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New York (Wine) Cocktail Party

We always love a great party, so when we heard that **Drinkology WINE: A Guide to the Grape** author **James Waller** was hosting a **New York (Wine) Cocktail Party** with caterer extraordinaire Ramona Ponce, on January 10, 2006, it was definitely a party that we wanted to attend.

Actually, the New York (Wine) Cocktail Party was a New York Master Class at [Vintage New York](#) in New York City, on creating wine cocktails utilizing New York State wines and pairing hors d'oeuvres made with New York State products. James Waller, always the humorist, began the evening with, "We're going to have a cocktail party tonight, where everyone sits very nicely in a row like in church...which is appropriate since someone said that my book looks like a hymnal." While the class did indeed sit very nicely on chairs lined up in rows, James and Ramona Ponce set out to introduce us to the history of wine cocktails, as well as sample cocktails paired with appetizing hors d'oeuvres, beginning with Ice-Box Cheddar Crackers made from New York State Cheddar.



We knew we were in for a good time when James continued with "Wine connoisseurs or aficionados would be aghast at the thought of wine cocktails. How could you add something to wine? Well, they are WRONG!"

Historically, people have added either water or something sweet to wine to either extend it or make a sour wine better. Mixing wine in cocktails has a long history; the cocktail itself would be inconceivable without wine. Cocktails got started in the 19th century when vermouth, an aromatized wine, came along. Both the British and the Americans came to invent cocktails using gin and dry vermouth to create the Martini, and whiskey or brandy with sweet vermouth to create the Manhattan. James explained that the word "cocktail" originated in New Orleans, and that prior to 1900 a cocktail had to have bitters in the ingredients or it was considered a "crusta."

The first wine cocktail of the evening was a classic champagne cocktail, The New York "Champagne" Cocktail, made with New York State sparkling wine, New York State Fee Brothers aromatic bitters, a sugar cube and a lemon twist. When creating this cocktail, place the sugar cube at the bottom of the champagne flute, rim the glass with the lemon twist, add two dashes of bitters, and then pour the champagne carefully over the sugar cube and garnish with the lemon twist. An interesting point to note is that the sugar cube will dissolve neatly, whereas using a teaspoon of granulated sugar will leave a residue along the glass as the sparkling wine or champagne bubbles carries the undissolved granulated sugar up the glass as you sip the cocktail. When making a cocktail with sparkling wine or champagne, it is important to always add all of the other ingredients to the glass before adding the sparkling wine or champagne, in order to prevent the cocktail from overflowing the glass.

Ramona paired The New York "Champagne" Cocktail with Trout Squares made with New York State smoked brook trout, strained yogurt and horseradish sauce, and garnished with dill on whole-wheat squares. Although you can purchase strained yogurt, Ramona shared her secret to make strained yogurt at

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home; line a colander with cheesecloth, add plain yogurt, and then place it in the refrigerator for 24 hours. Stir the yogurt occasionally until it reaches the desired consistency of softened butter. Add horseradish, salt and pepper to the strained yogurt, and spread it on the whole-wheat bread squares (or triangles), top with a thin slice of smoked trout and garnish with dill.

James' next cocktail was The New YorKIR made with New York State Seyval Blanc wine and a New York State black current cordial. The Kir took its name from a certain Mr. Kir who was a hero of the French Resistance, and was later mayor of Dijon, France. This classic Burgundy drink is traditionally made with wine from Aligoté grapes grown in the Burgundy region and crème de cassis. Seyval Blanc is an early 20th century grape that is known as a French hybrid, and is a cross between French vines that were grafted onto American rootstock. An interesting historical note on black currents is that until recently it had been illegal to grow them commercially in the United States, because they carried a disease that kills white pine. Cornell University's Agricultural School created a black current hybrid that does not produce this disease, and grants were given to 2 producers in New York to start producing black currents commercially.

Ramona paired The New YorKIR with Apple Wedges made with New York State Macintosh apples, which she had cut into wedges, rinsed in a lemon water bath to prevent discoloration, spread with softened Camembert and garnished with green grape slices.

In keeping with James' church reference, his third and last cocktail of the evening was The Bishop of New York made with chilled New York State Merlot, lemon juice, orange juice, simple syrup and garnished with an orange slice, which tasted like sangria. We learned that The Bishop cocktail is actually a very old cocktail, and was probably originally made with port and served hot.

Ramona paired with The Bishop of New York with Buffalo "Chips," New York State bison steak and cippolini onions that were marinated in the same Merlot as the cocktail, and were then sautéed and served on skewers.

The evening ended with a sweet finale of Maple Biscotti made with New York State maple syrup, New York State walnuts and star anise. Ramona infused the New York State maple syrup with pods of star anise to impart a unique flavor, and then cooked the maple syrup until it reached the soft ball stage, and then glazed the biscotti with the reduction. The soft ball stage is when the syrup reaches 234°F - 238°F on a thermometer. To manually determine if the syrup has reached the soft ball stage, remove the pan from the heat, dip a spoonful of boiling syrup into cold water in a cup; the syrup should flatten out somewhat in the water, and when rolled between your fingers it should form a soft ball.

Students left the class with a signed copy of James Waller's Drinkology WINE: A Guide to the Grape, ([Stewart, Tabori & Chang](#) 2005), so that they could continue their "homework." Read our review on Drinkology WINE: A Guide to the Grape in the **Luxury Products** section.

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