

# GINGER BLISS

AND THE

# VIOLET FIZZ

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**A COCKTAIL LOVER'S GUIDE  
TO MIXING DRINKS USING  
NEW AND CLASSIC LIQUEURS**

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**A.J. RATHBUN**

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THE HARVARD COMMON PRESS  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



# Table of Contents

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[Title Page](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Photo](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: How to Enter the World of Liqueurs and Vermouths](#)

[Chapter 2: A Liquid Citrus Circus](#)

[Chapter 3: A Bouquet of Lovely Liqueurs](#)

[Chapter 4: If You're Feeling Fruity](#)

[Chapter 5: Take Your Herbal Medicine](#)

[Chapter 6: It's a Nutty, Nutty World](#)

[Chapter 7: The Spice of the Drinking Life](#)

[Chapter 8: The Justice League of Vermouths](#)

[Chapter 9: Here's to You, Sweets](#)

[Measurement Equivalents](#)

[Index](#)

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PRINTED IN CHINA | PRINTED ON ACID-FREE PAPER  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA  
RATHBUN, A. J. (ARTHUR JOHN), 1969-  
GINGER BLISS AND THE VIOLET FIZZ :  
A COCKTAIL LOVER'S GUIDE TO MIXING  
DRINKS USING NEW AND CLASSIC LIQUEURS /  
A.J. RATHBUN.

P. CM. INCLUDES INDEX.

ISBN 978-1-55832-665-1

1. COCKTAILS. I. TITLE. TX951.R167 2011

641.8'74—DC22 201004816

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY ERRICO

FOOD/DRINK STYLING BY HELEN JONES

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR KAISER AND COEN:  
YOU CAN'T COMPLETELY ENJOY THIS  

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BOOK FOR A FEW MORE YEARS, BUT THANKS  
FOR THE LAUGHS AND INSPIRATION.



## Acknowledgments

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To travel to and within the dimension of the *Ginger Bliss and the Violet Fizz* (as well as their many beautiful brethren) without assistance, aid, and companionship is not only dangerous, but not nearly as much fun. It's a journey I'd never take alone, let me tell you. Because of this, I'd like to raise a toast of thanks and praise to the many who helped me put this book together. But a few intrepid ones deserve a special shout-out and holler, starting with editor Valerie Cimino. Once again (she's resilient), Valerie helped me create a book from the initial idea to the last strained drink, adding her wit, wisdom, and good cheer to every page. A big cheer must also be given to Bruce and the entire Harvard Common Press crew, who are boisterous, bouncy, and incredibly helpful and talented. Special thanks to editor Dan Rosenberg, who wasn't afraid to get poetic in naming the book.

Of course, I wouldn't even take a drinking trip such as this without the constant and consistent aid of my agent, Michael Bourret, who is always ready to pitch in, answer questions, listen, and give advice and who is, well, awesome. He deserves a *Salut!* at full volume (as does his partner, Miguel, who moved with him to the West Coast, making it easier, at least in theory, for us to get together for drinks). Now, though, back away from your desk and make yourself a cocktail, Michael, 'cause you're working too hard.

A booming toast—*Prost!*—needs to be given up in addition to copy editor Karen Wise, for her keen-eyed help with the book and for her aid with my dubious translations, and to photographer Jerry Errico and his team, whose lovely pictures of the drinks contained within brighten up the ride and bring the book to full-color life.

As mentioned above, traveling solo just isn't as jolly. Because of that, a huge shout-out (*Cinghiale!*) to a few more specific folks is in order, because they helped make everything possible. This toast encompasses a bit of a wide range but starts with the fantastic bartenders of both the pro and home varieties, who provided recipes and inspiration for this volume, as well as the amazing modern drink scribes (check out some of my favorite reads on [\[>\]](#)) whose delectable drinks I borrowed from their delectable books. You all rule! Thanks for making this book, and the drinking world, a tastier place to reside within—the next drink's on me when we're in the same town. A special glass has to be raised to two bar geniuses in particular: My local bartender, Andrew Bohrer, who isn't afraid to don a curly wig on video or let me in early when I need a snazzy cocktail, and my former local bartender, Jeremy Sidener, who isn't afraid to host afternoon book signings. Speaking of local drinkers and drink makers, I wouldn't even be able to make it through writing a book, much less make it through a week, without the support (and by "support" I mean "drinks") from those I imbibe with the most: Double Taker Jeremy, wife Megan, and Beatrix; poet and drink designer Ed and wife Jill; Mark Leslie, and Alex; Shane; Christy; Andrea S. (thanks for the editing help, too) and Eric; the Amazon Kitchen team past and present; Rebecca, Eric, and Meg; Andy and Deena; the Thirteenth Street basketballers; Philip, Mimi, and Yuki; Jon and Nicole; Joel and Alexis; Jesiks and Koes near and far; Erika; Becks and Drew; Nichole; Brad and Erin; Ame and Ron; Tasha and Keith; Brett and Chelsea and Nevia; Braiden and Spencer; and the world's most amazing video and film director, Brad K., wife Christy, and Cash and Harley. Big props also to the Lisa Ekus crew for their help getting the drinking word out, to anyone who's stopped by my blog Spiked Punch ([www.ajrathbun.com/blog](http://www.ajrathbun.com/blog)) or my Italy blog Six Months in Italy ([www.sixmonthsinitaly.com](http://www.sixmonthsinitaly.com)), to Andrew and Marianne for making my Italy pre-tirement possible (start your own Italy dream trip at [www.amicivillas.com](http://www.amicivillas.com)), to the bands that keep things rollicking (specifically old-school-ers TSL, DG, GFB, MVG, SB, AD and the HFs, Bs of O, Malinks, Withholders, Tales from the Birdbath, The Table of Contents, Zoom, and Tom Waits, the inspiration for *The Hounds They Start to Roar*, [\[>\]](#), and many evenings of drinks), and to anyone else

who's made me a drink in the last 21 years.

~~Three final toasts are in order before the voyage (and the liqueur pouring) begins. First, to my wonderful family, who haven't yet seem shocked that I write so much about cocktails. For all the Rathbun, James, DeMaranville, Fuller, and Davis family members, you're the best family anyone could ask for. Thanks again, always, for the support and love—and for bringing extra snacks to parties whenever they're needed.~~

The penultimate toast goes to you, dear reader and home bartender. Thanks a whole case of liqueur bottles for not being afraid to take this expedition into the realm of liqueurs and vermouths, and for expanding the cocktail revolution into your homes.

But the final toast goes to those nearest and dearest to me, Sookie and Rory (the best, and sometimes nuttiest, dogs anyone ever could want to have, even when they knock over a bottle of booze or a glass that's just been poured), and, last and loudest, to Natalie. Thanks again, dear, for putting up with my cocktail and liqueur obsession (even when it takes us overseas for six months) and for not being shocked at the number of liqueur bottles in the dining room. Here's to many more evenings spent together cocktail testing, party throwing, and drink sipping as the sun goes down.



## Introduction

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Shhh ... I have a secret. Come closer, because this is something that you can't tell anyone, a series of rituals and whispered words, a bunch of formulae and unknown ingredients, a matter of great importance that must be kept hush-hush. Follow me, and we'll unlock one of the most masterful mysteries that the world (or, at least, the drinking world) has ever known. Don't be scared—by unlocking this clandestine curiosity, you'll be going on the liquid ride of your life, which will change everything you ever thought about throwing parties. We'll go through the padlocked oak doors, around the maze of tables and chairs, and past the row of stools standing like sentinels guarding our destination. We won't even stop to stare at the wondrous words printed and scrawled across the coasters, because we're going to the dimension of the *Ginger Bliss and the Violet Fizz*.

Which actually isn't a scary or secretive place at all, even with the array of enchanting bottles that stand on shelves in a manner that seems to taunt, "Look at me but don't touch, because you don't have the expertise to unlock the delicious enigma that is me."

But first, let's step back for a minute and give some context to our sleuthing. In the beginning, there was man and woman (we're stepping way back). How they got to that way-back place, I'm leaving for others to discuss, but they were thirsty, I know ('cause I'm thirsty just typing this, and they were working harder than I am). This thirst led to water, sure, but then to the discovery of more spirited beverages, including wine and clear alcoholic spirits, and then more aged and flavored mixtures built off of those bases (yes, we're rushing through history rapidly here because I don't want to delay you from the book's real contents for too long). But every palate is different, and our imbibing ancestors, like us, were drinking for taste as well as for the divine freeing of the mind that the drinks bring along. So they also started sweetening their spirituous combinations here and there, and experimenting with flavors, and maturing them, until they reached a point where what they had was so delicious that they started distributing it to others in their tribe, and then farther afield. This made these liqueurs and vermouths (as they started to be called) more and more available, and more and more beloved, and more and more used in cocktails, highballs, and other drinks.

Now, in the modern age, a growing number of these liqueurs and vermouths and their ilk are becoming available worldwide, and even more are being created (or re-created in the case of a few that were lost along the way) than ever before. This liqueur globalism is one of the many drivers behind the modern cocktail revolution, a revolution that we are lucky to be able to take part in as it happens. There are so many new and newly available bottles out there, in physical liquor stores and via the magic of Internet liquor stores, that at times it becomes overwhelming, and it can confuse even the most intrepid of home entertainers.

There are really three (because three is a magic number) categories making up this new availability. First are those items that are brand-new to the cocktail landscape, such as VeeV Açai spirit and Loft Lavender Cello liqueur. Next up are the classic ingredients that were once on most bar shelves but that disappeared from production for decades—swell little numbers such as crème Yvette and absinthe. And finally there's a whole host of ingredients that over time have become underappreciated (here we're looking at venerable names like Chartreuse and Bénédictine) or saddled with stereotypes that just didn't fit (for instance, delicious-but-often-pigeonholed charmers like amaretto and Cointreau).

The availability quotient is, definitely, one driver of this revolution. Another is the emergence of modern professional bartenders, who are on the front lines reclaiming the bartender's place as craftsman, artisan, and artist. To do this, these honorable women and men are rediscovering and using classic techniques, unearthing classic recipes, and using the wide range of now-available ingredients

to create new mixtures—with an eye toward enriching your drinking experience when out and about. This is why, when you meet any of these true bartenders, you should be happy, trust to their expertise and always tip well.

But what about when you throw a party at home? I mean, you like to make drinks too, right? And you're intrigued by what you see when out at a bar, that twinkling rainbow of bottles and the magic that you know they contain. Maybe you tried a new small-batch vermouth recently while out with friends, and you want to seek out a bottle for home use. And when you go into your local liquor store or are surfing online and see a new and unknown bottle, you want to know you're making a good investment when you buy it. You want to ensure that once you get that bottle of Czech herbal liqueur home, you will be able to use it in a way that will assuredly set your next party amongst the stars (or at least on a level above every other party being thrown that month, or season, or year, even). This book, my adventurous one, is for you.



GINGER BLISS, PAGE 198

# Chapter 1: How to Enter the World of Liqueurs and Vermouths

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The answer to the question of how to expand your usage of liqueurs and vermouths is not, in this instance, to flirt with a bunch of bartenders (though by and large they are incredibly pleasant people). Because we're talking about usage at home bars now, the place where *you* do the pouring, shaking, and stirring, the spot where *you* become the drink dispenser, the arena where *you* make the secret mixes that delight guests—and, most important, delight you. Because you have to enjoy the drinks first and foremost or your guests probably won't be so delighted, and you won't have as much enjoyment at your own party, which would be a crying shame.

This is why I've designed *Ginger Bliss and the Violet Fizz* in a very particular manner. There are numerous awe-inspiring classic and modern cocktail tomes available that break out chapters by base spirit (gin, vodka, brandy, whiskey, tequila, and sometimes Champagne), and this can be handy. Other fine volumes are alphabetized by drink, which can, again, be useful (especially when you're looking for a specific drink you've heard of). And then other worthy reads (including a few by yours truly) organize chapters by theme, which is helpful when you're planning a party around a particular occasion or season. Here, however, we're talking about integrating specific liqueurs and vermouths into your cocktailing life, about changing your get-togethers from being solely gin-and-tonic and rum-and-coke deals, about using those many bottles you see out and about but don't know how to use, even when you know what tastes you tend to enjoy most.

For these reasons, the chapters of drinks in the following pages are grouped around liqueurs that share a flavor profile. By "flavor profile" I'm talking about the flavor of a particular liqueur that's responsible for the personality and taste of a drink. This doesn't mean that in every recipe the liqueur in question is the main ingredient. On the contrary, it is often the second most-used ingredient (after the base spirit), and sometimes it's even farther down the list. The liqueur, though, and the many qualities it imparts, is the key to that particular drink's existence. It's what makes the drink a successful and delicious addition to your day, and that's why it's in the book.

So, for example, there's A Liquid Citrus Circus, containing recipes highlighted by the vast panoply of fun citrus liqueurs, and a chapter that reminds you to Take Your Herbal Medicine, which contains the darker, more intense herbal liqueurs that are popping up regularly these days. There's also a chapter detailing The Justice League of Vermouths—though they aren't specifically liqueurs, vermouths and their cousins figure prominently as some of those curious bottles you might have glimpsed when out drinking or shopping.

One intriguing thing to remember when going through the chapters (and one of the things that makes trying new recipes so much tasty fun) is that there are certain liqueurs that by their very complex natures can show up in multiple chapters. Chartreuse is a historically perfect example. Made from a secret recipe known to only two monks at a time (for the full history, see [\[>\]](#)), it has a flavor profile that is layered and intricate, with both floral and herbal accents that show up on the tongue when sipped solo (which isn't a bad thing to try, and a drink of choice in some spots). Different parts of its multifaceted personality shine more brightly when it is combined with other ingredients, which means that you'll find drinks highlighting Chartreuse in both A Bouquet of Lovely Liqueurs (drinks such as the Triomphe Cocktail on [\[>\]](#)) and Take Your Herbal Medicine (drinks such as the Last Word on [\[>\]](#)). So, don't get thrown off if you see a key ingredient in multiple spots: Just be glad our drinking world is rarely boring for your palate.

By breaking out the chapters in this flavor-oriented way, it makes it easier to plan a party around a few signature drinks. You can go about it two ways. First, if you're out drinking or shopping and you see something intriguing, pick up a bottle and check where it fits as far as "flavor profile," and then

flip to that chapter to find an enticing way to use it. For example, if you know already that you tend to favor fruit flavors, then, before the festivities, skip to the chapter called If You're Feeling Fruity, pick out a few intriguing drinks, and stock up on their ingredients. In the same manner, if you're looking for a cocktail to serve as an after-dinner dessert, turn the pages to the Here's to You, Sweets chapter, which is full of sweeter numbers, and pick out the perfect match for that after-dinner moment. The idea is to make it easier for you to pick out a few signature drinks to make any gathering sparkle—from parties of many people to those that consist of just you and a significant other.

## Stocking Your Home Bar

One of the hardest parts of knowing how to stock your home bar is the uncapping—or knowing where to start. No one becomes a superstar home bartender overnight, so don't fret about it to the point where you end up standing in the kitchen gritting your teeth to nubs. That's not going to be enjoyable for anyone. Really, there's no need to worry about throwing a successful party, as long as you remember that the answer to the question "How do I throw a successful party?" comes mainly down to one word: preparation. Being prepared makes everything go more smoothly. It means having the right ingredients, tools, glassware, and more, which we'll discuss soon, but it also comes down, at heart, to this idea of having a signature drink or two, so you can focus on a few quality offerings instead of trying to anticipate what possible combination of ingredients every single attendee might want.

First, you'll be able to stock up on the ingredients for the drink, ensuring that you don't run out of that one liqueur that makes the drink shine. Second, you'll be able to prep needed garnishes and squeeze juice in advance, making it breezy during the party to make drinks for folks and leaving you time to revel in the party instead of spending hours cutting, juicing, and swearing. Third, when you're trying to get people excited about a party with clever invitations, exhilarating emails, and bright banners pulled by airplanes, you can drop the names of your signature cocktails, thereby stirring excitement and a little buzz, which never hurts. And having a delish couple of cocktails makes your party one that people will continue to talk about long after that last sip is swallowed.

Looking at the bigger picture, having signature drinks also helps you to build your home bar in a organic, and festive, fashion. Here's what I suggest: You decide to throw a soirée next Saturday (I'll watch for my invite), and then pick out two signature drinks from this very book. When shopping for the liquors and liqueurs and bottled ingredients involved in the drinks, pick up a little extra. This covers the bases in case anyone brings extra guests (which they always do), but it should also leave you with something in the way of liquid leftovers. Then, when deciding on drinks a few days later to go with dinner, or for a Sunday brunch the following weekend, look for different recipes that contain those very bottled leftovers, then go shopping just for the ingredients you don't have yet. And while shopping, get a little extra. You see where this is going: Soon you'll have a well-stocked bar of bottles that you know the flavor profiles for, and that go in drinks you're already familiar with, and that you like for certain occasions. Running low? Start the cycle again.

Before I begin unveiling the other, more basic necessities for the bar, some words about the start of this book, the many liqueurs and vermouths. I'll do this chapter by chapter, to help you understand and decide on what flavors and signature cocktails appeal most. I'm not, of course, going to suggest that every single liqueur or vermouth available worldwide today is in this book. Because I would never lie to you, friend. There are so many varieties available, and so many new ones coming out even as you read, that it would be impossible to cover each, and would also dilute the book so much that it wouldn't be helpful. *Ginger Bliss and the Violet Fizz* does cover a wide variety, though, enough to

keep you in signature cocktails and flavors for parties from January 1 until December 31 and every rollicking reason for revelry in between. So, let's open the first bottles.

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## CHAPTER 2: A LIQUID CITRUS CIRCUS

In this chapter, you'll find those drinks that derive their flavor profile from liqueurs that are primarily citrus-based, though in many cases they also have spice overtones. Many of these drinks have a tropical quality coming from ingredients such as orange curaçao, a liqueur made from the laraha fruit (a relative of the Valencia orange) that's cultivated on the island of Curaçao. Other well-known citrus liqueurs featured in this chapter include Cointreau, which is made in Saint-Barthélemy-d'Anjou, France, from a combination of bitter and sweet orange peels grown in places such as Spain and Haiti; Grand Marnier, which combines Cognac with a specific Caribbean orange, the *Citrus bigaradia*; and limoncello, the Italian sun god of liqueurs, which can be found in various commercial varieties but might just be best when homemade (see A Note, [\[>\]](#)). On the newer side are recipes calling for liqueurs such as the recently available Rhum Clément Creole Shrub, which has an orange-based flavor mingling with vanilla, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, grapefruit, and a slight peppery finish.

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### Learn More with Liqueur Spotlights

**ABSINTHE** ([\[>\]](#))

**AMAROS** ([\[>\]](#))

**ANISETTE** ([\[>\]](#))

**APEROL** ([\[>\]](#))

**BÉNÉDICTINE** ([\[>\]](#))

**BITTERS, BITTERS, EVERYWHERE** ([\[>\]](#))

**CAMPARI** ([\[>\]](#))

**CHAMBORD** ([\[>\]](#))

**CHARTREUSE** ([\[>\]](#))

**CHERRY HEERING** ([\[>\]](#))

**COINTREAU** ([\[>\]](#))

**CRÈME YVETTE** ([\[>\]](#))

**CYNAR** ([\[>\]](#))

**FERNET-BRANCA** ([\[>\]](#))

**GALLIANO** ([\[>\]](#))

**GETTING VERY VERMOUTHY** ([\[>\]](#))

**GRAND MARNIER** ([\[>\]](#))

**KIRSCH** ([\[>\]](#))

**KÜMMEL** ([\[>\]](#))

**LILLET** ([\[>\]](#))

**MARASCHINO** ([\[>\]](#))

**RHUM CLÉMENT CREOLE SHRUBB** ([\[>\]](#))

**SAMBUCA** ([\[>\]](#))

**ST-GERMAIN** ([\[>\]](#))

STREGA ([\[>\]](#))

TIA MARIA ([\[>\]](#))

TUACA ([\[>\]](#))

WHAT DOES "CRÈME DE" MEAN? ([\[>\]](#))

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## CHAPTER 3: A BOUQUET OF LOVELY LIQUEURS

When building your garland of cocktails in this chapter, you'll find an assortment of liqueurs that offer floral and botanical qualities. Not only a delight to the mouth, they also bring blooming aromas that add to the drink's overall aesthetic sensibility. Here you'll find liqueurs that are flowering at first glance, such as newer numbers Loft Lavender Cello, which has a delicate taste achieved by using only organic lavender grown on a particular Washington State farm, and St-Germain elderflower liqueur, which is made from 100 percent hand-picked elderflowers (as the story goes) once a year in late spring. We'll revisit more renowned liqueurs, such as the violet-heavy crème de violette and the recently re-released crème Yvette, which has violet flavors backed by berries, vanilla, and spices. This chapter also contains liqueurs that have a personality on the botanical side of floral and that bring out their floral-ness when combined into certain mixes—liqueurs such as Chartreuse, which comes in two varieties, contains 130 secret ingredients, and has a history that goes back almost a thousand years; and Elisir M.P. Roux, a French botanical liqueur created by combining flowering herbs and spices including marjoram, fennel, cinnamon, coriander, lemon peel, star anise, and ginseng.

## CHAPTER 4: IF YOU'RE FEELING FRUITY

As you might expect from a fruit liqueur chapter, the flavors contained within are as wide (almost) as the flavors of the fruit world itself—though remember, you won't find citrus-based drinks here because they're back in [\[>\]](#). You will find drinks based on landmark fruit liqueurs such as cherry Heering, which has been made by Peter Heering since 1818. Cherry Heering is built on cherries and brandy, but it isn't as dry as cherry brandies such as kirsch or Kirschwasser (also featured in this chapter), which is made using sour Morello cherries. You'll also find fresh fruit liqueurs like VeeV Açai spirit, the first liqueur made with açai, the national fruit of Brazil; and the ruby-colored and berry-ific PAMA pomegranate liqueur, crafted out of pomegranate juice, vodka, and a smidge of tequila. Of course, a fruit chapter wouldn't be complete without cocktails containing Chambord (which descends from a liqueur that was crafted in the late seventeenth century in France's Loire Valley of black raspberries, blackberries, and spices), and its cousins framboise (which is usually made from red raspberries and has a bit more kick than Chambord) and crème de cassis (which is made from black currants).

## CHAPTER 5: TAKE YOUR HERBAL MEDICINE

The drinks in this chapter tend to be on the complex side, can be strong and bold in flavor, and have a bit of an unfortunate reputation for being enjoyable only after a long apprenticeship program (where you take a teensy sip here and there) or if you're insane. This is a shame, because the liqueurs used in this chapter are both some of the most fun and some of the most rewarding in flavor. The liqueurs I'm

convincing you to cuddle up to here include some internationally well-known ones like Campari, whose history of love traces back to the 1800s in Cassolnovo, Italy, where Gaspare Campari was born; Bénédictine, which goes back to the Renaissance, when a monk named Dom Bernardo Vincelli mixed a healing assortment of 27 spices, plants, and herbs together with a spirituous liquid and sweetener; Pimm's No. 1, which is still created following James Pimm's original recipe; and Chartreuse, which boasts enough layers of flavor that it can fit into both this chapter and A Bouquet of Lovely Liqueurs depending on how it's mixed. You'll also find lesser-known but still international (those herbal liqueurs tend to travel) liqueurs such as Amer Picon, a French apéritif with a slightly bitter presence and a touch of orange (it isn't as readily available as it once was; see [\[>\]](#) for more info and a substitute), and Becherovka, which has been a hit since 1807 in the Czech Republic and is created via a secret recipe using 32 herbs and spices. Finally, you'll meet the amaro family of Italian after-dinner digestivos, a family that contains numerous herbal members traveling the road from slightly sweet and barely bitter liqueurs like artichoke-based Cynar all the way to muscular numbers such as Fernet-Branca, whose history goes back to 1845, and which is an amalgamation of herbs, spices, and roots gathered from the far corners of the world.

## CHAPTER 6: IT'S A NUTTY, NUTTY WORLD

Those folks who tend to never leave the bowl of mixed nuts at parties will find much to love in this chapter, as it contains cocktails and drinks using an assortment of liqueurs that have flavors falling on the nutty side. This includes a variety of liqueurs based on specific nuts, such as nocino, made from green walnuts in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, and Castries Peanut Rum Crème, which has strong peanut flavor and a rum bite and is a bit creamy (which helps it be at home in cocktails in this chapter as well as in the Here's to You, Sweets chapter, depending on what it's mixed with). You'll also find liqueurs that have a nutty taste, if not an allegiance to a particular nut, such as Tia Maria, which is nutty with coffee and vanilla flavors (as well as carrying a legend that goes back to the seventeenth century), and amaretto, which when mixed right delivers a solid almond flavor that actually comes from apricot or peach pits. You'll meet nutty favorites here like Frangelico, the Italian hazelnut liqueur whose bottle looks like a Franciscan monk and whose history goes back 300 years, alongside liqueurs more recently made available on a wide scale, such as delicious Dumante Verdenoce pistachio liqueur, crafted with love and all-natural ingredients on the slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily.

## CHAPTER 7: THE SPICE OF THE DRINKING LIFE

In this chapter, you'll find an amusing, entertaining, and varied grouping of liqueurs that hold in common their allegiance to a particular spice or collection of spices. The list starts with absinthe—a liqueur that was out of circulation for a long time—which is distilled from wormwood, anise, and fennel. Absinthe's anise-based relatives Pernod and pastis also show up in the chapter, as does anisette, which is sweeter than those mentioned above and which uses anise seed for its flavoring rather than star anise. You'll also find pals like Galliano, named for Giuseppe Galliano, who, with 2,000 Italian soldiers defended a fort against an army of 80,000 during the Abyssinian war; kümmel, whose caraway, cumin, and fennel flavors made the news first in 1696 when Russian leader Peter the Great fell for them; Tuaca, whose recipe, legends say, was created by Lorenzo de' Medici, ruler of Florence, Italy, during the Renaissance; and another Italian favorite, Strega, the saffron-hued magical liqueur made since 1860. You'll also find new spicy favorites like St. Elizabeth Allspice Dram, an



allspice-flavored liqueur made with Jamaican allspice berries and rum; and Navan vanilla liqueur, which is made from Madagascar vanilla merged with Cognac.

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## CHAPTER 8: THE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF VERMOUTHS

Regular vermouth does play a key role in many of the most classic of cocktails, so you might wonder what there is to learn about vermouth. Well, the drinks in this chapter let vermouth play more of a key role, and the recipes expand into using vermouth's cousins as well. Which means you'll see regular sweet and dry, or Italian and French, vermouths as well as Dubonnet, the French aromatized wine spruced up by the addition of herbs, spices, and quinine (there are two Dubonnets used today, red wine—based Rouge, which is spicy and sweeter, and white wine—based Blanc); and Lillet, which was first created in 1887 by Paul and Raymond Lillet and which includes the better-known Blanc and the lesser-known-but-worth-tracking-down Rouge. You'll also find drinks here that call for some vermouths that have recently become more available, such as Punt e Mes, a rich Italian-style vermouth whose name means "point-and-a-half"—the story goes that the company was founded after the stock market jumped a point and a half in one day, making one man a good amount of money.

## CHAPTER 9: HERE'S TO YOU, SWEETS

In this chapter you'll find a collection of dessert drinks and sweeter combinations that often provide a liquid accompaniment to those more romantic moments between two people. Because of this chapter's embracing nature, you will find some liqueurs used here that also show up in other chapters, such as crème Yvette, the violet and spice liqueur used in the floral chapter, and its slightly-more-violet-y-cousin, crème de violette, as well as Strega, that saffron-scented star from the spice chapter. But we'll also explore liqueurs specific to sweeter drinks. For instance, we'll revisit cream liqueurs such as Iris whiskey—based Baileys Irish cream; Crema de Alba, a brandy-based cream liqueur featuring a coffee nutty, and sherry flavor; and Amarula cream, which is made from the fruit of the African marula tree yielding a nutty, caramel flavor. You'll also find drinks using the well-known chocolate liqueur crème de cacao, which comes in light and dark varieties; Scotch treat Drambuie, which is crafted carefully from whisky, honey, and a variety of herbs; and Parfait Amour, a violet-hued liqueur that has floral tinges combined with vanilla and sugar—it was once thought to be a love potion, making it perfect for this chapter.

### **A Base Spirits Refresher**

While *Ginger Bliss and the Violet Fizz* is, at its boozy heart, about using specific personalities (and tastes) of liqueurs and vermouths in creative cocktails, most of these drinks are also built upon one of the seven base spirits. Here, I'm talking about brandy, gin, rum, tequila, vodka, whiskey/whisky, and Champagne. (Some might disagree on that last bubbly base, but I believe so strongly in sparkling wine cocktails that I would be ashamed to leave it off the list. If some want to argue, they can go into the other room and argue while we're sharing drinks in here.) We aren't going to dwell on these too much because I know that many of you are already versed in the base spirits and have a number of them in your home bars, but let's at least make some friendly reintroductions.

Starting alphabetically, we begin with brandy, a base that has been sadly underemployed lately, though many top drink slingers are working hard and happily to reverse the trend. The name comes from *brandewijn*, or brandywine, and it originally meant "burnt wine." There are today three types of brandy: grape brandy (which is the "basic" brandy, such as Cognac and Armagnac), fruit brandy (which we touch on more throughout this book, as it has lots in common with liqueurs and is sometimes treated as such), and pomace brandy (which is constructed from what some might see as leftovers: grape skins, seeds, and pits, and which includes the mighty Italian digestivo grappa).

Our bubbly base spirit, Champagne (and its sparkling wine siblings), adds a touch of class and effervescence to a host of hopping drinks. True Champagne, by law and various regulations (and some historically significant treaties), comes from the Champagne region in France and must be created from a secondary fermentation of a wine using yeast and rock sugar inside the bottle, which then increases carbon dioxide levels and creates bubbles. Other sparklers use this same method—look for the phrase *méthode traditionnelle* on the bottle. Five levels of sweetness are used to classify Champagne from driest to sweetest: brut, extra-dry, sec, demi-sec, and doux. Champagne is mostly made with the white Chardonnay grape or the darker-skinned Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier grape, though the wine itself ends up clear and elegant. This elegance often leads to true Champagne being more expensive than other sparkling wines, which is why, unless specifically called for (and sometimes even then), you should feel okay about subbing in a quality sparkling wine for Champagne in recipes, as long as you get one that is in the appropriate sweetness range. You shouldn't sub, though, when a recipe calls for another variety of sparkler. For example, if a recipe calls for rosé Champagne or rosé sparkling wine, find a true rosé.

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## Tracking Down the Latest in Liqueurs

As mentioned, the range of new liqueurs (both newly created and new to the U.S. market) and vermouths is expanding rapidly. I'm bringing this up for two reasons: First, to say that this book, while awfully helpful and full of creative and delicious cocktails, doesn't in any way claim to be the be-all and end-all collection of every liqueur and vermouth available. It's just a great cross-section of current hits, organized in a manner that helps you add a flavorful spark to your home cocktail creating. Second, so that I can point you in the direction of five online locales, including stores and research spots, that you should browse occasionally, to find out what new liqueurs and vermouths are out there:

*Internet Wines and Spirits* ([www.internetwines.com](http://www.internetwines.com)) was one of the first online liquor and liqueur sellers. It is reliable and offers a good selection.

*DrinkUpNY* ([www.drinkupny.com](http://www.drinkupny.com)) was one of the first online spots to offer a wide range of absinthes. When browsing, I almost always find something here that I haven't yet seen.

*Haus Alpenz* ([www.alpenz.com](http://www.alpenz.com)) is an importer with an interesting and expanding profile of liqueurs from around the world, including a number of exquisite small-batch beauties. But it's not a seller, so go here to research rather than to buy.

*Preiss Imports* ([www.preissimports.com](http://www.preissimports.com)) is also an importer, with a strong reach into European liqueurs and spirits. Again, you can't buy from this site, but browsing sure is informative.

*Wikipedia's Liqueur List* ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/list\\_of\\_liqueurs](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_liqueurs)) is a large and ever-changing list. Yes, it is in the sometimes-wild Wiki land, which can feel like a boozy jungle. But

just scroll through until you find something intriguing you've never heard of, and click it or paste it into your search engine of choice.

A top-forty favorite in cocktails from yesteryear and today, with an explosion in brands available in recent years, gin is at its core a juniper berry—flavored grain spirit, which gets its name from an English shortening of *jenever*, the Dutch word for "juniper," or (as some have started to think) *genièvre*, the French counterpart. It's hard to determine exactly when gin was discovered, though stories point to Dutch doctor Franciscus Sylvius (aka Franz de le Boë), which helps to highlight gin's medicinal side—like many liquors and liqueurs, gin was thought to have restorative and curative powers. It became an incredibly popular cocktail ingredient in the first cocktail blossoming, pre-Prohibition, when multiple styles of gin were used. Lucky for us modern consumers, some gin styles have been revived, and today you can get classic London dry gin (with a bright juniper taste, often augmented by citrus or spice undertones) as well as the Dutch- or Holland-style genever/jenever, which tends to offer a strong juniper style, and Old Tom gin, which is a sweeter gin made famous as the crucial ingredient in the original Tom Collins.

Rum has a colorful history and has had a number of names on its passport to prove it, including hydra-monster, cursed liquor, kill-devil, and that demon rum. Because rum isn't as regulated as some base spirits, it has a more free-spirited personality, and maybe because of that it is hard to pin down. We do know that there are white and dark rums, with the former being clear and the latter covering a wide range of shades from amber to almost pitch black. All rum, though, begins clear as distilled sugarcane juice or molasses. Then it's fermented and aged in different manners that alter the shade and the taste of the rum. When "white" rum is called for in the following pages, you should go for one of the clear rums, and when "dark" rum is used, try one that's a rich amber color like light brown sugar; use the really dark, more aged (and more expensive) varieties only if specifically called for. With rum's laissez-faire personality, it's no wonder that flavored rums have started entrenching themselves on shelves. Unless called for by name, shy away from using these varieties in drinks, as it can be hard to tell which are flavored using natural ingredients and which using chemicals and evil.

Tequila remains at heart a local spirit. To be true tequila, it has to be made close to the town of the same name in Jalisco, Mexico (which is, if you're traveling, about 65 kilometers from Guadalajara). Tequila is actually a type of mescal, the name for any spirit distilled from the agave plant; however, there's a Tequila Regulatory Council, whose guidelines the spirit must follow to be classified as true tequila. These guidelines ensure that a tequila is made in the geographical area described above and that it is at least 51 percent blue agave (a particular type of the plant, which just so happens to grow well in the red volcanic soil of the region). There are five types of tequila: *blanco* or "white" (sometimes called *plata*, or "silver") is not aged, or is aged only a smidge, and is stored in stainless-steel or plain oak barrels; *oro* or "gold" (sometimes called *joven*, which means "young") refers to a blend of *blanco* with caramel or food coloring (if cheaply made) or one of the last three types (if made with more care); *reposado* ("rested"), which is aged for at least two months but not more than a year in oak barrels; *añejo* ("aged"), which is aged for at least one year but not more than three years in oak barrels; and *extra añejo*, the newest category, established in March 2006, which refers to tequilas aged for a minimum of three years in oak barrels. Though *blanco* is the type used most in cocktails, and the others are usually sipped solo, you do see some crossover in specific drinks.

With a jump in popularity from the 1950s onward, vodka is currently beloved by many for its malleability and kick. A usually colorless spirit crafted from grain, potatoes, soybeans, grapes, and/or other ingredients, vodka made its first popularity push in the United States in the 1950s via an advertising campaign dreamed up by the Smirnoff distributor and the owner of Los Angeles—based bar the Cock and Bull. They decided to focus on a cocktail instead of the spirit itself, and pushed the

drink the Moscow Mule out into the world. Today flavored versions of vodka (from citrus to pepper to chocolate and every other flavor occurring in nature and not) have become very popular, with some brands delivering deliciousness and some a liquid that tastes like chemically altered lighter fluid. Don't use the flavored versions unless the recipe specifically calls for one.

Whiskey (or whisky, if your bottle is from Scotland or Canada) is more of a base spirit family than a single base spirit. It's a host of relatives that sometimes argue at the table but that are each worthy of inclusion. To start unwrangling this spirited family tree, let's talk through some of the regulations, starting in the United States. American straight whiskey must be made from a grain mash that contains between 51 and 79 percent of a single grain (corn for bourbon, rye for rye) and must be aged in charred oak barrels. (Corn whiskey is an exception, as it must be at least 80 percent corn.) Moving north, Canadian whisky must be aged in oak barrels in Canada for at least three years, and must be mashed and distilled there too, using wheat, corn, rye, barley, or barley malt—usually blended, as most Canadian whiskies are blends. Irish whiskeys come in three forms: single malt (pure malted barley), pot still (malted and unmalted barley), and blended (malted and unmalted barley, as well as corn or other grains), with every type aged for three years in oak casks and triple-distilled. Scotch whiskies have to be made in a distillery in Scotland and contain water and barley (different grains are sometimes included), and they must be aged in oak casks for at least three years and a day, be double-distilled, and have their malt dried over a peat fire. Scotches are either single malt (100 percent malted barley) or blended, with the stated age of the blend being the youngest part. This brings up a good point: There are many blended whiskeys and whiskies available, which may have to follow strict guidelines depending on country and type, and which shouldn't be frowned upon. Within this book, the type of whiskey/whisky, if not the brand, will be called out in the ingredients, and the drink in question has been structured for that particular type, so please follow the ingredients list and you'll end up with a better-balanced drink.

## Revealing the Mixer Mantra

While liqueurs and vermouths are crucial to our mission, and base spirits are the foundation from which the liqueurs and vermouths shine, a host of other ingredients make the cocktails inhabiting the following pages (and, eventually, homes and parties) sing in luscious tones. These are the mixers, those sometimes overlooked ingredients. Too often, someone decides to spend the weekly take on a particularly high-priced bottle of gin, and picks just the right liqueur to pair it with, but then brings both down by grabbing a can of frozen juice. Or takes them down ten pegs by introducing them in the glass to some club soda that hasn't had a boogie-ing bubble in it for weeks. Argh! It's enough to make a grown cocktail lover cry. But you, *you* can avoid these mixer monstrosities by following one simple mantra: the fresh rule.

The fresh rule (it almost needs capitalizing, but I don't want to seem like I'm screaming at you, just taking it very seriously) is one important rule. It covers most of what you might think of as "mixers" and so is easy to remember (we'll cover the three outliers below). Simply put: Fresh is better. Always. If you want superior drinks, use fresh mixers. Isn't simplicity wonderful? It's easiest to remember, I think, when dealing with fruit juices. Fresh juice takes a drink from lackluster to legendary, which then also takes a party from tedious to tremendous (and again, that's what we're aiming for).

# Simple Syrup

Makes about 4½ cups

3 CUPS SUGAR  
2½ CUPS WATER

1. Add the sugar and water to a medium-size saucepan. Stirring occasionally, bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat. Lower the heat a bit, keeping the mixture at a low boil for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Turn off the heat and let the syrup cool completely in the pan. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 month.

**A NOTE:** I tend to use my simple syrup all the time, but if you're going to use only a bit here and there, you can add ½ ounce of high-proof neutral grain spirits or vodka to the bottle and it will last for many months.

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Juicing isn't tough (we'll go over the juicer options in the section on tools), and it is well worth it. It starts with picking out the right fruits, though. When at the grocery store or farmer's market or orchard, be sure to look for fruits that are lacking in blemishes and that have a crisp aroma—get right up close and personal with them to find out. Don't be ashamed to talk to your fruit, knowing that the dubious looks from other shoppers are going to be balanced by smiles once you're serving the right stuff. When juicing, don't juice more than a day or two before serving time. Here's a lively hint to make citrus juicing easier, too: Before juicing, run fruits under warm water, or wrap them in a damp towel and microwave them for 20 seconds, and then roll them under your palm with steady pressure. This helps to get the juice flowing. If (because of a great fruit famine, perhaps) you find it impossible to use fresh juice, then pick drinks that don't use it. Or, pick up some fresh juice at a local juice bar. Or, as a last resort (say you're stranded on an island for a month with only three pieces of fresh fruit) use frozen juice concentrate, but at least get a couple whole fruits so you can have a squirt or so of fresh juice and fruit for garnishes to give a fresh burst.

The fresh rule, as mentioned, travels beyond juice to other mixers. It should go without saying (but, hey, reminders don't hurt) that if using dairy products (most often cream, which adds a smooth sexiness to many sweet drinks), don't trot out something that's been in the hinterlands of your fridge and expect to get applause. Even if it's within the "use by" date, if it's been hanging in there for some time, cream and other products pick up scents from the fridge—and you sure don't want a Cara Sposa ([\[>\]](#)) to taste radish-esque. This is especially true for drinks that use eggs (and don't be scared by these drinks—eggs add amazing mouth feel and texture). Always use the freshest eggs, organic if possible.

Also, follow the fresh rule with bubbling mixers. This means that the ginger ale you're using to craft a Tuscan Mule ([\[>\]](#)) shouldn't enter the event with ambiguity and a faint *pfff*. It should come on the scene like a knight of carbonation, with a brisk effervescent nature and bubbles galore. The same goes for club soda and other bubbling favorites. If they've even started to go flat, they'll take any drink down with them when falling on their drinky faces. When picking out bubblers, be sure to get reputable brands and not knock-offs. These top-shelf items won't set you back excessively, but they are going to be more reliable and vivacious. If you have your own CO2 dispenser and it roars, then feel free to use it when applicable, too.

The last three mixers I'm going to touch on may, as mentioned, go slightly against the fresh rule. The first and second are somewhat related, as they're items you'll want to make yourself if possible. The first is simple syrup. A basic sugar and water syrup, this is used to add a slight sweetness and to smooth the rough edges out of many drinks. It's easy to make and keeps in the fridge for a month. You'll find that having it at arm's length comes in handy for cocktailing, sure, but also for making nonalcoholic drinks such as lemonade and home-crafted sparkling fruit drinks—there's really no reason not to always have some on hand.

The second mixer that you can, and should, make yourself, is grenadine. Now, I know you're thinking "I can get grenadine in any store." But most of what's out there passing for grenadine is chemically sweetened dyed-red syrup. Real grenadine should have a sweetness in it but should also have a serious pomegranate-y tang, and it should add that flavor to drinks it's contained within. You can make it very simply (which I am fond of), or add a few other accents. Beyond being enjoyable in drinks, it's also handy if you have kids, or cousins, or rockingly cool nephews or nieces, because it's used to make the classic Shirley Temple and Roy Rogers. If you somehow can't find the time to make grenadine, at least pick up a brand that has some serious flavor, such as Scrappy's or Stirrings. The grenadine recipe below is a version I picked up from one of Seattle's best bartenders, Andrew Bohrer. You can learn more about him and check out a few of his recipes on [\[>\]](#), [\[>\]](#), and [\[>\]](#), and you should definitely visit his blog Cask Strength ([www.caskstrength.wordpress.com](http://www.caskstrength.wordpress.com)), where he writes in charming style about cocktails and life behind the professional bar.

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## Grenadine

Makes about 4 cups

4 CUPS UNSWEETENED POMEGRANATE JUICE  
1 PINT FRESH RASPBERRIES  
4 CUPS SUGAR  
2 OUNCES ORANGE FLOWER WATER

1. Add the pomegranate juice and raspberries to a large saucepan and place over high heat. Cook for 15 minutes.
2. Let the mixture stay at a steady boil, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes longer, reducing the heat if needed to prevent burning.
3. Slowly stir in the sugar, stirring continuously. When the sugar is completely dissolved, remove the pan from the heat and stir in the orange flower water.
4. Let cool, and strain into bottles. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 1 month.

A NOTE: Serving the grenadine to adults only? Add 2 cups of brandy in step 1, and an extra 2 cups of sugar in step 3.

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The final mixer we're going to touch on also skirts around the fresh rule, and it is a mixer that was, sadly, somehow misplaced for a while but that has recently made a welcome comeback. I'm talking here about those champions of the dash or two: bitters. Bitters are, basically, a bitter flavoring agent for drinks (and also a medicine, or at least they were thought of that way for years and are still precious prescription when taken with a glass of club soda after eating too much). Created with care

and craft, they contain a base spirit infused or altered or enchanted with a bundle of herbs, fruits and fruit peels, spices, roots, leaves, love, flowers, long-lost magical items, and much more. Each type of bitters is different, which means that you can't substitute one for the other in drinks without changing the drink's character. This isn't to say that one won't be good subbed in for another—it'll just be a different drink. So, if you kick off your Kick-Off ([\[>\]](#)) with Peychaud's bitters instead of Angostura, you probably should call it a Kick Return. There are currently, and thankfully, many bitters now available, including the Peychaud's and Angostura just mentioned, revisions of classics such as Regan's Orange Bitters No. 6, and brand-new models such as Bittermens Xocolatl Mole Bitters. You can learn even more about bitters on [\[>\]](#), but one thing to remember is that they keep for a year at least—though you'll probably use them more quickly than that.

## Unearthing the Right Ice

Isn't it nice that we no longer have to chip ice off of glaciers? Though, that would probably teach us from an early age to respect ice in ways that we now don't. Anyhow, it's not too late to discover some key facts about ice in order to upgrade the chilly side of cocktails. To begin with, though it may sound funny, the fresh rule should also apply to ice as much as possible when you're entertaining at home. Unless you have a dedicated ice freezer or ice machine plugged in, you'll want to watch the ice you use, to make sure it hasn't been in the freezer too long, as it could pick up aromas and scents from its freezer roommates. Since you don't want your ice, and thus your drinks, smelling of the cod you caught two Junes ago, be sure to use fresh ice whenever possible.

There are a few types of ice you'll want to be aware of as well. First off, ice cubes, which should be of the 1-inch variety and as square as you can get. Second is cracked ice, which you can either buy or make yourself, by cracking those cubes into smaller pieces with a muddler or smallish mallet of some sort. I like to crack it myself, because I have more control over the ice, and because, well, it's a kick to do. You don't want to pulverize it, just crack it into a few irregular pieces. These pieces melt more quickly and thus chill a drink more rapidly, which is why cracked ice is ideal when you're stirring a drink to combine it. Cubes are used most often when shaking a drink, because they won't melt so fast (if they did, a shaken drink might get watery).

This, of course, invites the question "When to shake and when to stir?" There are some rules to follow, outside of the ice choices. Always shake and never stir a drink with fruit juice or fruit, cream or eggs, because you have to have a more violent combining, an emulsifying of sorts. Stir when those ingredients aren't involved, as stirring can deliver chilly results without clouding the drink up. One thing to remember, though, is that you can shake most cold drinks (if you don't feel like stirring or feel uncomfortable with stirring). They might not look as clear and might be a bit frothier than when stirred, but they'll turn out dandy.

There are also third and fourth ice types: crushed ice and ice rings. Crushed ice is used to make drink agreeably frothy, or even rustic, as with the Bruja Smash ([\[>\]](#)) or the classic Daiquiri. You can purchase crushed ice, or crush it yourself, using a Lewis bag (a canvas bag made for the job) or other bag and a mallet—with crushing, as opposed to cracking, you really want to go to town on the ice. Ice rings, or ice molds, are used within punch bowls, both because they'll keep it cold longer and because they look dashing. There are no recipes in this book calling for ice rings, but you can make your own ice mold using a ring mold or even a regular round or square baking pan.

## Divulging Garnishing

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After stocking up on bottles and bases and migrating to fresher mixers, you might believe that you're completely set on ingredients, but stop! You wouldn't go out without accessories, would you? In the same way, and even more important, you shouldn't send certain cocktails and highballs and slings and such out to waiting guests without proper garnishing. And they are for far more than appearance, as most garnishes also add essential flourishes of flavor to a drink, without which the drink is as plain as a princess without a proper tiara. Because of this prime role that garnishes play, they too need to follow (as you might guess) the fresh rule. For garnishes, this applies to most everything, including raspberries, mint and basil leaves, freshly grated nutmeg, and many more.

While the array of garnishes mentioned above is as important as the drinks they live with, there is one garnish group we'll need to gather round a little more closely, because of how often they come to the forefront. I'm talking about our old pals, the citrus garnishes. Again, pick your garnish-destined citrus fruits with care, getting up close and personal to be sure of ripeness and loveliness. And then cut them to pieces—specifically, twists, wheels (and half-wheel slices), and wedges. To make a citrus twist, start by cutting off the bottom of a (freshly washed, preferably organic) fruit in a straight line—don't cut off too much, just enough to give you a flat bottom. Then place that flat side down on a cutting board. Using a sharp knife and a keen eye, cut ½-inch-wide strips of peel going from top to bottom, trying to get as little of the white pith as possible. The strips you cut are your twists, which should be sturdy enough to actually twist over the top of a drink. When doing so (making sure you're over the glass), notice how the fragrant oils rocket off the twist's outer side and into the drink and onto the glass's edge. Those oils are the treasure within the twist, because of the massive flavor burst they provide for the nose and mouth while drinking. Too often bartenders at large just flop a twist in a glass, or twist it to make it look pretty but twist nowhere near the glass, thus losing those essential oils. Don't make this mistake, cocktail-loving friends. Here and there you'll see a recipe suggesting a wider twist—say, 1½ to 2 inches wide. You may want to use a wide, sharp peeler for this. There are a couple of drinks that get fun with flaming twists, too, and instructions are included in those recipes.

Our other crucial citrus garnishes are wheels, their sibling slices, and wedges. These are a snap to make. For the wheel and slice family, first slice off the top and bottom ends of the fruit in a straight line with a sharp knife, and then cut the fruit into equal-size wheels, from ⅛ to ¼ inch in size. If you want slices, cut the wheels in half, or cut the fruit in half before slicing. If you're eager to quickly perch slices on a glass's edge when serving, cut notches in the slices. Wedges are also a breeze, and also start by cutting off the fruit ends. Then, with the fruit on a cutting board, cut it in half lengthwise and put each side cut side down on the board. Make two length-of-the-fruit cuts, top to bottom. Then cut each of the three pieces in half. This should leave you with six equal-size wedges per half, or twelve total.

## Don't Have a Bare Bar: Exposing Crucial Bar Tools

Learning to pick the proper ingredients for a drink is indeed important, but if the proper cocktail-creating tools are missing, you'll have a hard time serving anything but booze straight out of a bottle (which is both unhygienic and lacking in the class department).

The bar tool assortment starts with one main item: the cocktail shaker. You get to choose



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