

The Bubbly Also Rises by Baroness

A CHAMPAGNE-BASED LIBATION CLOSE TO HEMINGWAY'S HEART

It's uncanny how bubbly mixes brilliantly with almost any liqueur. Just add drops of Chambord, Canton or St. Germain and voila, a sparkling creation. The French do it best with the traditional Kir Royale (Champagne with cassis or black currant liqueur). The Italians are rightfully boastful when it comes to bellinis, the prosecco-peach purée bombshells first made legendary at Harry's Bar in Venice.

In this country, the classic Champagne cocktail begins with a few drops of Angostura bitters splashed onto a sugar cube, followed by a shot of brandy and a Champagne topper. (Note the order: A well-crafted Champagne-based cocktail needs to be precisely assembled, with the sparkling wine always poured last.)

You'd expect La Panetiere in Rye, a picture-perfect Provençal restaurant with wood-beamed ceilings and the traditional blue-and-yellow color scheme, to stick to the standard Kir Royale for their house Champagne cocktail. But Jacques Loupiac, who's owned the place for the last 23 years, had a different idea. His signature drink is more offbeat. Dubbed Celestial Bubbles, it includes vodka, Cointreau and fresh-plucked mint. Years back as captain at Manhattan's old-school French icon La Caravelle, Loupiac watched patrons line up at the bar for the restaurant's signature cocktail (the very drink he now serves at his establishment in Rye).

Like any top-shelf libation there's a story behind it. According to a barman who worked with Loupiac at La Caravelle in the 80s, it was none other than Ernest Hemingway who introduced the drink, when he asked a previous barman to whip one up for him. But while the mint speaks to Hemingway's Cuban connection, the vodka somehow seemed out of sync to me, given the writer's proclivity for rum-based drinks like the papa doble and mojito.

Skeptical of the Hemingway connection, I turned for answers to David Wondrich, the world's foremost authority on cocktails and author of *Imbibe!* "Although he is associated with daiquiris," said Wondrich, just



Papa's Quaff | credits his signature Celestial Bubbles, to Ernest Hemingway, supposedly a favorite of the famed La Caravelle barman. It's his favorite, the nectar of the gods, sugar and

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back from lecturing at New Orleans' Tales of the Cocktail annual event, "Hemingway drank just about everything. He liked Scotch with lime juice and Calvados when he was in France. By the late 50s when he probably came to La Caravelle, everyone was drinking vodka. This cocktail is like a reconfigured French 75, which Hemingway would have known very well. And imitation, as they say, is a form of flattery, so this is one bit of appropriation a writer can be forgiven for—especially because the results are so sensational, if not totally original."

"Hemingway was not a drink inventor, not even a mixologist hobbyist," continues Wondrich. "Instead he popularized drinks. He liked to mix things with Champagne. The other Champagne cocktail he favored was bubbly with a heavy shot of Absinthe. A really rough drink."

Loupiac, amused by my investigation, informed me that ladies especially love his house drink. This lady, too, enjoyed the green-tinged creation with its hybrid Caribbean-French flavors and aromas of mint. For a minute I thought it might be a mojito, but then I was hit by the surprising thrill of its bubbly finish. *

RECIPE Celestial Bubbles



8 fresh mint leaves
1 tsp. granulated sugar
1.5 oz. freshly
squeezed lime juice
1.5 oz. vodka
1.5 oz. Cointreau
6 oz. Champagne

Crush the mint leaves and sugar together until they form a paste. Add the lime juice and shake the sweetened mint-lime blend as if you were making a sour mix. Strain through a sieve over ice, add the vodka and Cointreau, then stir well. Pour into a large burgundy glass, float the champagne to the rim and add a mint sprig for decoration.



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