smashed) we ended up singing Journey on top of the bar at Erin Rose, then stripped down to our drawers and ran through the kitchen and into their meat locker. Security escorted us out and we all ran in and did it again. Then I fell off E's bicycle handlebars on the way to the "house," where C and a bunch of people I don't remember all partied until G lost his grip on a bottle of Ocho Reposado and gave me a minor concussion. Everyone kept me awake by throwing me into the clap/gonorrhea/hepatitis pool on top of D and A, and of course K, and then I woke up, fully clothed and chlorinated, on top of a plantation-style canopy bed, and when I went to look for E or C, I found two different bedrooms covered in vomit but otherwise empty and one bedroom with at least nineteen people passed out in a dog pile on one bed, and that's how you end up coming home from an industry event with strep throat and a black eye, still on retainer with Anchor and repping a rum called Pink Pigeon that came bottled and branded with a pink cock ring.

ERIC THORNE, GOOD FRIEND AND MASTER CARPENTER

We struck a bargain

I never paid for a drink

Would work for cocktails

CARLOS LOPEZ-FLORES, VARNISH BARBACK  
FROM DAY ONE TO TODAY

Cuando mi hermano Héctor me comentó que su amigo Eric iba abrir un bar, me dijo que está buscando personas para trabajar. Yo le conteste a mi hermano que tenía un poco de inseguridad por que nunca había trabajado de barback y no sabia inglés. Pero mi hermano me dio seguridad, me dijo que Eric le gusta la gente que trabaja rápido, atenta, y eficaz. Yo me sentí confiado y pude ir a la primera semana de entrenamiento.

Mi primera reacción fue intimidado, porque había mucha gente familiarizados con el trabajo. Y a pesar de que la gente me enseñaron bien, todavia me sentia fuera de mi area. Al final del dia le comente a mi hermano sobre del apertura del bar, no tenía fe en el negocio porque está muy escondido y la arena estaba muy sólida. Rápidamente me corrigió mi hermano: “Estamos trabajando para el mejor bartender.”

Después me llamaron para darme solo un dia de trabajo. Pero ese dia fue terrible para mí, no entendía el sistema y tuve que hablarle a mi hermano para que me ayudara a cerrar. Pero por suerte la siguiente semana estuvo mejor, me aprendí todo muy rápido de la semana pasada. A mitad de turno me preguntó Eric si podía venir a trabajar el viernes, quiero pensar que el vio mi potencial para trabajar. Ese viernes llegó y me sorprendió ver que el schedule decía que iba a trabajar seis días.

Despues de dias, semanas, meses, e incluso años me gané el respeto y la confianza de Eric. Al que me a dado un apodo “Papa,” me puso mi foto en su pared de honor.

RIP Sasha Petraske

*... por que uno de los grandes me enseñara a trabajar.*



SARI LINDERSMITH, VARNISH BARTENDER/  
SERVER/HOST, 2011–2018

In the fall of 2018, I was trying to compose my resignation letter. After seven and a half years, I was leaving The Varnish. In the same moment, I received an email asking if I'd like to make a contribution to this book. After a few seconds of reflection, I burst into tears.

I started at The Varnish in 2011. I was twenty-two years old, with close to zero service industry experience. I was a big fan of the bar as a patron, but my main career focus was fashion and I resented the fact that I had to work nights to supplement my income and intern during the day.

I graduated high school in the height of the recession. It was a time when guidance counselors basically shrugged at you, because every industry seemed to be dying. I attempted more than one career path before finding myself at The Varnish, but it took working there a few years before something clicked. Sasha came to Los Angeles to do a training with us in early 2014, and I was so nervous I had to take a Xanax. We were each instructed to make a martini for him while he watched our technique, tasted it, and tossed it out. Martinis are my absolute favorite drink, which made me even more nervous. When it was my turn, I stepped behind the bar and made my martini while thinking about everything he had told us about agitating the ice and checking the temperature often. One thing he said that stuck out to me the most was: when you sip a martini, the first thing you should experience is very cold water; the other flavors should follow.

When the martini was ready, I strained it into a glass and placed it across the bar in front of him. He took a sip and very casually said that this one was too good to toss. Then he asked me to make him a grapefruit twist. He expressed it over the martini and handed

it back to me to taste. It tasted like very cold water, and all of the other flavors followed. This experience made me realize I was no longer just working a night job to afford my low-paying fashion gig. I realized that I loved what I was doing and I was good at it. I realized I had found my people and my path.

Soon after, I left my other job and committed the next several years to The Varnish.

GORDON BELLAVER, VARNISH BARTENDER,  
2013–2018, AND PARTNER IN PENNY POUND ICE

In my time, I have seen The Varnish's napkins, which are in fact dental napkins, worn as bibs. I've seen people put them on their face and cut out holes and make masks. I've seen business proposals materialize on napkins. I've watched people unfold and refold and flip their napkins expecting to find some magic treasure hidden beneath. I've had someone ask me if the menu is inside the napkin. (It's not.)

Have napkins been lit on fire? You better believe it.

As for me, I've used napkins to cover bleeds and clean lipstick off the rims of glasses. I've used napkins to swat annoying customers. Napkins have been bracelets, table wedges, and moist towlettes. Need to clean a table quickly? Use the condensation from the glasses to mop up the sticky spots.

Napkins can have their own visual cues. Placing them atop a drink means *I'll be back*. In the case of The Varnish, leave a pile of napkins stacked in the corner of the table to inform the next employee, *Hey, this needs a wipe-down from a real towel*.

Napkins are presented when a table needs to be seated. Napkins are where the drinks go. Napkins are the best way to give someone a telephone number. Napkins mark the passage of time. I had a relationship with napkins for almost five years at The

Varnish as a bartender/server/host, before transitioning into my current position as a partner at Penny Pound Ice. When the time came for me to depart, I took with me countless memories but only one napkin, for that napkin gave me my first marriage. He didn't have the gall to give it to me himself as he stumbled out of the bar. At the time it seemed rude of him to leave without saying goodbye, but on his napkin he'd left a note, "Thanks for the shots," and a number.

It was a full week before I sent him a message, not out of some power move but simply because I had placed the napkin in my pants pocket and didn't wear those pants until the next Saturday. A few weeks passed until we actually spent time together, and months before we were exclusive. Engaged for years and married for years, all while visiting The Varnish on a semi-regular basis. We had highs and lows there, and I can recall moments of twirling the napkin absentmindedly between my fingers like a nervous tic.

When we separated, I looked at that napkin long and hard, debating what to do with it. I used to show it off to friends and family when they visited, a veritable sign of our courtship. I had always wanted to frame it, but there was something in the tactile sensation of touching the napkin that reminded me of him.

I still cling to that napkin, buried somewhere deep in memorabilia from years past, knowing that one day I'll flip it over and start fresh, but not ignore the stains on the other side.

DANIEL ZACHARCZUK, VARNISH BARTENDER/  
SERVER/HOST, 2011–2015

There is a romance to arriving at the bar, to greetings and orders, to cutting ice, to holding your glass, to shaking and stirring, to candles, to music, to being in range, and there is a romance to leaving but never being gone.

## ANONYMOUS, A FRIEND OF MANY YEARS

I have cut away a tangled parachute, reentered free fall, and deployed my reserve. I have jumped into a glacial crevasse. I have spoken in front of a crowd of thousands and frequently swim in the open ocean with sharks. Nothing in my life has approached the feeling of fear I had while I stood and faced the door to the room of my intervention.

Six months later, I stood behind the bar at The Varnish, off-hours, and rifled through the beer cooler looking for water. The shimmering bottles of liquor on the backbar gave me pause. There had indeed been good times, even magical and fantastic times in The Varnish and in other bars, but as my life with alcohol went on, it became like playing grab bag with a sackful of hand grenades—when one went off, someone I loved was usually hurt more than me.

For most of my life I felt I needed to drink to talk to women, to speak with confidence, to make and keep friends, and to be a man. Alcohol had informed much of my personality from a young age, and until my late thirties I could not conceive of a life without drinking.

Then it happened. At thirty-nine years old—an intervention. Rehab.

And the next summer, sober, a six-thousand-mile solo motorcycle adventure that brought me all the way back to The Varnish.

So there I was, like an ostrich, head down in the beer cooler. Behind one of the Czech lagers, I grasped the finest bottle of club soda known to man; this man, anyway. I clinked my club soda against Eric's glass of mezcal and we had ourselves a proper toast and I found being at The Varnish sober to be affirming and empowering.

Four years later I am still living sober.

P. J. PESCE, VARNISH REGULAR AND  
FILMMAKER, 2010–PRESENT

When I was growing up, I was a huge fan of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The idea that one could find this little rip in the fabric of the universe and walk into a time out of mind, place out of space, where everything stops and the world is an idealized version of “not here, not now.” I’d heard The Varnish was such a place and dragged my partner with me to see if it was really true.

And it was. Every drink was extraordinary, as if the person who made it had taken great pains to make it balanced, subtle, and gorgeous, done with love. They gave me not only a drink but an experience, and it was exactly what I needed. I felt a deep connection to the place, and to whoever had created it. I told my wife that when we redid our kitchen, I must have something like it—that our kitchen must reflect this gorgeousity, this profound obeisance to the glory of alcohol. What proceeded was one of the worst fights of our married life.

*Are you out of your fucking mind? We can’t make our kitchen into a bar.*

*We must get a divorce. You obviously have no understanding of who I am on a fundamental level, of what is important to me, and cocktails are deeply and profoundly so.*

Somehow, through the haze of multiple incredible cocktails (in spite of or because of), we survived.

A few years passed and I was directing a TV show with a great actor, Anil Kumar. He came to our home to watch the show and of course, I made everyone drinks at my bar. He was impressed.

“What’s your favorite bar in L.A.?” he asked. Unhesitatingly I replied, “The Varnish.”

“You’re kidding! One of my best friends owns that place! We went to acting school together!”

Two weeks later I found myself seated next to a man who would become one of my dearest friends, someone who shares my love of food, drink, friendship, motorcycles, women, movies, and old-school honor.

When my father died and I needed a place to lick my wounds, Eric and The Varnish were there. I drank deep, the alcohol dulling the pain. And when the bill arrived, there was a note on it:

“Pops got drinks tonight.”

I consider The Varnish one of the most sacred places on this Earth.

#### MARC GASWAY, VARNISH MUSICIAN, 2012–PRESENT

When I started to take responsibility for the music in 2015 (I was already calling myself The Varnish’s “musical director,” at least on my Tinder page, but would never have called myself that in front of Eric), I started bringing in some of my own compositions. Just instrumentals at first, but eventually I knew I could write songs that fit well enough nobody would know I wasn’t singing a cover.

I’d go to The Varnish on all my off nights and order a Bartender’s Choice, telling whoever was working what I was writing about, and asking for a cocktail to echo the mood I was going for: For “Oarsmen,” a song with nautical themes, I’d wind up with a dirty martini, because it’s briny. For “Marmalade” I’d sip a Singapore sling, because it’s a song about two people screwing on a picnic blanket while drinking Singapore slings. I’d wait for Max to give me the green light to take a booth for myself and sit down and put pen to paper.

Now we’ve got a record out—*Live at the V* (I’m a bit paranoid that people are going to think that’s what people call The Varnish, so let me say now, it’s not. Nobody calls it that. I just needed the V

so I could make a lyric on the record rhyme properly.) The album was recorded in front of a live audience at The Varnish, where all the lyrics were written, and features all the musicians in our Varnish music family.

It's impossible to separate the music from The Varnish's essential connection to my life. Those songs couldn't have been written anywhere else. I've spent more hours playing and creating music at The Varnish than I have anywhere else. The room itself is in the music's DNA.

CHRIS ANGULO, VARNISH REGULAR AND  
SCREENWRITER, 2009–PRESENT

It was October 2018 when I brought my girlfriend to The Varnish. We had only been going out for a few months and I hadn't brought her around my friends yet, but I wanted to show her The Place, let its classiness leave its scent on me. Not that I needed it, but it couldn't hurt.

She'd never seen anything like it—a super-dope place hidden in the back of another place, dark, old-school, guy was on the piano playing, the host knew me, we got a table right away—I was classier by the second.

When my girl asked how I knew Eric—perfectly normal question, nothing to see here—I tried to put a button on the moment with a cool answer, so I thought for a beat.

What to say . . . I had met Eric eight years before while secretly working on this movie. Long story, but the lead actor had to make the perfect old-fashioned, and Eric was the only guy to teach it, apparently. I went to the lesson, too. Which turned into a drinking session, and soon I was making fun of him for no good reason, a little-brother thing I can't shake even in middle age.

Then I thought about the time Eric watched me die at a birthday

party in Catalina. I had only known him a few months and had this strange accidental-on-purpose Hunter S. Thompson deal going. I was on the slide down when Eric and I were alone at the condo. I went into the bathroom, and minutes later there was a crash and a sickening thud. Eric ventured inside to find I had fallen through one thick glass shower door, and the other appeared to have bisected me at the waist. I sat contentedly in the tub, feeling absolutely fine while he took care of me.

So there I was at The Varnish, sitting across the candlelit table from my perfect newish girlfriend, all smiles, her big browns looking at me, her hand in mine, waiting for an answer.

“Eric? I think Zach introduced me or something.”

#### JOHNNY SNEED, VARNISH MUSICIAN, 2009–2017

I am forever grateful for the many Monday nights I’ve played at The Varnish, a magical place where drinks, conversation, and music stimulate and inspire all who are fortunate enough to be there. Many musicians have joined us over the years—professional and novice alike. Jon Brion playing piano and guitar with us was a definite highlight. Another happened to be when my parents were visiting: Jamie Elman was on piano, Marc Gasway on bass, Claire Wellin on violin, and I was on drums. Claire sees the door open and then leans over to tell us we have to play something especially good, *right now*—Chris Thile, the Grammy Award-winning mandolin player and current host of *A Prairie Home Companion*, was walking in. He sat down at a table near us, mandolin by his side. After he had a drink, we invited him to play with us, which he did to much applause and several flashes from my mother’s camera.

The Varnish is that kind of place—where my mom and a Grammy winner can share a drink and a laugh while singing songs together.



LINDA AND DAVE, VARNISH REGULARS, 2010–PRESENT

“Living on borrowed time.” This is how we like to describe the interval we inhabit at The Varnish before the inevitable blackout sets in. Once we enter, we accept that only fragments of our experience will come floating back to us in the morning, among the drunken flotsam of random cocktail pics, matchbooks, and hopefully a receipt to confirm we actually paid for everything. “Living on borrowed time” is what Linda announced to Devon as she blessed a batch of shots she thought we needed, and it has stuck. It’s what Linda was thinking, no doubt, when she suggested Anthony smell those rubber summer sandals with the special manufactured Strawberry Shortcake doll-like scent, and he, without pause, held one damn shoe aloft and inhaled its perfume. It’s what David has been up to when he’s been *that guy* and slurred a request for something Chartreusey like a Greenpoint or a Bijou but not exactly either of those.

Navy-strength gimlets, amaro with staff, snaquiris, shots from an ice luge in the shape of a giant penis—we’ve taken a lot in our borrowed time at The Varnish. But maybe nothing more so than its logo. To commemorate our drunken hours together and our marriage, we decided to get matching cocktail-themed tattoos, and when text tattoos like GIN & on his forearm and TONIC on hers didn’t seem cool enough, we ripped the image of the coupe from The Varnish. Proud of this new ink and how each cocktail glass tilted toward the other in a tattoo toast, excited to show friends outside The Varnish’s circle, we were nevertheless worried—had we become worse than those obnoxious regulars we sneer at when visiting other bars? Even more terrible, had we become stalkers? Would the people there view us differently? Would the smiles we saw as they chipped ice at the bar take on a more sinister meaning?

And what about Eric? Speaking of stalkers, he had just moved into our apartment building, taking up residence on the same floor. One of us embarked upon elaborate measures, never rolling up his sleeve, turning his arm inward whenever he detected a fashionably professional masculine presence in the hallway of his building.

Perhaps we took ourselves too seriously. Surely we underestimated the pride that comes from being a part of The Varnish. Eric eventually discovered the tattoos, and instead of banishing us from his bar for being creeps, he rewarded us with a big cooler full of Penny Pound ice.

And so, with the exception of one insignificant blip, we have persisted in drinking at The Varnish, comfortable in our roles as two fortysomethings who appear semi-regularly and get hammered and yammer on about borrowed time.

MIKKI KRISTOLA, VARNISH BARTENDER/SERVER/HOST,  
2011-2018, AND PARTNER AT THE STREAMLINER

*My first day in, my leg was felt up  
I was new to cocktails, a “mixologist” pup  
A new kind of bar, I was out of my zone  
A misfit bar crew, I wasn’t alone  
Behind the bar I had spent many years  
Pouring shots and slinging draft beers  
This place was different, a dark dim-lit room  
The vintage my own, not a costume  
Notebooks, straw-taste, the flavor in this  
Pairs well with cookies, classics with twists  
Palate learned this and that to Potato Head drinks*

*So much rye whiskey, slept zero winks  
Downtown was building, some people don't flee  
See them shit, piss on the street, and OD  
But the neighborhood grew, and safety in pairs  
Thieves after hours, (thanks to Matt) I was spared  
Seldom again would the groping repeat  
Knife in my pocket, taser for the street  
Confidence grew, the years I'd been there  
Template and practice, not out of thin air  
The next detail is to teach what I've learned  
The next generation of bartender years  
To do something different, to make something new  
But something's to be said about paying your dues  
A timeline, progression, dedication of years  
The Varnish. My training. To You, Family, Cheers!*

MAX SEAMAN, VARNISH GENERAL MANAGER,  
2011-2018, AND PARTNER AT THE STREAMLINER

We take our fair share of shit for our rules. Usually it's from assholes who aren't used to being held accountable. Some people simply write us off as pretentious. Sometimes the shit is deserved: sometimes we *are* pretentious, and we definitely have moments when we use the rules as an excuse to be cavalier. But plenty of customers are happy to have an establishment where everyone agrees on how to behave, and there are bartenders, too, who are happy to work at such an establishment. We could make more money and exert less effort working somewhere else, but instead we are here for the gratification of doing a job well and doing it alongside like-minded people. I think the guests can sense the sincerity, and that's what keeps them coming back.

## JOSH BITTON, FRIEND OF TWENTY-PLUS YEARS

A few years ago, I went through a really difficult breakup. It was the kind of relationship where marriage and children were very much on the table. When the relationship fell apart, I found myself thrust back into the world of dating. Try not to judge, or judge if you'd like, but there was one week where I had three dates, three nights in a row. Let's say I wasn't the most imaginative date planner—I took all three to the same place. The Varnish. I walked in the first night and was greeted by Anthony.

“Josh, how amazing to see you! Is this the lovely woman I've been hearing so much about?”

A complimentary first round was sent over. The staff fawned all over us, giving space when they sensed it was necessary and engaging in fun, playful, quick bits of conversation, bringing delightful cocktails, making me look like some kind of star.

The second night I walked in with the second date. Mikki greeted us at the door. She had been behind the bar the night before and was fully aware I'd been on a date, but she greeted us as if I hadn't been there in months.

“Oh my God, Josh! It's so good to see you! Who's your date? Wonderful to meet you!”

Night three, I walked in with date number three. Anthony was back on the job at the door, and holy shit—he embraced me as if I was his brother who had been away at war. He kissed my date's hand! He said, “Ahhhhh, this must be the lady I've heard so much about!”

Now, maybe they were having a little fun with me. Maybe they knew we all knew the game, but they made my dates feel special. They never intimated anything other than joy at hosting us, making one thing clear: The Varnish wasn't just a bar. It was a home.

CEDD MOSES, CO-OWNER OF THE VARNISH  
AND PROPRIETOR OF 213 HOSPITALITY

In late 2007, I bought Cole's, Originators of the French Dip. The place was a mess—rodents wandered the dining room, surveying the seedy customers. The sewer system was clogged from century-old pipes layered with grease. Every time a toilet flushed, the urine would back up into the kitchen. The ceiling was covered in crumbling asbestos that formed a cloud of toxic particles whenever the wall fan was turned on, and they needed the fan on due to the lack of air-conditioning in the kitchen. It was sweltering. Shocking back there.

I wished I hadn't eaten all those dips before we took over.

The first thing we did when getting the keys was call in an abatement crew with hazmat suits to scrape the kitchen clean and remove the asbestos. We junked all the previous kitchen equipment, burned some sage, and boarded it up. I just wanted to pretend that space never existed.

Six months later, I had dinner with Sasha Petraske and Eric Alperin in K-town at Soot Bull Jeep, the smokiest Korean BBQ in town, and suggested working together. They had the best pedigree in the business; Sasha was already a legend. Why would I want to compete?

When they asked if I had anything already licensed, I remembered the toxic cesspool of a space boarded up behind Cole's. I warned them about its history, but they insisted on seeing it.

The Varnish opened fourteen months later. What a miracle . . .