

2006 Tales of the Cocktail Classic New Orleans Cocktails Seminar

[2006 Tales of the Cocktail](#) seminar with Phil Greene and Chris McMillan provided a look into classic New Orleans cocktails.



New Orleans is the birthplace of the cocktail, and [Tales of the Cocktail](#) is a five-day culinary and cocktail celebration in New Orleans. Phil Greene, a descendant of the Peychaud (bitters) family, and Chris McMillan, venerable Louisiana mixologist at The Ritz-Carlton Library Bar in New Orleans, presented an interesting seminar on Classic New Orleans Cocktails on July 20, 2006, beginning with a little history of the 200th anniversary of the American cocktail.

In the beginning, a "cocktail" was any drink that contained sugar, water, alcohol, and bitters. The term cocktail eventually evolved into a more generic term, and no longer required the use of bitters. "The cocktail renders the heart stout, and befuddles the head."

The story of the cocktail is the story of America. People drank what was available; bitters were prophylactic measures against disease, and every man, woman and child drank alcohol. They could not drink the water, so the country was a bunch of drunkards for the first 100 years. Whiskey changed as the Americans moved west, changing from rye, to wheat and corn.

By the 1840's, the United States had ice, and by the 1860's, manufactured ice competed with natural ice, which opened up a completely new world for cocktails. Suddenly, we were adding ice to our drinks, and drinks served with ice became known as American drinks. Bars around the world that served iced drinks became known as American Bars. In 1862, Jerry Thomas created the first cocktail manual, although there were only about 10 cocktail recipes (Gin Cocktail, Fancy Gin Cocktail, etc.).

The first New Orleans cocktail was a Sazerac made with brandy, bitters, and sugar. By 1870, American whiskey from Bourbon County, which became known as bourbon, replaced brandy. The Sazerac evolved into Rye Whiskey, a sugar cube muddled with Peychaud bitters, and Absinthe or Absinthe substitute.



Phil and Chris demonstrated making a Sazerac, which is a short drink made with 2 ounces whiskey. Take a chilled glass, add a small amount of absinthe, and turn the glass around to coat the glass. In another glass, muddle the sugar cube with the Peychaud bitters, add 2 ounces of whiskey, and pour into another glass filled with ice, stir, and strain into the chilled glass with the absinthe. Drink the Sazerac with a minimal amount of dilution. As Phil and Chris set up the next cocktail, the audience had the opportunity to sample the Sazerac.



The Ramos Gin Fizz, created by Henry Charles Ramos in New Orleans around 1887, became so popular that Henry Charles employed 35 shaker boys at his bar, to shake this cocktail for 12-15 minutes. The drink has lemon juice and egg whites as a base, and essentially, you are creating a meringue. During Prohibition, Henry Charles Ramos published his recipe for the Ramos Gin Fizz so that it would be remembered for the future. Chris and Phil got the audience to participate in the art of bartending and had the group make their own Ramos Gin Fizzes. Imagine a room of over 100 people shaking Ramos Gin Fizzes to the Elvis song, "All Shook Up."

Huey Long, the famous New Orleans Governor, went to New York and stayed at the New Yorker Hotel. He brought his bartender Sam Marino with him, took over the hotel bar, and taught the New York bartenders how to make a Ramos Gin Fizz, which popularized this drink in New York and contributed to how cocktails spread from region to region.

Chris also touched on why to shake a drink versus stirring it; shaking a drink aerates it and produces a drink with crystal clarity. We also learned that the only difference between a Collins and a Fizz is that a Collins is served with ice and a Fizz is served without ice, as was a hangover drink.

Another famous New Orleans cocktail is the Vieux Carré, created by Walter Bergeron around 1936 at the Hotel Monteleone, made with equal parts brandy, rye whiskey, and vermouth. The original recipe called for $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce of Sweet Vermouth and Benedictine from France. The world was becoming more global, and imported products from around the world were now being used in cocktails.

Hurricanes are another popular classic New Orleans cocktail made famous by Pat O'Brien's Bar. They are a great summer backyard punch. Mint Julep's are also popular in New Orleans. Chris said that you want to gently express the mint when muddling it, without extracting the bitterness. When you first sip a Julep, you

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just taste the bourbon, you wonder how you will be able to finish this drink, and towards the end of the drink, you wish that it would not end. Chris ended the seminar by reminding the audience "If we want better drinks, we need to demand better drinks!"



The Recipes

Sazerac

Take a chilled glass, add a small amount of absinthe, and turn the glass around to coat the glass. In another glass, muddle the sugar cube with the Peychaud bitters, add 2 ounces of whiskey, and pour it into another glass filled with ice, stir, and strain into the chilled glass with the absinthe. Garnish with a lemon peel.

Vieux Carré

¾ ounce brandy
¾ ounce rye whiskey
¾ ounce sweet vermouth
1/8 ounce Benedictine
Dash Peychaud bitters
Garnish with a lemon wedge

Pour all of the ingredients into a glass filled with ice and stir. Strain into a new glass filled with ice. Garnish with a lemon wedge.

Ramos Gin Fizz

1.5 ounces gin
½ ounce lemon (soak a lemon in warm water to increase juice, ½ ounce = ½ lemon)
½ ounce lime juice
1 1/4 ounce Fee Brothers Rock Candy Syrup
½ ounce whipping cream or half and half
Drops orange flower water
Vanilla extract
Pasteurized egg white

Add all ingredients to a shaker filled with ice and shake for 3-5 minutes. Strain into a glass.

Dale DeGroff's Hurricane

1 ounce dark rum
1 ounce white rum
½ ounce Galliano
¼ ounce fresh lime juice
2 ounces passion fruit nectar, or in a pinch, passion fruit syrup
2 ounces fresh orange juice
2 ounces pineapple juice

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1 ounce simple syrup
Dash of Agostura bitters
Fresh tropical fruit for garnish

Shake all the ingredients with ice and strain into a hurricane glass filled with ice. Garnish with fresh tropical fruit.

Read all of the [Tales of the Cocktail](#) and **New Orleans** articles in the **Liquor Cabinet, Restaurants, Chefs' Recipes, Events,** and **Music Scene** sections.

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