

Why are they called cocktails?

When defining the classic cocktail, it is impossible not to recall the sophisticated Golden Age of Hollywood, when libations went hand in hand with sultry seductions, cheery celebrations and raucous parties, and evoked the effortless style and sophistication of the movies in which they played a part.

Our selections include the tried and true classic cocktails that pass the test of time. They pay tribute to the era of glamour and glitz from pre-Prohibition America to the 70's and beyond, when our beloved Doris Day and her legendary co-stars lit up the silver screen. From Clark Gable to Greta Garbo, Bogie and Bacall, many screen icons were spotted sipping in key scenes from their movies. Who can forget Mae West's introduction of the line "You ought to get out of those wet clothes and into a dry martini" in the 1937 film "Every Day's a Holiday", or Bogart complaining "...of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine" in 1942's "Casablanca"?

So where did the term come from? There are several stories of the etymology of "cocktail" but none are confirmed fact. One version has it that during the Revolutionary war, in a tavern near Elmsford, New York, French and American soldiers would mix their spirits together during toasts that occurred later in the evening. On one such evening of camaraderie and merriment

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one of the soldiers stole a rooster from the tavern's Tory Supporting neighbor, whereupon the customers of the tavern promptly cooked and served the bird and garnished their cups with the rooster's tail feathers, celebrating their adventure.

A differing theory claims that leftover liquors from drinks served were dumped into a ceramic container shaped like a rooster, and you could get cheap drinks from a tap set in the tail of the rooster; hence these drinks were called "cock's tail." A third legend that has its beginnings in New Orleans during the 1800s contends that the word "cocktail" is derived from the use of serving these mixed spirit drinks in a "coquetier" - a French double-ended egg-cup.

During Prohibition the cocktail provided many a speakeasy a palatable method of serving up some extremely low quality alcohol. Because of the laws prohibiting legal - and monitored - distillation of alcohol there was a great amount of bad tasting, low quality and even sometimes dangerous liquor being brewed. Bathtub gin, being the easiest and cheapest to manufacture, became a staple of clandestine drinking establishments of the day. To hide the bad taste and quality, clever purveyors of illegal booze would mix in other ingredients and serve their concoctions in fancy dress (garnishes and unique glassware) to make their "cocktails" palatable. Interestingly, the cocktail became a catalyst for the breakdown of class and gender boundaries, as members of disparate classes came together to imbibe after being collectively forced underground to drink alcohol.

While the debate will no doubt continue, most of us can agree that there is a perfect cocktail for every time of day, or celebration. Read on, and try one of the many classics we have to offer. You're sure to find something new and exciting, or to re-discover an old friend.

Here's lookin' at you, kid.