

Shaken or Stirred? What is the "proper way" to mix a martini? Does a bloody mary get the addition of a lime wedge or lemon wedge beyond the celery? Can a true black and tan use English Ale with an Irish Stout? Why in the world would anybody put soda water into a Cape Codder or a Fuzzy Navel? Is it possible the original recipe for a Long Island Iced Tea was a build, not a shaken drink? Can a drink made without 151 rum possibly be called a Zombie? Is the Zombie really a "joke" drink? Let the war wage on ...

Old school classicists take the view that a cocktail is a drink of certain requirements that cannot be deviated from or modified. A martini cannot have juices, syrups, and colorings say the proper bartenders, but must contain vodka or gin as a base and only a whisper of a modifier or flavoring agent. And so these seasoned pros carefully select fresh ingredients and sparkling, polished glassware to enhance the presentation of their work. The new age bartenders have different ideas. To them, a cocktail is simply the masterful (and often airborne) blending of various ingredients that creates an adventure for the palate (and perhaps the soul) and is housed in a cocktail glass. No other restrictions exist, claim the youthful apprentices, and so they pour their chocolate martinis and other deviant drinks made with coconut rum and pineapple juice and call them cocktails. So who's right?

Ask the chicken. Then go ask the egg. Who cares? Isn't it more important that all true bartenders are artists, skilled craftsmen and women who take pleasure and pride in pouring cocktails? Are we that egotistical that we insist there is only one way to perform such a creative craft? Equally, are we so arrogant to dismiss the traditions and time-tested practices of master bartenders who first invented certain libations?

Is it possible that a modern-day master combines both an homage to those who poured before him and yet also innovates and breaks new ground in his or her own time? So right or wrong, tequila in your LI Teas or not; maybe the best measuring stick is to ask the basic question: how tasty are your creations? For just as a recipe for a soufflé does not create itself, nor does a recipe for a cocktail pour itself.

And those dedicated to the craft, from the old school and the new, pay close attention to this simple truth. In the end, who determines the "right way" to pour a cocktail? The person paying for it, of course. And that is why I will shake your martini or stir it... because who am I to tell you how you like your drink? After all, I'm just your bartender. Cheers.

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