

LIQUID ASSETS

MANHATTAN . . . TO VERMONT

Putting a Local Twist on a Classic

BY SARAH ZOBEL



At its most elemental level, a cocktail is composed of one or more liquors mixed with some combination of water, sugar, bitters and juice. It's not a new invention by any means—traces of a mixed drink, a grog, that dates back some 9,000 years have been found on pottery shards in China's Yellow River Valley. But cocktail historians point to the late 18th century as the real turning point. That was when Americans first started whipping up cocktails by balancing the sweetness in their punches and slings—which were made of liquor, water and sugar—by adding bitters. Today, drink connoisseurs and office workers who just want to put a stamp on their week can choose from a familiar repertoire of cocktail options, including the Manhattan.

A mix of rye or whiskey, bitters and sweet vermouth, the Manhattan has a distinct taste, and though it's often served in a martini glass the two drinks have little else in common. The Manhattan came first, and some have dubbed it the “king of cocktails.”

As with so many other alcoholic concoctions, the Manhattan's origins are sketchy. Could it have played a small part in American history, or was it an accidental creation, a chance meeting between a near-empty bottle of rye and another of vermouth? What is known for sure is that the original Manhattan was poured sometime in the late 19th century, seemingly the first of many drinks that would use vermouth as a backbone, including the Rob Roy and the Martinez, forerunner to the martini.

The legend—because every great cocktail has a legend behind it—is that the Manhattan was created and served at an autumn 1874 party thrown by Jennie Jerome Churchill to celebrate the election of Samuel Tilden as governor of New York. Tilden was a so-called “Bourbon Democrat”—one of a group of post-Civil War conservative Democrats who supported an end to Reconstruction, among other things. Jennie Churchill was a Brooklyn native who that year had married an Englishman, Lord Randolph Churchill.

It was a busy year for the happy couple: Their eldest son, Winston, the future British prime minister, was born that November. And since Jennie gave birth in Oxfordshire, England, historians say it seems unlikely that in the days of ocean travel she could have been in New York celebrating an election that same month.

What is unquestioned is that the cocktail appears to have originated in the borough for which it is named. Some

Photo by Maria Buteux Reade

adhere to the belief that the drink was invented at and named for the Manhattan Club sometime in the late 1800s. But others, noting that there's no real proof of that, point to William Mulhall's essay "The Golden Age of Booze" in the 1923 *Valentine's Manual of Old New York*, in which he says in passing that the "Manhattan cocktail was invented by a man named Black, who kept a place ten doors below Houston Street on Broadway in the sixties—probably the most famous mixed drink in the world in its time."

Regardless of its origins, the Manhattan is as revered today as it was 150 years ago—there's an annual Manhattan Cocktail Classic competition held in New York City each May, while in Dallas a number of venues host a so-called "Manhattan Project" two or three times a month, to celebrate what they call the ultimate cocktail. The drink is considered a classic—timeless and distinctive.

Though today the Manhattan is often made with bourbon—perhaps in a nod to Governor Tilden and his colleagues—it traditionally called for rye. The recipe below harks back to the original, but with enough Vermont-made products to do any locavore proud. It was adapted by Deirdre Heekin and Caleb Barber, co-proprietors of Osteria Pane e Salute and La Garagista farm winery in Woodstock, Vermont. Deirdre also collaborated with Eden Ice Cider Company in creating Orleans, an aperitif dry cider that's infused with herbs, which stands in for vermouth in this version. 🍁

VERMONT MANHATTAN

Yield: 1 serving

1½ ounces WhistlePig Rye

½ ounce Orleans (or to taste)

½ dropper each of Urban Moonshine Maple and Original Bitters

½ to 1 teaspoon local honey simple syrup (or to taste)

1 WhistlePig-soaked cherry

Pour the liquid ingredients into a shaker together with four to five cubes of ice. Shake or stir. If you like your Manhattan up, strain into your favorite cocktail glass. If you prefer it on the rocks, pour the contents of the shaker into a highball. Those who like a "perfect" or dry Manhattan can leave out the simple syrup.



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