

Wine With Liquor. Never Sicker?

A Look at Wine in Cocktails

Article and Photo by M.Quinn Sweeney

Wine cocktails were what we drank backpacking across Europe at 19 - before we knew better. No longer relegated to bottomless Bellini brunch specials and champagne cocktails served to octogenarian knitting circles, cocktails made with wine are making a resurgence on the American bar scene.

The tradition reaches back centuries, as recorded in the wine punch recipes of 17th century British sailors, and many genesis stories of “the cocktail” are rooted in first meaning a mix of wine and spirits. One dates back to the Revolutionary War, when American and French officers would pour between glasses to show solidarity, mixing the wine preferred by the French with the gin and whiskey of locals. When a rooster was stolen from a Tory and its feathers used to adorn drinks, they toasted, “vive le cocktail!”



As pre-prohibition cocktails have been coming back into vogue, cocktails with wine are appearing on menus across the country. Death in the Afternoon, Ernest Hemingway’s absinthe and champagne drink, has become a standard, French 75 is a perennial classic, and creative twists on the classics have popped up, like the Lavender French 75 at Midi in Ssan Francisco and the NY Sour at Schiller’s Liquor Bar.

Sparkling wines add effervescence without diluting, while dessert wines, and fortified wines like sherry, port and vermouth are most commonly used in cocktails, offering potency rivaling liqueurs and adding complexity to a drink.

In creating wine cocktails, balance is key, requiring careful measurement. For contriving your own wine cocktails, start with your favorite cocktail recipes and, tablespoon at a time, substitute wine for one ingredient, or add it to a cocktail.

Tip: like crafty 19th century bartenders, you can make the most of wine past its prime by cooking a wine syrup just like simple syrup. Combine equal parts left-over wine and sugar in a saucepan. Over medium heat, bring to a boil just long enough to dissolve the sugar. Try substituting this for a fortified wine or liqueur in a favorite cocktail recipe.

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*< Joie de Midi at Midi in SF,
made with Sparkling Grüner Veltliner*