



Martinis

By Marc W. Reuben



The simple words “dry martini” supply an indelible joy to those happily beguiled by the thought of snappy and bracing refreshment. To a dedicated lover of stimulants, this cocktail represents all that is fine about the world. Nothing is as welcome after 5 p.m. (7 p.m. if you are in practice for less than three years) than this silent relief from the daily grind. Start your day with caffeine, but reclaim your sanity with a crystalline cocktail.



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A martini is a very stringent and dry drink that dances brightly across the palate and goes so well with things that tease. What a salubrious effect a good martini can have for the practitioner. It can transcend the effect of a client who doesn't tell the entire story, or the client who tells more than the entire story; the employee who doesn't provide court-ordered discovery because the material “doesn't say good things,” or an adjuster who tells you not to supply discovery because it is “bad.” A day spent trying to negotiate with an attorney who can't imagine buying a paper clip for less than \$3 million, or waiting in the courtroom for a judge to return from the beauty parlor may signal a time for one. The filing clerk who rejects a pleading because the paper is too thick. The child of a big client who is now employed by you and needs to know, after three years of law school, just what a complaint is. All of these things, and a multitude of other things like them, suggest the benign intervention of Padre Martini.

Cocktails were only dimly hinted at in Dickens, so you can bet they were not in the forefront of the classical booze world. Spirits (distilled by heat) came about after an Ethiopian alchemist named Mary-The-Jewess discovered distillation while she was trying to heat grain mash into gold. She was a true chemist. Gin comes from the name of a distilled spirit called “genever,” named for the juniper berry that flavors it during the distillation process. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, gin is brewed from a mixture of malted grain meals, distilled with water and sugars, and flavored by the (*inter alia*) juniper berry in heating. A genuine martini is made of gin and vermouth with an olive in it. Nothing else. The introduction of the vodka martini happened after the recognition of Stalinist Russia in the 1930s. Anyone who prefers a vodka martini should be regarded with suspicion. There is also an English drink known as a Gibson, which is a martini with a pickled onion in it instead of the essential olive. (Leave it to the British to deposit a pickled onion in paradise.) The best gin is English style, because the Brits use luscious herbs in the distillation process to cover up the taste of wretched ingredients they used to use. There is something excellent called Sheidams or “Dutch” gin, but it is unflavored.

It was in merry old England that gin reached its apogee as a popular beverage. The *Britannica* of 1906 noted of gin that it “has long been a favourite stimulant with the lower orders in London and other large English towns.” So much gin was consumed by Londoners that gin shops multiplied with great rapidity, and the use of the beverage increased “to an extent so demoralizing that retailers actually exhibited placards in their windows intimating that there people might get drunk for 1d (penny) and that clean straw in comfortable cellars would be provided for customers. The legislature was obliged to interfere in order to curb the tide of debauchery.” The gin laws of 1736 came into being and resulted in taxation of gin sales. Riots ensued (Gin, OK. But tea?). After seven fruitless years, the law was repealed. Although the rioting has now largely been confined to soccer games, the gin industry developed the “British” or “London Style” gin. Dry as can be, aromatic and God save it.

A real martini is made from a mixture of gin and vermouth, classically to the measure of three to one. To make a martini drier, increase the amount of gin to vermouth. Many mixers simply drip vermouth into

a glass, swish it around and then discard the vermouth, and prepare the gin thereafter. According to one famous martini enthusiast, the ingredients should be a shaken but not stirred. The martini was favored in American circles from the time it became popular in the early 20th century. The martini is said to have emerged from California in the late 1800s. According to martiniart.com, Julio Richelieu's saloon in Martinez, Calif, mixed a small drink for visiting miner in 1870. Julio placed an olive in the glass before handing it to the man, then named it after his town. Martinez continues to hold claim as the birthplace of the martini.

Famous lovers of the martini include President Franklin Roosevelt and Tallulah Bankhead, the immortal Broadway actress who had no memory for names. She once went to a party where she introduced a friend of hers by telling her host "Dahling, this is my dear friend martini." Her friend was named Olive. After drinking several martinis, she and (*inter alia*) Noel Coward attended the funeral of a friend who was Catholic. They sat in the very back row of the church so as not to draw attention to the fact that she'd had a few, and the priest in vestments and with incense lamp ventured to stop there with the coffin. Tallulah vaguely recognized him and said "Dahling. I love your gown. But your handbag is on fire."

The slapstick Benny Hill famously played a wartime German spy disguised as an Englishman who ordered two martinis at a pub. "Dry?" the waitress asked. "No! Two!"

On the eve of world war, there was a royal visit to the White House. President Roosevelt, who often worked himself to near exhaustion, always took an hour each day to enjoy a drink and a smoke at 5 p.m. with his staff. One day in 1939, the visiting King George VI was ushered into the presidential office on the second floor of the White House. The office doors were closed (to prevent dour mother Sara Roosevelt from seeing) and the inner cabinet joined the president and the king. Aides wheeled Roosevelt to a cabinet, which he dutifully unlocked, and gin and vermouth, glasses and a shaker were removed. The president mixed his usual 5 o'clock martinis. Once they were poured, the president was wheeled to the king and offered his guest a drink. As they lifted their glasses, Roosevelt shyly admitted to His Majesty "You know, my mother does not approve of my drinking during the daytime." Before he took his first sip, the king replied, "Neither does mine."

The mixture of gin and vermouth is something to be prized by elegant imbibers. It takes time to learn to appreciate a good martini and no time to react to a bad one. A badly mixed martini

is worse on the soul than a cranky judge. But a great one has a clean and bracing effect and dances on the palate when tasted. So versatile is the drink that it can be appreciated with a variety of partners. For instance, the highly spicy combination of a slice of club rye, on which is a small slice of horseradish and a pinch of dry mustard powder, is a perfect escort. But some very fresh oysters, with just a hint of lemon juice on them, make a perfect attachment as well. (Younger lawyers should be advised to remove the oysters from the shell before swallowing.) And may my cardiologist forgive me, but the perfect non-edible accompaniment to a good martini is a fine cigarette. Rarely, of course.

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The search for the perfect martini is a lasting adventure for me. All the places in the city that I once frequented are now history. The Captain's Table on the 1600 block of Walnut made wonderful "dirty" martinis (mixed with some olive brine) with the cheapest gin. The combination of watered gin and olive brine is something only the wisest bartenders with the best taste could manage. Alas! Of the remaining places, the Four Seasons Hotel has a bar where all the best drinks and oysters can be had. The same can be said of the Bellevue and of Ruth's Chris.

In Center City, Maggiano's (on Juniper Street across from Reading Terminal Market) makes a wonderful martini at their bar. So does the Mariott on Market Street (the bar is on the main floor). No oysters though. In New Jersey, the Safari eatery in the Taj Mahal makes a great martini (make it a double to deal with the decor and the tourists) and in Chambersburg (the remnant Italian section of Trenton, east of the railroad station and two blocks east of the old Hebrew home) the bar at Amici Milano does a great martini. In Princeton, Lahieres has a wonderful bar with great martinis and oysters.

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These dangerous mixtures of gin and other liquors are what the untutored of today call martinis. There is the "apple" martini and the "chocolate" one. Not to mention the super raspberry fudge martini with whipped cream and a cherry. The martini is gin and vermouth. Come lemon peel and onion, give me a good gin martini or give me...well. ■

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