

Are you kidding? It's a triple serving of my favorite drink with a straw jammed into it. If you have to carry me home, I'll be smiling and singing "La Marseillaise" the whole way there. Not that a French 75 (it's actually the name of a piece of WWI field artillery) is definitively French—there's much debate over its place of origin. Some say it came into being at Harry's New York Bar in Paris, or possibly the Hotel Chatham down the Rue Daunou. Others maintain that it came from an American fighter pilot or the Buck's Club in London. Maybe a variation on a Tom Collins or a Champagne Cup, but possibly an upgrade on the popular French combo of Cognac and Champagne.

Should you be lucky enough to nab an empty stool at Arnaud's French 75 Bar on Bienville Street in New Orleans, Chris Hannah—the (non-moustached) bartender who has likely poured more of them than anyone else on the planet—just might hand you a four-page, typewritten, imagined conversation with the long-dead and legendary bartender Harry Craddock, wherein they muse over those very origin stories.

I don't recommend that, though. Not at first. Not until you've gotten a few dozen under your belt (not all at once) and fully appreciated the range of expression, the possibilities of the mixological palette that can create a French 75. Because the one Chris will pour you might ruin you for the rest. It starts with a frosted tulip glass. Then Courvoisier VS, sugar, and lemon juice shaken and strained, then topped off with Moët and Chandon. Then a twist. Then bliss. Then regret.

When I visited Arnaud's on Easter morning this year, I chased Hannah's French 75 quickly with a cup of coffee and a massive seltzer, needing to lightly mar the memory. I get to New Orleans increasingly frequently, so I'm confident it won't be my last, but knowing it's out there makes me have a bit less abandon in my explorations. Like meeting the love of your life when you're in high school and still have so much misguided kissing, screwing, and crushing to do. I'm not ready to settle down yet. I still have many years of wandering and tipping ahead of me, but now I know I'll always have that taste of Paris. Or possibly London. And definitely New Orleans. 🍸

Kat Kinsman is the editor-in-chief of *Tasting Table*. Her debut book *Hi, Anxiety*, comes out in March 2016, and she will be drinking a lot of French 75s before then. PHOTO, PAGE 20 by Andrew Thomas Lee.



A LOVE LETTER TO THE OLD FASHIONED

MAKE AN OLD FASHIONED AND
YOU HAVE TRANSFORMED WHISKEY

by Jerry Slater

“WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE COCKTAIL?”

“What do you drink at home?”

I’m asked those questions a lot. I own a drinking establishment on the east side of Atlanta that has a bit of a reputation for elaborate cocktails and a well-stocked whiskey selection. After I teach one of our cocktail or bourbon classes, patrons frequently ask me about my own drinking habits. I sometimes worry about disappointing the enthusiasts with my simple answer: I drink Old Fashioneds. Okay, I also drink Manhattans, and various

improvisations on Manhattans. I drink a lot of wine with my sommelier wife, and I occasionally just want a cold beer after a long day. But when someone asks, “What is your cocktail of choice?” The Old Fashioned is it.

Like the majority of chefs I know, who don’t really cook at home, off-duty I like to keep it simple. My work space is better stocked for pomp and circumstance. At home, a bottle of bourbon, a bottle of bitters, and some cubes of sugar are enough. If I remembered to fill the ice tray that makes large cubes, or to steal a lemon from work, things are even better—but neither is necessary.

An Old Fashioned made in the old-fashioned way is the drink equivalent of rustic Italian cuisine: simple and elegant. Take a sugar cube (I prefer brown for its kiss of molasses, but white will do), add a

couple of dashes of Angostura bitters, and muddle with a half-ounce of water. Add two ounces bourbon—rye is just fine, too—and a large cube of ice or two. Stir, and garnish with a spritz of citrus oil from a long strip of lemon peel.

This may not be the Old Fashioned that you grew up with. There is another “Old Fashioned” out there. It involves pulverizing an orange and an unnatural candied cherry with a packet of sugar. A purveyor of such drinks sometimes sometimes adds bitters. Sometimes he forgets. After, he adds a little whiskey and a lot of ice. If this wasn’t enough to make you order a beer instead, the same bartender finishes the murky,



fruity drink with a generous splash of soda water, insulting your whiskey and propelling said cocktail further out of balance. There is a theory that this “Old Fashioned” came to prominence during Prohibition, when bad whiskey needed to be masked.

Others say the Old Fashioned was created at the Pendennis Club in Louisville, Kentucky. As the story goes, it was first mixed by, or for, a bourbon distiller by the name of Colonel James E. Pepper around the turn of the twentieth century. This is such a pervasive story that I repeated it at a Southern Foodways Alliance summer Field Trip in 2008. That afternoon Julian Van Winkle III made Old Fashioneds for everyone in the famed club’s pool room, giving further credence to the tale.

Dave Wondrich, author of *Imbibe!*, points out that the original “cock tail” dates back to 1806 and includes spirits, bitters, water, and sugar. A hundred years later, to have a cocktail in the old-fashioned style was as much an adjective as it was a noun. Bartenders never like to let the truth get in the way of a good story. And as a turn-of-the-century bourbon distiller, Colonel Pepper didn’t let truth stop him from using the story to hawk his wares at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, where the Old Fashioned became popular. Liquor marketers were the original *Mad Men*.

Let’s talk about why I love an Old Fashioned. Make an Old Fashioned and you have transformed whiskey. A potent and singular spirit has been bittered, sweetened, mellowed, chilled, and bequeathed a bright and pleasing note of lemon essence. The drink evolves as you sip it. It starts off strong and bracing, with the spice of the bitters married to the whiskey’s sweeter tones. In a proper glass, the drink has weight, and the clink of large ice cubes against its sides tolls a welcome tune. Most of us will give a slight shake to hear it.

As the ice melts slowly, the Old Fashioned becomes easier and easier to drink—until, about three-quarters of the way through, it might become too sweet. This is not sacrilege to say. The sugar and bitters, muddled together at the beginning, were barely held together by the whiskey. And not all the sugar dissolved in that slurry. This is the time for a patch. Just one more ounce, maybe one more ice cube, to put the drink, and therefore the world, back in balance. 🍸

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PHOTOS by Andrew Thomas Lee.