



“SAZERAC FOR BOTH OF US. WITH WHISKEY, NOT BRANDY.” — The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, 2008

THE FIRST COCKTAIL

The oldest known American cocktail is credited to an enterprising pharmacist, Antoine Amédée Peychaud, who devised Peychaud’s bitters. Not surprisingly, it became an ingredient in his 1870s concoction.

The French native established a pharmacy in the Vieux Carré, serving his libations in a *coquetier*, a French egg cup. Localization of the word resulted in mispronunciation — cocktail. This tale could be true, perhaps not.

The word cock-tail was noted for prior to 1870 in a newspaper north of the Mason-Dixon line. Earlier it had been used in a different context, and rudely so, in London. It didn’t refer to our spirited *coquetier*. There, it was simply a word. Here it’s a tradition.

A coffee bar down the block from Peychaud’s pharmacy was quickly renamed The Sazerac House to toast the cocktail. On everyone’s lips, the new drink was wildly popular, creating new Sazerac bars around the city and grins.

While the Sazerac was our first, it was certainly not the last in an ever-evolving array of fancy mixed drinks and cocktails. We’re still smiling.

These recipes demonstrate how the low, the high, and the mighty co-exist, sharing libations from absinthe to zombies.

~ Kit Wohl



BIG EASY SPECIALTIES

The close relationship between New Orleans and the cocktail hasn't always been without conflict.

Since the first cocktail and before, New Orleans' pharmacists, bartenders and mixologists have had their creative way with alcohol, magically crafting and combining ingredients to amplify what we now call the cocktail, at times under strained circumstances.

Absinthe, a popular French import was banned as a poison. "gentlemen only" taverns, bars and clubs replaced what were called coffee houses beginning in the late 1700s. That lasted through the 1800s and lingered into the mid-1900s.

Liquor of any kind was declared illegal with Prohibition from 1920 to 1933. The country was supposed to be dry, demanded the Volstead Act. No matter, in New Orleans liquor was freely but carefully poured. Defiant purveyors were fined repeatedly for selling alcohol. Cavalier attitudes remained intact throughout.

Times have changed.

Absinthe is back on the shelf.

Prohibition was repealed.

Women's liberation struck back in the 1970s, scotching exclusion of anyone in public establishments.

Differences of opinion are now those of taste and technique rather than the kind, place or to whom alcoholic beverages are served.

Enjoy, legally with spirited indulgence and your own sophisticated moderation.

PIRATE'S ALLEY CAFÉ

DRIPPED ABSINTHE FRANÇAISE

Prior to the Sazerac, absinthe arrived here in the early 1800s. Pernod or Herbsaint were substituted after 1912 when absinthe was wickedly banned before teetotaler aggravation sparked Prohibition.

At the corner of Pirate's Alley, overlooking the garden behind St. Louis Cathedral, a small bar serves absinthe in the Parisian manner using an antique multi-faceted water cooler, a precursor to modern water coolers.

Glasses placed under the facets contain absinthe, Pernod, Herbsaint, or anisette and catch the water drips, which then turn the cocktail's color to white, green or pink, depending on the liquor.

Garnish is generally not acceptable. Some people use mint. Others say to do so is blasphemous.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1 1/4 ounces absinthe
- 1 sugar cube
- 3 3/4 ounces chilled water

Pour the absinthe in a glass and place an absinthe spoon across the top. Place the sugar cube on the absinthe spoon then drip chilled water over the sugar cube until it dissolves. Serve immediately.



SAZERAC BAR, ROOSEVELT HOTEL

SAZERAC

Many Sazerac bars emerged when Peychaud's bitters was introduced, with only one surviving.

Ingredients in the original recipe included cognac, absinthe, sugar and Peychaud's bitters. Pernod and Herbsaint replaced absinthe when it was banned in America in 1912. Absinthe is once again back on the shelf after an evil scheme that labeled it as a poisonous hallucinogen.

The fanciful, old-fashioned bar is in residence at the restored Roosevelt Hotel.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

sugar cube
dash Peychaud's bitters
3 ounces rye whiskey
1/2 ounce absinthe
lemon curl, for garnish

In a cocktail shaker, saturate the sugar cube with the bitters and crush. Add ice, the rye and absinthe and stir. Strain the shaker into a chilled Old Fashioned glass. Garnish by twisting the lemon curl over the drink to release the oil then place it over the side of the glass.



OLD ABSINTHE HOUSE RAMOS GIN FIZZ

One of New Orleans' most revered cocktails, the drink was created by barman Henry Ramos in the 1880s. As governor of Louisiana, Huey Long often traveled with his bartender so he would always have his cocktail prepared just so.

It dates to the Old Absinthe House at the corner of Bourbon and Bienville where a secret room was created to harbor pirate Jean Lafitte. Pirates still hang out in the bar, usually on Friday afternoons.

The Ramos Fizz needs to be shaken like mad, sometimes five minutes or more to properly emulsify the cream, egg, and spirit, producing an exquisitely frothy drink.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1 1/2 ounces gin
- 2 ounces half and half
- 2 ounces whole milk
- 1 large egg white
- 1 tablespoon simple syrup (Page 91)
- 2 drops orange flower water
(available in the baking section of supermarkets)
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Using a shaker half filled with ice, combine all the ingredients. Shake as long as you can stand it. Pour into a chilled glass.





FRENCH 75 BAR, CHRIS HANNAH

BRANDY CRUSTA

The grandfather of many popular cocktails, the Brandy Crusta consists of a base liquor — brandy, an orange liqueur for the sweetener, and lemon or lime for the sour. It was originally named the New Orleans Sour.

This combination is used in many modern day classics such as the Margarita (tequila, cointreau, lime juice) and the Cosmopolitan (vodka, cointreau, lime juice, cranberry juice.)

Chris Hannah has a contemporary take on this venerable classic attributed to Joseph Santina, who owned and operated the City Exchange during the 1850s. It has a unique garnish, using a lemon peel to almost entirely crown the upper rim and inside of the glass.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

1 lemon wedge
superfine sugar
1 1/2 ounces cognac
1/2 ounce orange curacao
1/2 ounce lemon juice
1/4 ounce maraschino liqueur
2 dashes Angostura bitters
lemon curl, for garnish

Using a chilled wine glass, rub a wedge of lemon around the rim to moisten it. Then rotate the rim of the glass in a saucer full of fine sugar until the rim is well coated. In a cocktail shaker with ice, shake the cognac, curacao, lemon juice and bitters until chilled. Strain the shaker into the prepared glass. Garnish with a standing lemon curl. Mixologist Chris Hannah prefers to use the peel of an entire lemon.

FRENCH 75 BAR, CHRIS HANNAH DEAUVILLE

An end-of-Prohibition era classic created in 1930 New Orleans, the Deauville Cocktail should be prepared with equal parts of the best ingredients on the shelf. Deauville is a large resort town in Basse-Normandie, where calvados is produced.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

3/4 ounce cognac
3/4 ounce calvados
3/4 ounce cointreau
3/4 ounce fresh lemon juice
apple slice, for garnish

Fill a cocktail shaker about 2/3 full of ice. Add ingredients. Shake vigorously for at least 30 seconds and pour into a chilled cocktail glass.



CAROUSEL BAR, HOTEL MONTELEONE VIEUX CARRÉ

Walter Bergeron created the Vieux Carré cocktail at the Carousel Bar in 1938, named for his beloved city.

Ernest Hemingway noted the bar in "The Night Before Battle." He was just one of many colorful characters who have visited the 125-year old, recently updated Monteleone.

Newly restored, the Carousel slowly rotates, offering guests a revolving view of Royal Street. The bar turns, the bartender is stationary. Place your order. The bar returns bearing your cocktail.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

3/4 ounce rye whisky
3/4 ounce brandy
3/4 ounce sweet vermouth
1 dash Bénédictine
1 dash Peychaud's bitters
1 dash Angostura bitters
lemon curl, for garnish

Stir the rye, brandy, vermouth, Bénédictine and bitters in an Old Fashioned glass with ice. Garnish with a twist of lemon.



RESTAURANT *de la* LOUISIANE

COCKTAIL *à la* LOUISIANE

Restaurant de la Louisiane, one of the famous French restaurants of 1890s New Orleans on Iberville Street, was a stronghold of bon vivants when cotton was king.

Later, Diamond Jim Moran slipped sparklers into meatballs; his son, Jimmy Moran, held court, serving fettuccine thin enough to read through.

Jimmy's brother Tony operates the Old Absinthe House Bar on Bourbon at the corner of Bienville.

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

3/4 ounce rye whiskey

3/4 ounce sweet vermouth

3/4 ounce Bénédictine

3 dashes Herbsaint, pastis or absinthe

3 dashes Peychaud's bitters

maraschino cherry, for garnish

Mix all ingredients in a bar glass with ice cubes. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a maraschino cherry



TUJAGUE'S ABSINTHE FRAPPÉ

Tujague's stands on Rue Decatur, a New Orleans classic, dispensing absinthe and other noble liqueurs from behind a bar brought from France when the restaurant opened in 1856. It is New Orleans' second oldest restaurant, sixteen years younger than Antoine's.

Although imported to New Orleans in the early 1800s, absinthe didn't begin to gain popularity until the 1870s. One of New Orleanians' favorite ways to take their absinthe was in the absinthe frappé, using sugar to offset the bitterness of the absinthe and ice for the heat of the South. *Vive la France.*

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

crushed ice

1 1/4 ounces absinthe

1/2 ounce simple syrup (Page 91)

Fill a chilled Old Fashioned glass with crushed ice. Mix the absinthe and sugar water, and pour over the ice.

