

## **Q&As with the 5 best bartenders in the world**

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**Tell us about cocktail trends for winter 2012. What are the most au courant ingredients, liquors?**

It was a trend last year to make your own bitters and that's not gone out of fashion. Some bartenders are even making their own vermouths and aging their cocktails. There's always going to be a new vodka, whiskey or gin on the block, which is good because I think it's much more interesting to see bartenders making their own product. I think we'll see more of that.

**What's the secret to making a great cocktail?**

I would give the same advice to someone starting out as to someone who's been making cocktails forever: Keep it simple. Start with one base alcohol, one perfuming agent (liqueur or bitters) and a body (soda, vermouth, champagne, milk or things like that). That's it.

And make it fresh. When you make a lovely cocktail like a Bloody Mary, why not go back to the roots and make your own freshly pressed tomato juice, mix it with vodka and possibly use fresh ginger rather than ground pepper to spice it up slightly? It's marvelous to smell real tomatoes. It's fresh, simple and classic.

**What is totally out of fashion at the moment?**

I hesitate to say anything is in or out of fashion. There is immense individuality out there with different bartenders going through different ways of thinking. None of us are actually doing the same thing at the same time. And it depends where a bartender is at in his or her career. There's a gentleman here in Paris who likes freezing cocktails with liquid nitrogen, which is fine, bravo, but I'll never do that. The individuality of the industry makes it so that anything could be in or out.

**What are your favourite/least favourite ingredients to work with?**

*Favourite*

My favourite for a long time is Calvados, which is an apple brandy. It has a very beautiful *eau de vie*, is twice distilled and aged in oak barrels. It's a very honest alcohol. When you get people to try a whiskey or cognac and you ask them what they can taste, they say whiskey or cognac, but with Calvados they say apples.

### *Least favourite*

Just like Ernest Hemingway, my least favourite product is probably vermouth. I'm not a fan of Italian vermouth, but I can tolerate French vermouth. I find the quality is far better and the degree of alcohol is higher. The French vermouth tends to have a communication with the person who is enjoying them; the Italian vermouths tend to bore me.

### **What's your most requested cocktail?**

The cocktail of the Hemingway Bar is the Serendipity. [See recipe below]. It refers to when you find what you've always been looking for without knowing you've been looking for it. We'd sell 60 a night. I created it in 1994 for a friend and I'm so attached to it I've had it engraved on the back of my watch.

### **What's your most unusual request?**

I will do anything and make anything, so nothing is unusual to me. However, the most unusual thing that happened to me in the Hemingway Bar was when a gentleman visiting from San Diego said he liked the bar so much he would come back and bring 20 girls he knew to celebrate his birthday in the bar. He asked me to make reservations for 20 rooms for 20 girls. Months later, he came back and celebrated his birthday with all of his friends, including the 20 girls.

### **What's the recipe for your signature cocktail?**

#### Serendipity

½	tsp	White sugar
2/10		Calvados
3/10		Apple juice
5/10		Champagne

Glass: Tall tumbler

Preparation: Pour directly into tumbler

Garnish: One large branch of fresh mint with leaves intact

### **How did you get into the business? What are the highlights of your career so far?**

I got into the business because whenever my father would take me to a restaurant in London, he was always very impressed by the headwaiters. He would tell me to stand up and shake their hand. He had tremendous respect for these people and I suppose I came up with wanting to be one of them. I was enamoured with service.

I went to hotel school in France when I was 19. I worked at a restaurant in tails and I would carve and that was lovely, but what I didn't enjoy was that as a headwaiter you're totally reliant on another service: cuisine. A bartender is totally responsible from A to Z of the speed, service, quality, menu, design and character of the bar. By the time I was 22 I was a silver medallist in France for knowledge in alcohol and six months later I became number two in the Martini Grand Prix. I've worked at The Ritz for 19 years now and have won a number of cocktail competitions. I'm regularly asked to consult for hotels and restaurants around the world to improve their bar and their cocktail menus. I also judge cocktail competitions and travel frequently to help with events and staff training all over the world.

But one of the things I'm most proud of is creating the Meilleur Ouvrier and Meilleur Apprenti de France (Best Work and Best Apprentice) exams, which is a degree-level qualification for bartenders accredited by Paris-Sorbonne University. I'm president of this apprentice school and spend a great deal of time with teachers and students to show them you can have a marvelous time as a creative artist. You can meet beautiful people and have adventures all over the world. It's a wonderful profession and I like to be an apostle.

### **What's your prediction for 2013 cocktail trends?**

I don't know if it's a prediction or just wishing on a star, but I'd like to see more custom tapas, beautiful little dishes to go with cocktails. I would love to see hotel restaurants doing menus that feature the appropriate cocktail to go with each dish rather than just wines. I recently did an event and for each dish we served a special cocktail. It was lovely.

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**Tell us about cocktail trends for winter 2012. What are the most au courant ingredients, liquors?**

I think we're going to see a lot more winter warmers, scotch whiskies, scotch punches, a little more cognac and definitely some different vermouths. We have access to different styles of vermouths in Ontario right now by special order with wine agencies. People come in and are cold and aren't looking for mojitos and sangrias, they're looking for something rich and warm. Mulled wine and warm scotch punches will also be served, especially around the holidays.

**What's the secret to making a great cocktail?**

My advice for a perfectly balanced cocktail is to look into the old cocktails from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when the most treasured cocktails were created. If you learn how to make things like the Manhattan and the Negroni or Old Fashioned, you're set. The reason these drinks are still around today is because they're perfectly balanced, delicious drinks that are simple to make. All it takes is a spirit, a bitter agent and a sweetening agent. When you learn that a cocktail should be simple, then you can start playing around with your own creations.

**What is totally out of fashion at the moment?**

Flavoured spirits, like vodkas or anything with a flavour of fruit in it. Nowadays people don't want to use any [liquor] with raspberry or espresso because making a good cocktail is the same idea as making a good dish: you want to use real, fresh ingredients. If I'm making a drink with raspberries, I'm going to use real raspberries. The flavoured alcohol trend was big in the 1990s and early 2000s, but it's gone away now.

**What are your favourite/least favourite ingredients to work with?**

*Favourite*

I love working with Campari. It's an Italian aperitif that's nice and bitter. Instead of using cocktail bitters, I love using Campari as a bittering agent for my cocktails. It's something I drink quite a bit myself. My favourite cocktail is Negroni, gin, Campari

and sweet vermouth. It's a good example of a classic cocktail that's very simple and easily balanced out.

### *Least favourite*

Fruit flavoured liquers. I don't like using them because they're artificial. I'd rather use fresh ingredients, like a real banana, cocoa or orange rather than a bad imitation.

### **What's your most requested cocktail?**

At our bar, there are two that are constantly requested. The Athol Brose [see recipe below] is an ancient Scottish traditional beverage dating back to the 1400s. It's a beautiful example of what a cocktail should be with single malt scotch, honey syrup, frothed cream and shaved nutmeg.

The other is the Ronald Clayton, which I created and named after my grandfather. It's a cocktail featuring vanilla-infused whiskey, tobacco tincture and maple bitters.

### **What's your most unusual request?**

I had a cocktail writer from San Francisco come into the bar two years ago on one of those nights where I was slammed at the bar. The woman came up to the bar, gave me her card and said, "I'll take tequila, vanilla, ginger and pumpkin. Make it work." I had no access to pumpkin – it wasn't even the right time of year – but I made her a tequila cocktail that she claimed to enjoy.

### **What's the recipe for your signature cocktail?**

Athol Brose

Coupe

1½	oz	Honey syrup
1½	oz	Auchentoshen 12-year-old Scotch
2	oz	Frothed (not whipped) 35% cream

Glass: Coupe

Preparation: Stir the scotch and honey syrup over ice and strain into glass. Serve straight up. Dry shake the cream for about 30 seconds and gently spoon on top.

Garnish: Grated nutmeg

Honey Syrup

1	cup	Hot water
1	cup	Honey

Combine the water and honey in a mixing bowl and stir to dissolve the honey. Transfer into a bottle and refrigerate for up to three weeks.

**How did you get into the business? What are the highlights of your career so far?**

Over the past 17 years I've worked in numerous bars throughout my travels around this beautiful planet and have discovered a passion for working behind the bar. For the most part, I grew up working in cocktail bars but found myself working at some saloons, taverns and clubs as well. I have always felt more at home working in the smaller "gin joints," you could say.

When I showed up in Toronto in 2002, I spent several years creating and operating Czechoski on Queen Street West with my co-partner Bradley Denton. In 2007, I created The Harbord Room with my good friends and co-partners Chris Shiki and Cory Vitiello.

When I'm not at The Harbord Room, I act as president of The Canadian Professional Bartenders Association, Ontario Chapter. I'm passionate about sharing and building the cocktail community in Toronto and across Canada.

**What's your prediction for 2013 cocktail trends?**

I think we'll see a lot more refreshing libations over the year to come, easier drinking tipples that you can have more than one of and it won't put you on the floor. There will be a movement to less booze forward drinks.

People are also hot for brown spirits lately (everyone has a hate on for vodka). And I think we'll see more tequila coming up. There will be a lot of nice gins readily available in the upcoming months as well. I definitely see more cocktails with fresh juices and sodas, sparkling drinks.

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**Tell us about cocktail trends for winter 2012. What are the most au courant ingredients, liquors?**

People are drinking a lot more brown spirits than they did in past years, so I think we're going to see a lot more people diving into the world of whiskey and drinks that are deeper, richer and bolder in flavour.

I also anticipate a resurgence in hot drinks. I've seen a growing trend towards them in the last couple of years. I think people forgot that there are a beautiful array of warm or hot drinks out there and I'd like to try to bring that back in.

**What's the secret to making a great cocktail?**

Find the right balance between sweetness and acidity. People aren't into sweet drinks anymore, so I think bartenders are afraid of using even tiny bits of sugar. But it's amazing how much the smallest bit of sugar and another splash of acidity will give to a drink. When judging competitions I've come across cocktails that lack depth of character, are much too lean and finish too quickly. If they're open to it, I'll work with entrants to remake the recipe and we'll add another 1/8 oz of simple syrup and whatever acidity they've used in the same amount and they'll realize we've not made the drink sweeter or more sour, but we've increased the mouth feel and opulence and, in doing so, given it a longer finish. It's an "aha" moment for most people!

**What is totally out of fashion at the moment?**

I don't know if anything will ever totally be out of fashion. There are always going to be people who want different things. I don't want to kill any cocktail because I want people who sit down in front of me to have every option.

**What are your favourite/least favourite ingredients to work with?**

*Favourite*

Gin. It's almost a cocktail within itself because of the diversity of flavour. We can either choose to hide it in a cocktail or highlight and let it stake its own voice.

There's a plethora of expressions that can be delivered through the choice of botanicals [distillers] decide to use and the balance they achieve in the use of them. Different brands have different ways of highlighting the notes. It's an incredibly versatile liquor.

#### *Least favourite*

Agave syrup. People get it confused with agave *nectar* but agave syrup has been processed so much that the effects on our body are similar to when we ingest high fructose corn syrup. A little dash of healthier forms of sweetener like honey, maple syrup, raw sugar, beet sugar or unprocessed cane sugar go a long way in creating a richer, more opulent mouth feel in a cocktail.

#### **What's your most requested cocktail?**

There's a little cocktail I created called Kakkoi, which means cool in Japanese. [See recipe below.] Every single person we've ever served it to has absolutely adored it. We serve hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them every month. It's by far our top-selling cocktail.

#### **What's your most unusual request?**

In my mind we don't get that many strange requests. My favourite drink to make for people is the one they want to have.

If I had to name one I would say that it's when people ask for a 1 oz martini, which is odd because most martini drinkers like the taste and hit of alcohol. I guess that would fall into the unusual category.

#### **What's the recipe for your signature cocktail?**

##### Kakkoi (Individual)

1½	oz	Gin
¾	oz	Ume Plum Wine
¾	oz	Cinnamon Syrup
1	oz	Lemon Juice

Glass: Old fashioned/rocks glass

Preparation: Shake and strain over ice sphere

Garnish: Cinnamon stick

Cinnamon Syrup: Boil 1L of water with two cinnamon sticks until reduced to 500ml. Remove cinnamon sticks, add 1000 ml of sugar and simmer until dissolved. Cool before using.

##### Kakkoi (Batch)



21 oz Gin  
10 oz Ume Plum Wine  
10 oz Cinnamon Syrup  
14 oz Lemon Juice  
10 oz Water

Glass: Large Pitcher (3 litre)

Preparation: Build in Pitcher over ice

Garnish: Cinnamon sticks

Cinnamon Syrup: Boil 1L of water with two cinnamon sticks until reduced to 500 ml. Remove cinnamon sticks, add 1000 ml of sugar and simmer until dissolved. Cool before serving.

### **How did you get into the business? What are the highlights of your career so far?**

I have over two and a half decades of professional service experience both in front and behind the bar. Under my guidance, West has developed into one of the largest and most diverse selections of liquor in Vancouver. I believe that a diversity of skills, attention to detail and extensive product knowledge is the key to running a successful bar, as well as providing the guest with a memorable experience each and every time.

Highlights of my career include:

- o Bartender of the Year, Vancouver Magazine 2008
- o Bartender of the Year, Urban Diner Restaurant Awards 2008
- o Premier Cru Award, Vancouver Magazine 2007
- o "Best Mixologist in Canada", National Grey Goose "Arbiter of Cool" 2007
- o "Best Bartender Pacific Northwest" Art of the Cocktail Festival 2009
- o "Top 40 Foodies under 40" Western Living Magazine 2009
- o World finalist – 3rd place...G'Vine "Gin Connoisseur Program" 2011
- o Canadian Winner – Bombay Sapphire GQ Magazine Competition 2011
- o Finalist "World's Most Imaginative Bartender" Bombay Sapphire 2012
- o Winner "World's Most Imaginative Bartender" Bombay Sapphire 2012
- o Panelist "Tales of the Cocktail" New Orleans 2012

### **What's your prediction for 2013 cocktail trends?**

I definitely think gin is going to continue on its rise. People are less afraid of it because there are a plethora of bartenders out there who are talking gin and describing it better, which makes it easier for people to get their heads around it.

I also see tons of Tiki cocktail revivals happening with people diving into the world of rum. Our memories of [Tiki drinks] are that they are cloyingly sweet and syrupy,

but there are a host of cocktails where alcohol is more forward with an accent of tropical flavour. It's always great to keep a few tropical cocktail options a year round to give people a five-minute holiday.

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**Tell us about cocktail trends for winter 2012. What are the most au courant ingredients, liquors?**

I think tea is something that's been coming on strong for years, so I think we're going to see more of that, as well as coffee, in winter warmers. With winter, I typically switch from white spirits to brown spirits. This year I'm looking at more powerful flavours. Apple brandy is one I'm definitely working on right now.

**What's the secret to making a great cocktail?**

Know the person you're making it for. If you pick the wrong cocktail for someone, they're not going to like it no matter how perfect you think it is. You need to know the individual you're making the drink for and play to their tastes.

I usually ask if they have a spirit preference or if there's something they don't like. I might ask, "What's your favourite drink?" which says a lot about what kind of palate they have and whether it's sour or sweet. There are ways you can get information from someone to pair them with the right drink.

**What is totally out of fashion at the moment?**

The martini in a v-shaped glass. When I say martini I mean something like the Cosmopolitan. Martini used to be an umbrella term for the mixed drink and they were always served in v-shaped glasses. That's definitely out of style. People have definitely moved on from drinking Apple Martinis or vodka plus fresh fruit juice and more toward classic cocktails, drinks you can find in old books and pretty easily recreate.

**What are your favourite/least favourite ingredients to work with?**

*Favourite*

I like working with tequila because if you look back at the history of mixed drinks, tequila was never a part of that so there's been a lot of new ground to cover. It allows you to sort of choose your own adventure, make your own path.

### *Least favourite*

For me, vodka is most challenging. I don't hate [working with] it, but the goal of a great cocktail is to showcase the base spirit and when it's so subtle, like in the case of pure vodka, it's challenging.

### **What's your most requested cocktail?**

The Benton's Old Fashioned. [See recipe below.] It's a drink created in 2007 by a bartender called Don Lee. Crazy enough, it's bacon fat infused bourbon with maple syrup and bitters served over one big cube of ice. It's named after Allan Benton, a pig farmer in Tennessee who makes the most incredible bacon. People love it and can't get enough of it.

### **What's your most unusual request?**

As a bartender, people ask you for the craziest things so I do my best not to be surprised by what's next. A lot of being a bartender is rolling with the punches, I try not to judge. Sometimes people will come from another bar and say they had this great drink over there and can you make me that? That's a challenging request to figure out what drink it was and if you can make it. It's a Sherlock Holmes type of thing.

### **What's the recipe for your signature cocktail?**

#### Benton's Old Fashioned

2	oz	Benton's Bacon Infused Four Roses Bourbon
¼	oz	Deep Mountain Grade B Maple Syrup
2	dashes	Angostura Bitters

Glass: Rocks glass

Preparation: Stir with ice and strain into a chilled glass filled with one large ice cube

Garnish: Orange twist

#### Benton's Bacon Infused Four Roses Bourbon

1 ½	oz	Benton's Bacon Fat
750	ml	Bottle of Four Roses Bourbon

On low heat, warm bacon fat in a small saucepan. Stir until it becomes molten, about 5 minutes. Pour liquid fat into a large, non-reactive container. Pour bourbon into the container with the fat. Stir. Cover and let stand for 4 hours. After 4 hours, place the container in the freezer for two hours. After 2 hours, remove solid fat. Strain through a terry cloth or cheesecloth. Pour contents back into the original bottle and label. Yield: 24 oz.

**How did you get into the business? What are the highlights of your career so far?**

My career began in 1995 as a student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison when I worked my way through school as a bartender. In 2002, I moved to New York City where I worked in fine dining. Between 2004-2007, I tended bar at Pegu Club and Gramercy Tavern, where my work was recognized with a rising star award by StarChefs.com.

In 2007, I partnered with Crif Dogs founder Brian Shebairo to open PDT, a hidden cocktail lounge attached to the legendary East Village hot dog stand. In 2009, I received a rising star award from Cheers Magazine and the Spirited Award for American Bartender of the Year at Tales of the Cocktail.

I'm also the deputy editor of Food & Wine Magazine's annual cocktail book and a contributing editor of Sommelier Journal. And I work as a senior advisor to Banks 5 Island Rum. I have designed my own bartender bag and chef's rollup with Virginia based leather goods company, Moore & Giles.

Last year, my book [\*The PDT Cocktail Book: The Complete Bartender's Guide from the Celebrated Speakeasy\*](#) was published.

**What's your prediction for 2013 cocktail trends?**

I'm not a trendy person; I try to be a trendsetter. As for what I'm going to be working on next year, it depends on a lot of things, including the outcome of the election (the economy will have a lot to do on what people are drinking) and on new products, technology and glassware.

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**Tell us about cocktail trends for winter 2012. What are the most au courant ingredients, liquors?**

In the last few years we've seen the rebirth of the classic cocktail with a vengeance. We saw bars starting to create a speakeasy atmosphere, so obviously the classic and stronger cocktail seems to be coming back. We're also seeing cocktails that have been aged in barrels. Bitters, such as Amari, are becoming more popular as well, even in America.

**What's the secret to making a great cocktail?**

Never be scared to experiment. Go to anybody's house and you'll find an orange or a lemon or half a pineapple. These are ingredients you can use in a drink. Put the pineapple in a glass and extract the juice, then put a shot of rum and a little bit of sugar and you have a drink in there! With a bottle of Canadian Club, you can make a Manhattan with vermouth and a dust of bitter. A great drink doesn't have to be complex or complicated. Get a good book, follow the recipe and have fun with it.

**What is totally out of fashion at the moment?**

The Apple Martini was very popular and now nobody's asking for it. Badly made drinks are also out of fashion. Any good bar will try to make a great drink more than just "do." At one time if you asked for an Old Fashioned, a bartender would make it in 20 seconds, now he'll make it in 3 to 5 minutes because he knows he needs to take care. Bad bartending is definitely out of fashion.

**What are your favourite/least favourite ingredients to work with?**

*Favourite*

Bitters because I am Italian and I like Campari. I love to play with bitter.

*Least favourite*

I don't like sweet drinks. Every cocktail should balance sweetness and sourness. When you use a fine ingredient and sweeten it, it doesn't matter how good it is, you want to wash away the sweetness.

**What's your most requested cocktail?**

I'm known for making the best martini cocktail on the planet: The Breakfast Martini. [See recipe below.] It is a modern classic that's popular throughout the world. It has texture and a bittersweet flavor that comes from marmalade.

### **What's your most unusual request?**

One Christmas a customer asked me for eggnog, so I started to break a few eggs and he said, "I can't have eggs, I have high cholesterol." I said, "Okay, I'll use just brandy." He said, "I can't use brandy because I'm on an antibiotic." So I was left with the option to give him milk and nutmeg, but he was very happy because he was dreaming that it was eggnog.

### **What's the recipe for your signature cocktail?**

Breakfast Martini

50	ml	Gin
15	ml	Cointreau
15	ml	Fresh lemon juice
1	full bar spoon	Thin cut orange marmalade

Glass: Cocktail

Preparation: Pour all the ingredients into a shaker filled with ice. Shake and strain into a chilled glass.

Garnish: Shredded orange peel on top

### **How did you get into the business? What are the highlights of your career so far?**

I have over 30 years of experience in the business. I developed my talent for combining flavours at an early age while working in a bar in Maiori, a small village on Italy's Amalfi Coast. In my 20s, I came to London and gained a position at the Dukes Hotel in St James's. During my 12 years at Dukes, I began to develop a niche market for extra-special cognacs. By the time I left the hotel, I was known for making the best martini in the world.

From there I moved to the illustrious Lanesborough Hotel in Knightsbridge, where I worked as head bartender for 10 years, further developing my "host with the most" style. In 2004, I opened my first solo venture: Salvatore at FIFTY in London's St James's. During my time there I served a host of celebrities from around the world who flocked to enjoy my cocktails, creating a buzz across London.

I've won a number of awards over the years. The most recent include:

- 2012 – World's Best Drink Selection at the Spirited Awards at Tales of the Cocktail in New Orleans
- 2011 – Outstanding Achievement to the Industry at the Class Awards

- 2009 – International Cognac Personality of the Year (Bureau National Interprofessional du Cognac) and Spirits Personality of the Year (Drinking Out Excellence Awards)
- 2006 – Bar of the Year, Class Awards and 2006 Best Cocktail Offering.

I've also written several books, such as [Classic Cocktails](#), [The Complete Home Bartenders' Guide](#), [Cognac: A Liquid History](#) and [How to Cure a Hangover](#).

### **What's your prediction for 2013 cocktail trends?**

I think champagne will come back again. People will start [the year] celebrating with a glass of champagne and finish it with a cocktail. The classic cocktail will also continue. It's something the bartender loves to make, but it's very strong so we should think more about the consumer and not just the creative environment. I also hope to see even more hospitality and care for people in 2013. Let the consumer have fun with their taste buds!

