

COCKTAILS INSPIRED BY THE CLASSICS

BY THE BARTENDERS OF ABSINTHE BRASSERIE & BAR
 JEFF HOLLINGER &



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Old-Fashioned Values

BEHIND THE BAR AT ABSINTHE, JEFF HOLLINGER IS ON A MISSION TO KEEP COCKTAILS REAL. BY HEATHER THOMPSON

The word “cocktail” first appeared in print in 1806, in a Hudson, NY, newspaper. It was defined as “a stimulating liquor, composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water and bitters,” that “renders the heart stout and bold, at the same time it fuddles the head.”

In some ways, things haven’t changed: Cocktails still fuel us with liquid courage while causing our brains to feel as muddled as the mint in a mojito, but it’s *what* they’re composed of that’s become more complicated. Still, not all of today’s mixologists pride themselves in coming up with untraditional potions. Jeff Hollinger, beverage manager at Absinthe Brasserie and Bar, keeps it simple. Don’t go on about drinks made with habanero-infused vodka and black-raspberry liqueur to a guy like him.

To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the cocktail, Absinthe’s bar recently offered 10 old-school cocktails, from a Singapore sling to, of course, a martini, and even a cosmopolitan (which Hollinger has deemed a new classic), at its weekly “bar school.” Other nights have focused on Kentucky bourbons, single-malt Scotches and grappa. In case you’re envisioning a chalkboard and lecture, know that the term “school” is applied very loosely here: Hollinger holds court behind the bar, answering questions and passing out printouts—which include cocktail recipes and their histories—but mostly he’s there to turn people on to well-crafted drinks.

So what’s the purist’s favorite cocktail? “The Sazerac,” Hollinger answers without a blink. Order one and out comes it comes in a martini glass with a twist of lemon. Set in front of you with a flourish, it glows a deep red under the lights of the bar. The first taste brings the sparkling, almost numbing spiciness of Szechuan peppercorns to the tongue, followed by the strong, cooling, herbaceous flavor of anise from the Herbsaint liqueur. For those who normally stick to the safety of a vodka tonic, it can be a wake-up call not only to the senses but also to the fact that old-fashioned doesn’t necessarily mean uninspired. x

Absinthe Brasserie and Bar, 398 Hayes St., 415-551-1590. Bar school, Thursday nights, 6–9 p.m. Lessons are free to patrons.

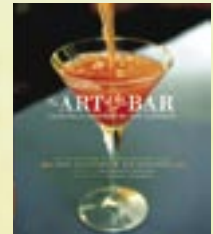
RECIPE

Sazerac

Originally made with absinthe, this New Orleans original is now most often flavored with Herbsaint, another anise-flavored liqueur. Bartender Jeff Hollinger offers this advice: “The important thing to remember is that this drink is stirred, not shaken.”

- 1 sugar cube
- 5 dashes Peychaud’s bitters
- 2 ounces rye whiskey
- Herbsaint for coating the glass
- Lemon twist for garnish

Fill a martini glass with ice and top with water. In an old-fashioned glass, combine the sugar and the bitters, and muddle to dissolve the sugar. Add the rye and gently stir to combine the flavors. Discard the ice and water from the martini glass, and coat it with the Herbsaint, draining any residue from the bottom of the glass. Strain the rye mixture into the glass. Rub the rim with a lemon twist and use for garnish if desired.




WHAT TO READ

JEFF HOLLINGER’S BEAUTIFUL BOOK, *THE ART OF THE BAR: COCKTAILS INSPIRED BY THE CLASSICS* (CHRONICLE BOOKS), COMING THIS FALL, INCLUDES MAKING FLAVORED SIMPLE SYRUPS AND PAIRING COCKTAILS WITH FOOD.

THIS ANTIQUE BOTTLE DATES BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS, WHEN COCKTAILS WERE A SIMPLE MIX OF SPIRITS, SUGAR AND BITTERS.



FRANKIE FRANKENY



**WHAT IS IT THAT
MAKES A GREAT COCKTAIL—
THE QUALITY AND FRESHNESS
OF THE INGREDIENTS
THAT YOU CHOOSE,
AN ARTFUL PRESENTATION,
OR
AN INVENTIVE RECIPE?**

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