

OSCAR WILDE liked to say that he drank to keep body and soul apart, and it is in this same devil-may-care spirit that Harry Craddock, the esteemed mixologist, created *The Savoy Cocktail Book*. Craddock tended bar at the Savoy, the legendary hotel in London's West End, for years in the earlier part of this century, and he collected more than 800 of his favorite—and, frequently, most intoxicating—concoctions in a handsome, brightly illustrated little volume whose cover nicely conveys the drinks' appeal, as it shows a man sipping a cocktail, a thunderbolt zinging from his lips to his heart.

The title page summarizes the book's encyclopedic contents: "Being in the main a complete compendium of the Cocktails, Rickeys, Daisies, Slings, Shrubs, Smashes, Fizzes, Juleps, Cobblers, Fixes, and other Drinks, known and vastly appreciated in this year of grace 1930 . . ."—the year of the book's publication. *The Savoy Cocktail*

## Potions for Palate and Soul

The Savoy Cocktail Book, playfully evoking glorious days long past, really belongs on the poetry shelf

*Book* exists now, alas, only in a facsimile edition, available through the Savoy.

Although this book was intended to be taken literally as a cookbook for mixed drinks, it reads now, in the lamentable Lite era, as poetry. Consider the Diana Cocktail:

"Use Port Wine Glass.

"Fill with Shaved Ice.

"Fill Glass  $\frac{3}{4}$  full with White Crème de Menthe and top with Brandy."

As much as a Fred Astaire movie or an Evelyn Waugh novel does, these few lines fully evoke the heyday of the swanky set between the wars. Having read this recipe, who does not know Diana? And whose fingers do not itch to grasp that brimming Port Wine Glass and get to know her even better?

Actually, for practical reasons, we may have to consign the book to the poetry shelf. Some of the ingredients and supplies required are now so arcane it is hard to imagine being able to concoct these potions, let alone imbibe them. What, for instance, is a "French drip spoon"? And I fear my local supermarket does not stock kümmel, Byrrh, Charbreux, orgeat syrup or Fernet Branca, which the anonymous editors, in one of their many wonderful asides, note is a "marvelous headache cure."

The book begins with "A Few Hints for the Young Mixer" that well establish the volume's jaunty attitude. Intones rule number four: "Shake the shaker as hard as you can: don't just rock it: you are trying to wake it up, not send it to sleep!" And number six: "Drink your Cocktail as soon as possible." Harry Craddock was asked what the best way was to drink a cocktail: "Quickly," replied the great man, "while it's laughing at you!"

And then, with Craddock as our guide, we are off on an extraordinary tour of the many provinces of bacchanalia. We start with the Abbey Cocktail, which is at least *some* compensation for a vow of chastity; it combines dry gin, something called Kina Lillet, orange juice and a dash of Angostura bitters. We end, almost 200 pages later, with, appropriately enough, the Zed, which would finish anything off, as it consists of equal parts

(continued on page 76)



GEOFF SPEAR

## elements of style

(continued from page 67) of "Hercules" (God only knows what that is) and Calvados or apple brandy.

Along the way, we take in the Manhattan, as well as *The Harvard is made with brandy and vermouth. Boola boola.* the Los Angeles, which consists of four "hookers" of whiskey, four teaspoonfuls of sugar, a dash of vermouth and a raw egg, and is meant for four (if you can find four who'll drink it); the Charleston, which is made up of a

little of everything (kirsch, Maraschino and curaçao liqueurs, plus gin and two kinds of vermouth); the Chicago (brandy and champagne); the Montpelier (a martini with a "pickled pearl onion"); and, inevitably, the London (gin plus absinthe, bitters and syrup). As part of our education, we sample a Harvard (brandy and vermouth), a Yale (basically, straight gin) and a Princeton (gin and port). And we meet some very interesting people, such as Mr. Johnnie Mack, who gave his name to a drink that mixes orange curaçao and sloe gin; John Wood, known for his explosive combination of Irish whiskey, Italian vermouth, lemon juice, kümmel and bitters; and my own personal favorite, Saucy Sue, who goes for brandy and Calvados with absinthe and apricot brandy.

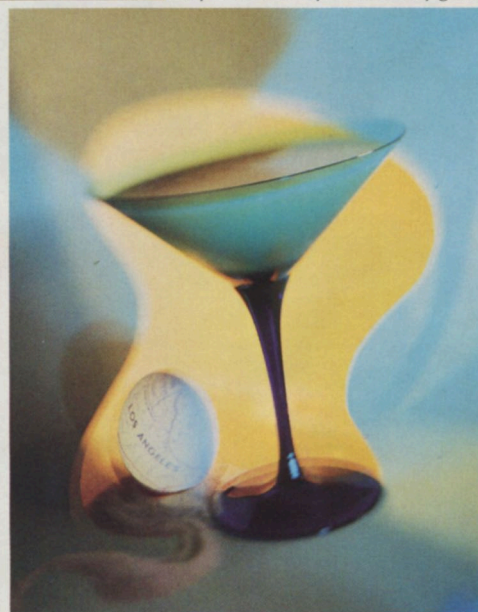
We also pick up some useful medical prescriptions, such as the Desert Healer, the Health Cocktail and the Corpse Reviver Nos. 1 and 2, the second of which, the editors caution, is so potent that "four of these taken in swift succession will unrevive the corpse again." And some romantic aids, such as the Bosom Caresser, the Cupid, the Bunny Hug and—watch out—the Monkey Gland. But most of the drinks are probably too combustible for a quiet night with a lady. The names connote their firepower: Depth Bomb, Depth Charge, Earthquake, Hurricane, Third Rail (No. 2) ("Better than 11,000 volts"), Thunderclap, Torpedo, T.N.T.

London in 1930 might have been the very apogee of the mixed drink. The United States, of course, was still in the grip of Prohibition, which, if *The Savoy Cocktail Book* is any indication, may have inspired Europeans to new heights of bibulosity. Craddock kindly included a few "Cocktails Suitable for a Prohibition Country," and all of them contain ample quantities of alcohol. One, *The Los Angeles includes four "hookers" of whiskey.* the Oh Harry!, is a kind of hymn to intemperance, as it consists almost exclusively of liquor, in this case two thirds "hooch whisky," one third vermouth and a lump of sugar saturated with raspberry syrup or grenadine. That lump is a lovely Craddock touch.

They don't mix 'em like that anymore, unfortunately.

In the hope of getting a taste of these past glories, I carried my *Savoy Cocktail Book* to my local barkeep, Rick. He flipped through the pages in growing astonishment and stopped dead at the Corn Popper. "They really use corn in this!" he exclaimed. Sure enough, the recipe did indeed call for corn—a pint of corn, to be precise. The recipe also requires a half-pint of cream, two egg whites and a tablespoonful of grenadine. Unfortunately, Rick was fresh out of corn. So in the spirit of the occasion, I selected the Journalist Cocktail. Essentially a juiced-up version of the martini, it calls for two thirds gin, one sixth "French" vermouth and another sixth of "Italian" vermouth—a distinction lost on Rick and myself—plus two dashes of lemon juice, two dashes of curaçao and a dash of Angostura bitters. Rick didn't have any Angostura bitters, so I told him just to give me the regular kind. And, put off by the French and Italian business, we decided just to go with a double helping of dry vermouth.

Rick served my drink to me in a martini glass. The liquid was faintly yellow and slightly blurry, like the air over the highway on a hot day. I raised my glass to him.



*The Los Angeles includes four "hookers" of whiskey.*

"To your health," I said.

"To an easier liquor book," he answered.

I ignored him and took a sip. A little tart, I thought at first. But then I realized the drink was just laughing at me. Before the glass was empty, I was laughing back.

—JOHN SEDGWICK