



CLASSIC COCKTAILS

COME AND GONE AND COME AGAIN

by Dick Odom

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“Old-Fashioned or Newfangled, the Old-Fashioned Is Back”.

Such was the title of an article by Robert Simonson that appeared in the New York Times on March 20, 2012. Simonson credits the tv series “Mad Men” for having brought this cocktail back into vogue. The drink, popular in the 1960s—when the series is set—fell into relative obscurity by 2000. The hero of the series, Don Draper was given to “dip his beak into an old-fashioned or three” in a given episode. The series ran from 2007 to 2015 and Simonson opines that the resurgence of the cocktail’s popularity “dovetails” with the arrival of “Mad Men”.

Whether or not old Don Draper was the catalyst for renewed interest in this grand old drink, it appears that in the years that the series was running there was a resurgence in the popularity of many of the classic old cocktails that were popular in the 50s, 60s and 70s...read Manhattans, Sazeracs, Mint Julips, etc.

My first Bartender’s Guide was Trader Vic’s, first published in 1947 and revised in 1972. This certainly brackets the series’ days of old Don Draper. Trader Vic offers 4 recipes for Old-Fashioneds. None of these perfectly mirror the one that I see and use most often, so I will take liberties and give you my best rendition with the help of old Trader Vic.

Old-Fashioned—My Way

½ sugar cube (or ¼ teaspoon)

1 dash Angostura bitters

½ ounce water

1 ½ ounces Bulleit Bourbon

Orange peel

Put the sugar cube in a rocks or old fashioned glass. Dash bitters on the cube. Add water. Muddle. Add one large or two medium ice cubes then the bourbon and stir for a few turns. Add a large twist of orange peel (no pith).

Old-Fashioneds can be made with bourbon or rye, either are acceptable depending on your taste or the tastes of your guests. I choose to go in between and use a high rye bourbon such as the Bulleit County that is 68% corn, 28% rye, and 4% malted barley (malt). Bulleit bourbon is 90 proof so I use ½ ounce of water rather than a teaspoon (plenty for typical muddling) to bring down the APV. You probably already know this, but in order to be called bourbon a whiskey must be at least 51% corn and to be called rye it must be at least 51% rye. The rye is much more peppery than corn and I choose to slight on the pepper in favor of the mellowness of the corn. I think this is especially important if you're serving the old-fashioned as an aperitif.

Liquor.com lists the Old-Fashioned as its number one most popular cocktail as of March 2023. In an article from February 2022 liquor.com has the Old-Fashioned ranked as number five with the Manhattan taking its place at the top. In this list the **Sazerac** ranks at number 8. I've chosen to follow the Old-Fashioned discussion with a discussion of the Sazerac because

they are so closely related. Liquor.com in June 2023 says it is a “close cousin” to the Old Fashioned. In an article for Paste magazine in May 2016, Jim Sabataseo wrote “screw the Old Fashioned, order a Sazerac instead”. His point was that over many years bartenders had gotten away from a simple Old Fashioned and started making a fruit salad out of it by garnishing with orange slices, lemon slices, cherries and even pineapple. The Sazerac has been kept simple...probably because its city of origin helps keep it that way.

The **Sazerac** was created in the mid-1800s at the Sazerac Coffee House in the French Quarter of the city known for its cocktails and revelry. My first “New Orleans” Sazerac was at Pascal’s Manale (known for its barbeque shrimp) located about ten blocks west of the Garden District on Napoleon. When the waiter took our drink orders I ordered the Sazerac and said that I wanted to watch the bartender make it, and he said to come on back to the bar.

The bartender was about my height (I topped out at about five seven back then) and he had big hands—figured he had made somebody a good point guard at some time. First thing he did was take a chilled rocks glass and pour a smidge of Pernod (Absinthe was still forbidden in the US because of the toxins it contained). With that he threw the glass in the air about six feet, spinning it at the same time, caught it and spun it in the air one more time completely coating the inside of the glass, then poured out the excess. He then followed by putting a sugar cube in a second glass and doused that with a few dashes of Peychaud’s bitters, muddled that, poured in a good shot of rye

whiskey, put in some ice, stirred a few times and then strained the concoction into the Pernod coated glass. He then squeezed a lemon peel over the top to release the lemon oil then placed the peel on the side of the glass as garnish. Viola!

I was, and still am not fond of too sweet drinks, but now when I make the drink at home, I cut the sugar by half and that with the, now Absinthe, by my taste, gives it just the right sweetness.

Sazerac—My Way

1 ½ teaspoons Absinthe

½ teaspoon simple syrup

3 dashes Peychaud's bitters

1 ½ ounces Basil Haydens Bourbon

Lemon peel

Coat one chilled rocks glass with Absinthe. Spritzing is easiest. Pour off any excess. Pour the Basil Haydens over a few rocks in a mixing glass, strain into the Absinthe coated glass. Squeeze a good slice of lemon peel over the glass to release its oils then use the peel as garnish.

As with the Old Fashioned, I use a high rye bourbon. The Basil Haydens is 63% corn, 27% rye, and 10% malt. This drink can make a good aperitif or digestif pairing well with a variety of sweets because of the herbals in the bitters and the anise flavor of the Absinthe.

Enough for this writing...**MORE TO COME!** In the meantime "fellows", keep on cookin', dining and enjoying those libations.