



THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE GUIDE TO COCKTAILS

A contemporary drink manifesto

BY SARA CAMP MILAM AND JERRY SLATER

WE CREATED *THE SOUTHERN Foodways Alliance Guide to Cocktails* because we believe that well-told stories complement well-mixed drinks. For two decades, the SFA has captured and shared narratives of barbecue, tamales, and gumbo. Of tacos, plate lunches, and boudin. The stories of these foods honor the men and women who grow, prepare, and serve them. We apply that same approach to cocktails. What we pour in our glasses, where we do the pouring, and with whom we do the drinking: Those matters reveal truths about our values and our identity in a diverse and changing region.

Jerry Slater and I gathered recipes both classic and contemporary from more than twenty bartenders. They are men and

women who span the region from Washington, DC, to Austin, Texas. Their tastes are as varied as their backgrounds. We added stories of spiritous lore to give you something to talk about at your next cocktail party. And recipes for bar snacks from Vishwesh Bhatt of Oxford's Snackbar, because we don't recommend drinking on an empty stomach.

What follows is a taste of the book, available from UGA Press. Cheers, and happy reading. —SCM

Stocking the Bar

I MOVED TO OXFORD, Mississippi, in the summer of 2012. I spent the first month subletting a house from a young English professor who was out of state for the summer. I reminded myself that the

location of the house, just three blocks from the downtown Square, made up for the fact that the professor, an avid cyclist, had left his sweat-stained jersey hanging in the bathroom—a sort of reverse air freshener.

Soon enough my furniture arrived from North Carolina, and I began to settle in to my rental house. Meanwhile I had met and gone on two dates with Kirk. I wasn't sure how I felt about his being a decade my senior, but I was impressed when he called, not texted, to ask me out to dinner at Snackbar. Five weeks in Oxford, and I already knew it was my favorite restaurant.

"Of course," I said. "Why don't you come over to my house first for a drink. I've just moved in and I have to tell you, my bar is limited to vodka and bourbon. And Miller High Life in the fridge." Before moving to Oxford, I had learned to appreciate Manhattans, Old-Fashioneds, and craft beer in Chapel Hill. Prior to that, it was PBR in Little Rock. Those days were preceded by 4 P.M. Margaritas in Houston (before you judge, know that I was a middle-school teacher). But I rarely got fancy in the solitude of my own home.

That evening I heard Kirk's car pull into the driveway. I looked out the window to see him approaching the front door. In his arms he carried a large cardboard box that looked to be full of something heavy. Had UPS come without my noticing? I opened the door.

Kirk was smiling, pleased with himself. He put down the box. "You said you only had vodka and bourbon, so I decided to have a one-man stock-the-bar party." From the box he pulled fifths of gin, scotch, and rum, then two bottles of wine. I don't even remember what we fixed ourselves to drink before dinner. But I was smitten.

The stock-the-bar story rose to the status of legend in our relationship almost

as soon as it happened. As much as it came from a place of generosity, Kirk admits now that he was also stocking the bar for himself, hoping to be invited to my house again. In any case, it worked: Two and a half years later, we were married. And our shared cocktail exploration, at home and on the road, was just beginning. By then Kirk had adopted the Barbary Corsair, a rum Negroni, as his usual on our frequent dates to Snackbar. (In fact, it turned out that these Snackbar dates were a little too frequent. Once we began to track our shared finances, we scaled back to once a month. Okay, sometimes twice.) I favored sauvignon blanc, occasionally switching it up with a rye Manhattan or the Lurleen or a new cocktail from the seasonal menu.

Two nights before our wedding, Kirk discovered pine liqueur in a gin cocktail at the now-shuttered Bellocq in New Orleans. (Thanks to Mississippi's byzantine liquor laws, it took us more than a year to track down a similar product, Dolin G n p  des Alpes, for our home bar.) After the wedding ceremony, I drank Puligny-Montrachet and Champagne on the third-floor balcony at Galatoire's. By the time we cut the cake, I knew I would be too exhausted to venture on Bourbon Street in my wedding dress, new husband in one hand and go-cup in the other.

There were more discoveries to come. Cynar at Zuni Caf  in San Francisco on our honeymoon, where we were intrigued by the artichoke on the bottle and asked the bartender to pour us a taste. (After more searching, it too earned a permanent place on our home bar.) There was a coveted taste of watermelon brandy in Charleston, and yellow-tomato Bloody Marys over the bridge in Mount Pleasant. (Three quarts of the mix came home with us.) A white Negroni in

Photos by Andrew Thomas Lee

Chicago, made with a melon amaro. The makings for Pimm's Cups, carried to college baseball games in a soft-sided cooler and mixed on a picnic table. A collection of bitters that multiplied beyond the confines of the bar proper (or "bar" not so proper, as it was, until recently, a shelf above the microwave.) Palomas and Greyhounds at home and in bars, to satisfy our healthy thirst for grapefruit juice. And, more often than not, a beer and a sandwich at a dim pub off the Square on Saturdays, followed by a nap for me and sports on television for Kirk. We even attempted to serve Chatham Artillery Punch at a tailgate one football weekend—an attempt that failed spectacularly when the glass jar of shrub fell to the ground and shattered on the bricks en route to the Grove.

Even if we both reach for a simple glass of wine most nights, we still have plenty of exploring ahead of us. I was on cocktail sabbatical as I wrote this, awaiting the arrival of our first child.¹ Kirk gallantly shouldered the responsibility of drinking for two, and I added at least a dozen drinks to my own bucket list. Love, it turns out, is a well-stocked bar.

Bourbon and Gender

ORDERING A DRINK at a bar can be daunting. Maybe you only know of dubious highballs: rum and Coke, Jack and ginger, vodka and Red Bull. What tastes good? What's cool? What's affordable? What will allow you to clime out of bed the next morning? It's enough to keep you muttering "Miller Lite" when the bartender deigns to look your way.

Sooner or later, you mature. You evolve. And so do your tastes in booze. You learn



the names of a few cocktails, and you adopt one as your signature. Eventually you order with confidence, and maybe work in a request for a certain liquor or a stylistic preference: "I'll have a dry rye Manhattan." And boom, you've arrived as a grown-up drinker.

If only it were that simple. Ordering a drink in a bar is a performative act. Your preferences, your values, and your very identity are on display in front of your companions, the bartender, and the other patrons.

Perhaps no liquor carries more confounding and contradictory implications than whiskey, especially what it says about the gender of the person who orders it. Since its infancy around the turn of the nineteenth century, domestic whiskey distilling has associated itself with the archetypal American man. "Whiskey reflected the strong streak of independence ingrained in the character of the frontier South," Robert Moss writes. And that frontier ideal was inextricably tied to masculinity, valuing physical strength,

self-reliance, bravery, and rebellion. "If we need it, we'll make it ourselves" might have been the motto of early rural America. That extended to its first distillers of rye in the Mid-Atlantic states and bourbon in the Appalachian South. Men still buy into this frontier fantasy when they savor a sip of bourbon—even if they left an office job downtown and drove to the bar in a luxury SUV.

Bourbon aficionado and novelist Walker Percy spoke to a similar phenomenon in the 1970s. He wrote of bourbon's power to cut through the ennui that plagued the suburban office worker, husband, and father. He didn't mention the millions of American women who had entered the workforce by the mid-1970s, nor those who stayed at home with the children and might have appreciated a nip of bourbon at the end of a long day. Percy associated drinking bourbon with male socializing, going back to his days as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Before that, he enjoyed bourbon from a Coke bottle passed around the boys' room at high-school dances.) Often these social occasions involved flirting with or dating women, but it doesn't seem to have mattered much to Percy whether the woman would actually drink the bourbon.

More recently, another UNC graduate explored what drinking bourbon purports to say about one's gender, racial, regional, and class identity. Seán McKeithan's 2012 *Southern Cultures* article "Every Ounce a Man's Whiskey?" turned a 1950s Early Times bourbon advertising slogan into a question, examining what it meant for McKeithan—a young, gay, white Southern man—to drink a liquor that has long been marketed as a symbol of heterosexual white Southern masculinity. Inspired by

RUBY SLIPPER

recipe by Jerry Slater

A gussied-up Joe Collins, or Vodka Collins, enhanced by grapefruit and rosemary. The redder the grapefruit, the better. Created at H. Harper Station in Atlanta, this is a fantastic brunch drink and a refreshing departure from the standard Bloody Mary or Mimosa. Try serving it by the pitcher for a breakfast or luncheon: Combine the grapefruit juice, vodka, and rosemary syrup in a single batch, then top each drink with soda water before serving.

Garnish: Rosemary sprig

Service ice: Cubed

Glass: Collins

Yield: 1 (6½–7-ounce) cocktail

COCKTAIL:

- 2 ounces freshly squeezed ruby-red grapefruit juice**
- 1½ ounces vodka, such as Cathead**
- ½ ounce rosemary syrup (see recipe below)**
- 3 to 4 ounces soda water**

Pour grapefruit juice, vodka, and rosemary syrup into a shaker, add ice, and shake. Strain into ice-filled glass, top with soda water, and garnish with rosemary sprig.

ROSEMARY SYRUP:

- 1 cup water**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 3 rosemary sprigs**

Place water and sugar in a small saucepan, set over high heat, and bring to a boil. Boil for 3 minutes. Remove from the heat, add rosemary, cover, and steep for 30 minutes. Strain and cool to room temperature. Refrigerate in a lidded container for up to 3 weeks.

Yield: Approximately 1½ cups

¹Sally Milam was born in December 2016. This past spring, I began my cocktail re-education in earnest.

NIHILIST SOUR

recipe by Greg Best



This drink is a refreshing and balanced fizz of whiskey and peach. “Even those who believe in nothing enjoy a sour,” says its creator, Greg Best, of Atlanta’s Ticonderoga Club. Shake until you achieve a foamy texture and a beautiful, creamy orange-yellow color.

Garnish: Orange peel
Service ice: None
Glass: Cocktail

Yield: 1 (4-ounce) cocktail

COCKTAIL

- 2 ounces barrel-proof rye (100-proof or greater)
- 3/4 ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 ounce peach liqueur
- 1/8 ounce simple syrup
- 4 dashes cardamom bitters
- 1 egg white

Place rye, lemon juice, peach liqueur, simple syrup, bitters, and egg white in a shaker and shake vigorously for 30 seconds to create a foamy mixture. Add ice and shake again. Strain into glass, squeeze orange peel over the drink, and float peel in drink.

a college boyfriend’s taste for bourbon, McKeithan recalls, “I drank Bourbon in a spirit of transgression that I could not pin down but felt that, in so doing, I took some nebulous stand against the heterosexual assumption that women and queer men drink from glasses that came with umbrellas, instead of only with ice.”

While the twenty-first century bourbon market targets a range of consumers “from the gentleman to the good old boy,” McKeithan finds it still relies on tropes of traditional white Southern masculinity. “In today’s South,” McKeithan concludes, “Bourbon remains a piece of masculine identity that Southerners can ‘put on,’ much like overalls, a seersucker suit, or a North Carolina twang.”

What happens when women try on the identity that bourbon conveys? Things can get complicated—and, frankly, a little icky—Courtney Balestier writes. “Few drinks have inspired the fetishization of women that whiskey (and its brethren, bourbon and Scotch) has,” Balestier argues in *Punch*. “In the pages of men’s magazines, where ladies appear with swollen busts and shrunken thighs, the woman who loves whiskey has become such a common trope (seriously, take your pick) that she’s already a cliché.” Balestier explores this idealized woman, whom she terms a “bro-girl archetype,” a sexy badass who drinks like a man while suggesting an unmistakably female—er, prowess. Like her soul sister, the rail-thin-yet-busty dream girl who eats rare cheeseburgers and knows her fantasy football stats, the whiskey woman is a carefully curated persona behind a façade. In all likelihood, she went to a lot of trouble to give the impression that she goes to none at all.

Some of this is changing for the better. Women like Alba Huerta in Houston and

Steva Casey in Birmingham are gaining recognition for their work behind the bar. Their drinks aren’t known as “girly” or “masculine”—they’re recognized as smart, and good. In Kentucky, Marianne Barnes of Castle and Key, a chemical engineer with a learned papate, now works as the Bluegrass State’s first female master distiller since Prohibition. She’s not even thirty yet.

So what’s the drinker of any gender to do when trying to navigate the identity politics of the cocktail list? Order what you darn well please. If you enjoy bourbon, go for it. If you’re a burly gentleman with a thirst for vodka and cranberry, you do you. Life is too short to order a drink you don’t really love because you’re trying to be manly, womanly, cool, or “Southern”—whatever that means to you. ☞



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BUFALA NEGRA

recipe by Jerry Slater

Jerry Slater created this drink in 2007, as the cocktail renaissance gathered steam. Some of his customers were initially put off by the idea of balsamic and basil in their bourbon. A decade later, shrubs and drinking vinegars are popular, and herbs of all kinds get to play with booze. Jerry’s network of tipsters has reported spotting this well-balanced drink on menus from Brooklyn to Oakland to Australia.

Garnish: Basil leaf
Service ice: Cubed
Glass: Old-fashioned

Yield: 1 (5½-ounce) cocktail

COCKTAIL

- 1/2 ounce balsamic syrup (see recipe below)
- 5 basil leaves, divided
- 1 brown sugar cube
- 1 1/2 ounces bourbon, such as Buffalo Trace (get it—“bufala”?)
- 2 ounces good-quality ginger beer, such as Blenheim’s hot (look for the red cap)

Place the balsamic syrup, 4 basil leaves, and the sugar cube in a shaker and muddle until sugar dissolves. Add bourbon and ice and shake. Strain into ice-filled glass, add ginger beer, and garnish with remaining basil leaf.

BALSAMIC SYRUP

- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

Place brown sugar, water, and balsamic vinegar in a small saucepan set over medium heat. Cook, stirring continually, until the sugar dissolves, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a glass container and refrigerate, uncovered, until cool. Cover and refrigerate for up to 1 month.

Yield: Approximately 1/2 cup