

Books



PETER THOMAS FORNATALE  
CHRIS WERTZ

# Brooklyn SPIRITS

CRAFT DISTILLING <sup>-and-</sup> COCKTAILS

FROM THE  
*World's Hippest Borough*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAX KELLY  
DESIGN BY ERIC SKILLMAN

# Brooklyn Spirits

By Peter Thomas Fornatale and Chris Wertz

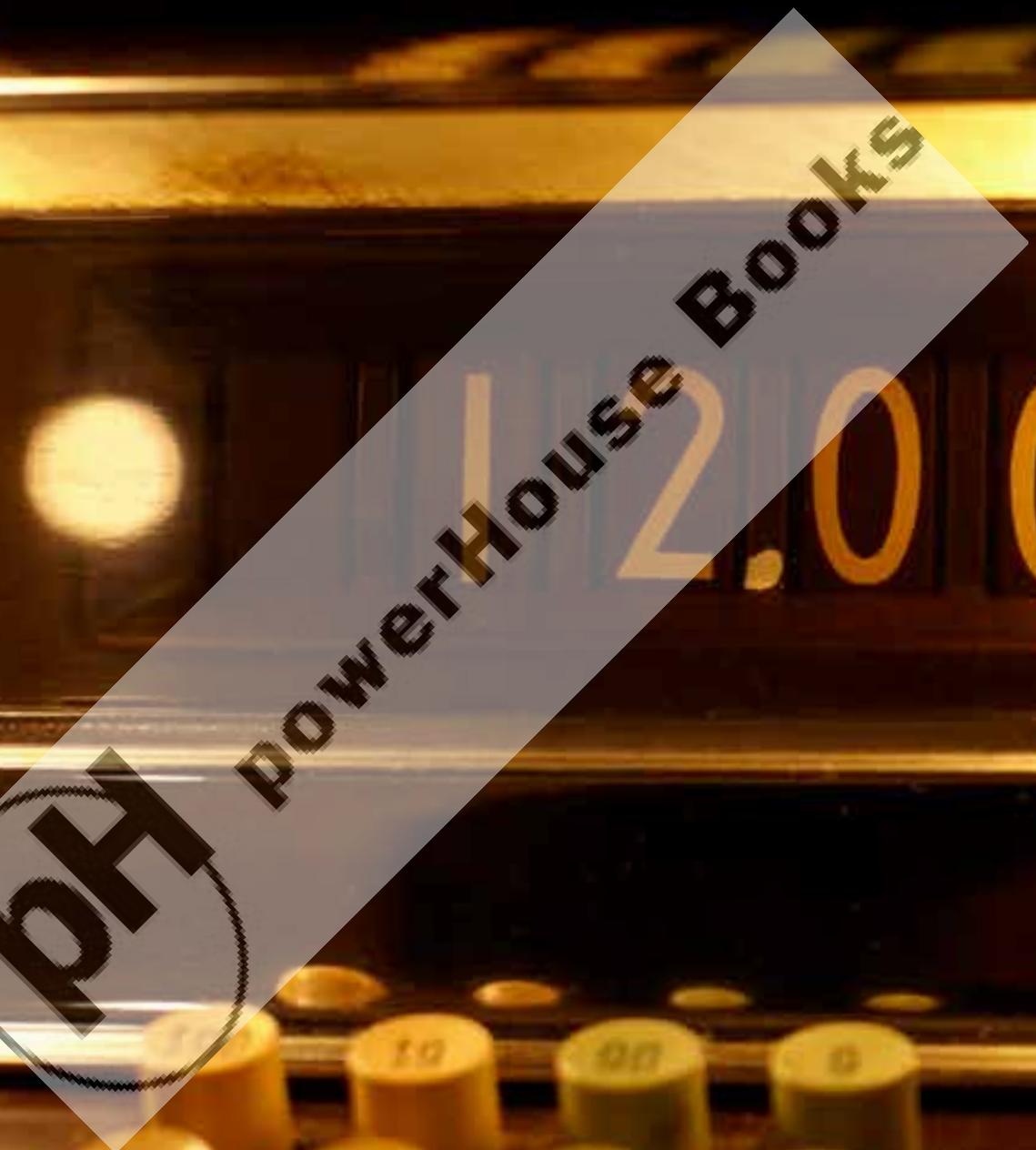
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I first moved to Brooklyn in 1996, into a tiny apartment with no heat and a rodent problem on 7th Street between 8th and the park. The place was little more than a crash pad, and most of my socializing was done after work in what we then called simply “the city,” meaning Manhattan, the place that mattered.

Of course, it wasn’t always that way. ►

## BROOKLYN COCKTAIL

1 1/2 oz 77 Wheat Whiskey  
3/4 oz Martini and Rossi  
sweet vermouth  
1/2 oz fresh lemon juice  
1/4 oz simple syrup (see page 11)  
lemon twist

*In a cocktail shaker filled with ice, add all the ingredients except the garnish. Shake hard and strain into a cocktail glass, preferably chilled. Express and drop the twist.*

Francine Stephens knew right away the drink she wanted to put at the center of her cocktail program.

“There were a handful of cocktails that I designed myself. I was opening a restaurant in Brooklyn and I didn’t really know what I was doing, but it was Brooklyn, not Manhattan, and I wanted to take a stance. At that time, the Brooklyn was really in obscurity as a cocktail and I wanted it to have a resurgence. That was my goal. And it’s still on the menu after 10 years. It is, hands down, our most popular cocktail.”

We think if you taste this smart reboot of the Brooklyn, you’ll understand why. It’s basically a Manhattan sour, and the 77 Wheat Whiskey gives it a particularly lovely, spicy finish. “We always made the drink with Maker’s Mark and I was very hesitant to change that up, but we have used a few different local and/or craft spirits, and the drink still works in many cases. The 77 Wheat Whiskey captures the essence of what our Brooklyn is all about.”

## SUBURBAN

2 oz 77 Local Rye and Corn  
3/4 oz dark rum  
3/4 oz ruby port  
dash orange bitters  
dash Angostura aromatic bitters

*Place all ingredients in a cocktail shaker mostly filled with ice. Shake and strain into a rocks glass with fresh ice. Garnish with a candied cherry, brandied cherry, an orange twist, or some combination of the above (as in the photo).*

This cocktail, the first of many racetrack themed drinks in this book, was suggested by Brad Estabrooke, one of his favorite ways to feature his 77 Rye and Corn Whiskey.

For the record, the Suburban is a famed stakes race first run at Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn in 1884, and is still run today out at Belmont Park, on the border of Queens and Long Island. It’s been won by an impressive array of horses including Imp, Assault, Tom Fool, Kelso (twice), Forego, Easy Goer, Skip Away, and many, many more. The 2009 winner was a horse named Dry Martini, which is rather ironic given that a dry Martini is actually about the farthest away one could get from this highly unusual drink—the only libation we can name that thinks to combine whiskey, port, and rum.



## OAK-AGED NEGRONI

1 oz Glorious Gin: Oaked  
1 oz Campari  
1 oz Cocchi Vermouth di Torino

*Place all ingredients in a shaker that is mostly filled with ice. Stir, then strain into a rocks glass with ice or a chilled cocktail glass up. Garnish with an orange slice.*

This variation on a classic Negroni replaces dry gin with an oak-aged version of the Glorious Gin. In the process, it reinvents the drink, taking it to a halfway point between the Negroni you know and love and a Boulevardier (which is a Negroni with whiskey instead of gin).

One of the many cool things Danny Kent has done in his time managing the bar program at Locanda Vini e Ollii is to devote an entire section of his cocktail menu to various takes on the Negroni. This drink is a worthy addition to that list.



## WHISKEY FACILE

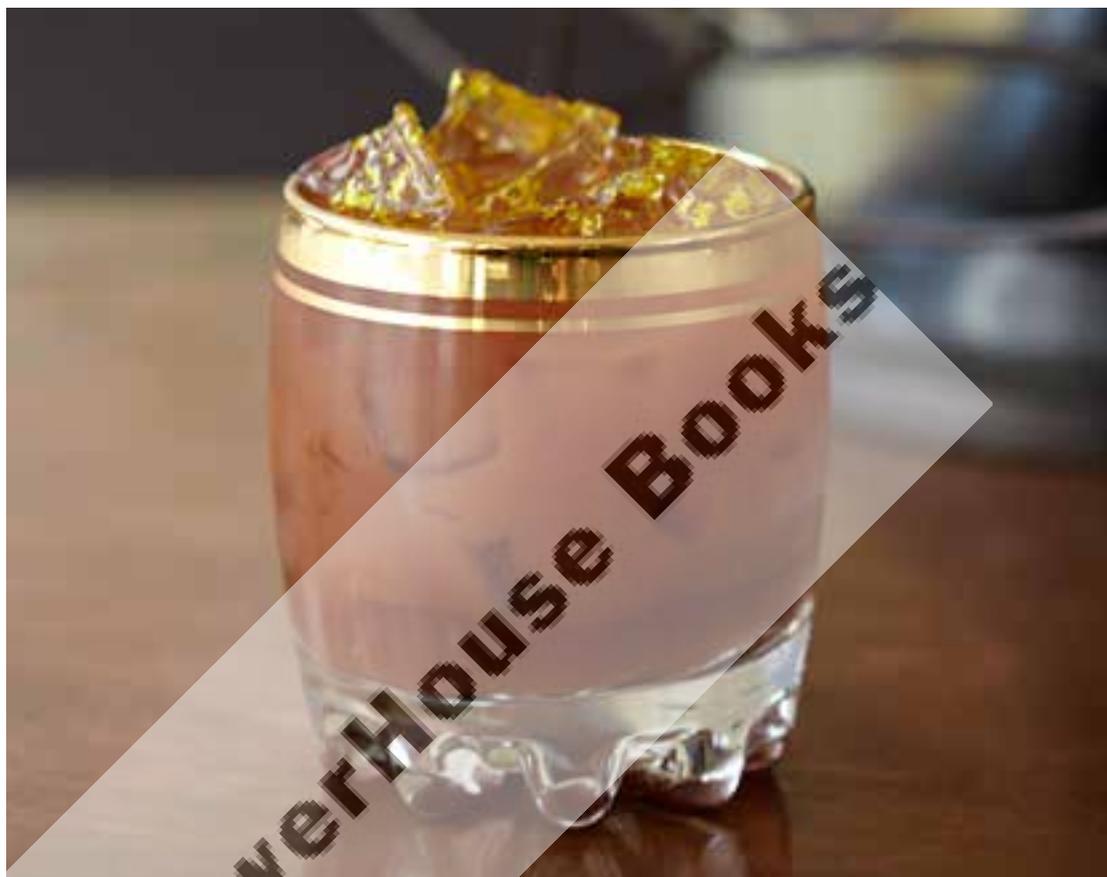
2 oz Widow Jane Straight Bourbon Whiskey  
1 1/4 oz Cardamaro  
2 dashes bitters

*Build in a shaker, give a quick stir, and strain into a cocktail class as in the photo, or just build over ice and enjoy.*

Fred Buscaglione, the inimitable capo of Italian jazz in the 1950s, became enamored with American culture as a child growing up in Italy in the 1940s—so much so that for his stage persona, he adopted a character that was said to be a combination of Mickey Spillane mobsters and Clark Gable. On stage and in film, he aped his favorite subjects, the hardened American gangsters of Prohibition, brutal in their pursuit of infamy but hopelessly at the mercy of women and whiskey. His stage character “Freddy” said he preferred an “easy whiskey” to the ubiquitous mineral water preferred by so many of his countrymen, and added that he drank nitroglycerin for breakfast!

“Whiskey Facile” is not only an ode to Buscaglione, but also a nod to the preferred drink of seasoned bartenders. At home and off-duty, a bartender will forgo the shaker and ceremony of cocktail preparation, to simply “build” a drink out of a good whiskey and a soft accent like a splash of vermouth or amaro, or a twist of a lemon peel, or a dash of bitters. The accent will depend on mood, or perhaps how to properly follow a meal, or, more simply, on what is available. It’s whiskey-easy, whiskey facile.

Danny Kent, bar manager at Locanda Vini and Olii in Clinton Hill, developed this cocktail using a Brooklyn whiskey, an amaro from Buscaglione’s native Piedmont region of Italy, and the technique of an off-duty bartender. His suggested technique is thus: “I think in Freddy’s jazzy vein, one should feel free to take this drink and improvise loosely—but whatever you do, never forget to take it easy.”



## CONQUISTADOR

1 oz Don Esteban chocolate liqueur  
 1 oz Madeira wine  
 1/4 oz Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao  
 edible gold flake

*Place the first three ingredients in a cocktail shaker mostly filled with ice. Shake and strain over fresh ice in a rocks glass. Garnish with edible gold flake.*

This cocktail originated at Botanica, the cocktail bar connected to Cacao Prieto Distillery, as a drink to highlight Don Esteban chocolate liqueur. Don Esteban is pure pleasure for the dark chocolate lovers of the world. Organic cacao beans grown on the distillery's own Caribbean plantation are toasted, then macerated in cane spirit, which produces this deep, dark delight. It goes great alone or pairs well in a number of cocktails.

There is another cocktail called Conquistador that features Irish cream. But last we checked, the Irish were not raiding the New World for its riches, so this version just makes more sense. It celebrates New World discoveries like chocolate and rum and is garnished with gold flakes plundered from El Dorado. Tying these flavors together is an undercurrent of Portuguese Madeira wine. The one-time conqueror is now just part of the mix.

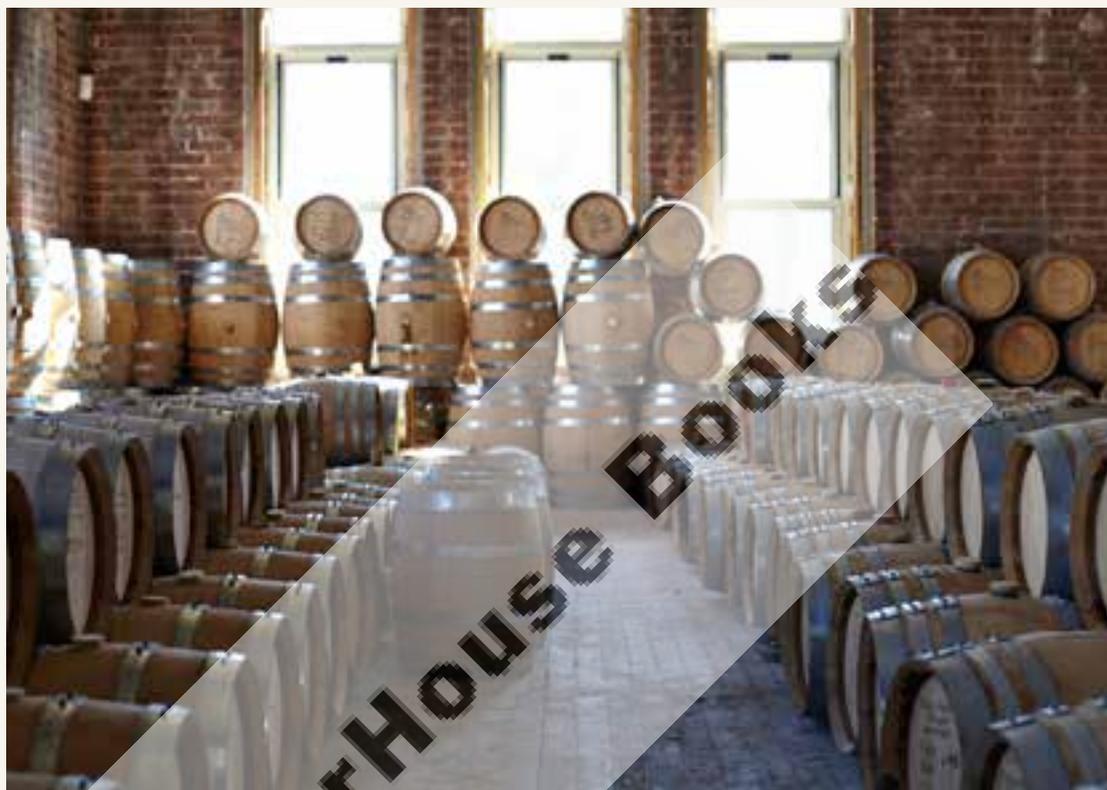


## DALE DEGROFF'S BRANDY COCO

1/2 oz Don Esteban chocolate liqueur  
 1 1/2 oz VSOP Cognac  
 1/2 oz Cointreau Noir  
 dash of Dale DeGroff's Pimento Aromatic Bitters  
 1 orange quarter  
 orange twist

*(Optional: frost the rim of the glass with ground cacao nibs, using a light rub from the orange around the rim to get them to stick.) Place the orange quarter in the bottom of a rocks glass and dash with the bitters. Add the Cacao Prieto and muddle gently to release the juice and oils from the orange. Remove the rind and add ice. Build the rest of the ingredients on the flavor mixture and stir. Garnish with an orange twist.*

This drink grew out of a brainstorming session with the incomparable Dale DeGroff. The initial idea was to build a cocktail in tribute to Dale's old friend, the late, great Brooklyn-born singer-songwriter Harry Nilsson. But as Harry was more of a straight spirit, wine, and Champagne drinker (despite being famous for singing a song about de lime in de coconut), Dale wisely opted to go in a different direction, coming up with an elegant way to feature the Cacao Prieto Don Esteban alongside his own eponymous bitters. Dale's Pimento bitters have a classic aromatic bitters profile with a long, drying finish that will elevate many a cocktail to new heights.



## WHAT MAKES GOOD WHISKEY?

Too many people have internalized the myths surrounding whiskey: the types of water that can be used, the kinds of barrels required, how long it needs to be aged, and, of course, those geographic restrictions. Spoelman chuckled as he explained, “I think that’s one of the things that people are surprised about—that you can make very tasty whiskey outside of Kentucky, and you can make very good whiskey that doesn’t have to age for 12 years. And you can make whiskey without limestone water, and you can make it from grain other than corn.”

The answer to the age-old question, “What makes good whiskey?” really comes down to the use of high-quality ingredients, “pot distillation, and narrow cuts from the still as you’re distilling, which gives you a cleaner but equally robust spirit,” according to Spoelman. For Spoelman, the “front side cuts tend to be very solvent-y and kind of like nail polish remover. They have that very astringent, chemically-laden sort of flavor.” Contrast that with the cuts on the back end, which have “more of a pungent, aromatic quality and are fruity, in a somewhat artificial

way. There are a lot more esters on the backside, and the esters tend to give it this artificiality.” It is the cuts in the middle of the distilling run that are generally considered to be the best: “They’re the cleanest and...the most familiar to the nose, and that’s where the best whiskey is.” Commercial distilleries, Spoelman says, face this dialectic tension between taking the narrower cuts for the best flavor, and financial pressures that can lead them to cut too widely; the wider cuts lead to more offensive, chemical elements finding their way into the final blend.

Aging, of course, plays a role in making whiskey, Spoelman says, and there are a number of factors that influence that phase of whiskey production: the temperature in the barrel storage room, the type of wood used, the “char” of the barrel, the size of the barrel—all of these things have an impact on how the whiskey will taste. Perhaps the greatest myth of all is that the longer the whiskey is aged, the better it will be. Not true, says Spoelman. The real trick is to find the whiskey’s “sweet spot.” Taken to the extreme, at a certain point you are more drinking the barrel than the whiskey. “Another myth is that if you were to drink the 100-year-old whiskey it would be better than the 10-year-old whiskey, and that would be better, in turn, than a one-year-old whiskey. But it just depends on what the conditions are. In the same way that wine has a balance point, after which it will start to deteriorate, I think whiskey, too, has a sweet spot, and there’s a novelty to that. I like the opportunity to drink very old whiskey, just because it’s rare, and unusual, and it teaches me about the distilling process. But is it better whiskey? I would certainly argue that an 18-year-old Macallan is better than a 25-year-old Macallan. It goes past the point of balance and goes too heavily into the wood category.”





“We want people to think differently about what they consume.”

—COLIN SPOELMAN

## MOONSHINE

For Spoelman, nothing demystifies making whiskey quite like understanding the world of moonshine. As city dwellers, we grew up with the persistent cultural stereotype of the toothless, flannel-clad backwoodsman hiding his rusty still in the forest, producing an almost unpotable concoction that could render one blind or insane with a single swallow!

Moonshine is whiskey, often referred to as “white whiskey.” Spoelman uses the terms interchangeably, for moonshine is essentially whiskey before it goes into a barrel. He pointed out that in a category like tequila, for example, people don’t give a second thought to the fact that you can buy both aged and un-aged versions at your local liquor store; the same holds true for rums and brandies. Most people don’t even make a distinction. Spoelman says, “They go to the bar and they order a tequila. They don’t say, ‘Oh my God, I would never drink un-aged tequila, that’s horrible.’”

“Some people think that white whiskey is a fad, when, in fact, in the long history of whiskey,

there’s probably been more white whiskey consumed than aged whiskey. And for me, when I got started making whiskey, I was trying to answer the question, ‘What makes good whiskey?’ And initially I didn’t have the resources to age the whiskey, so it was much easier for me to negotiate those variables when I was making white whiskey. I could make a very good, palatable white whiskey, and then sort of knew, by extension, if you put that into the barrel that it would end up being a good spirit. I would argue that to learn more about whiskey, don’t bother chasing down these very expensive bottles of Scotch that are really old. Drink more white whiskey, because then you’ll actually learn what it is you like from the spirit.”

Spoelman used rye as an example: “A lot of people use the tasting note ‘spicy’ when describing rye, as opposed to Scotch, or wheat whiskey, but if you were to drink the ‘white,’ un-aged version of the rye, you would realize that this ‘spiciness’ does not inhere in the grain itself. You would then understand that the ‘spicy’ flavor note is a result of the rye’s contact time with the barrel.”

## THE PROCESS

What is it that makes Owney's Original New York City Rum so special? What sets it apart from the competition? Bridget's face lit up as she described her baby in a bottle. "There are a number of things that make Owney's unique. First of all, the ingredients: It's made from New York City tap water that's been filtered. I think it's the best water in the world. As a native New Yorker, maybe I'm biased, but from a scientific standpoint, the chemical composition is perfect for distilling. Also, I use proprietary yeast. And lastly, I use an all-natural, non-GMO, top-grade sugar cane molasses that comes from small, independent sugar cane farms in Florida and Louisiana, so it's 100 percent domestic."

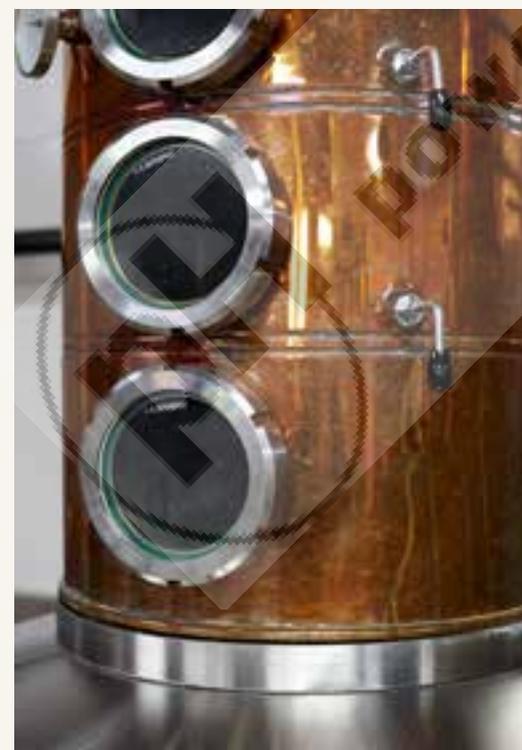
It would have been easy for her to replicate a clear commercial rum, made from blackstrap molasses, and pass it off as special just because it's a local product. But she wanted to be better. Her love affair with rums naturally led her to the much admired *rhum agricole* style of production found mostly in former French colonies, which uses pure cane juice in place of molasses. Cane juice is sugar rich and has the distinct flavor of its source—known as *terroir* in the wine world. *Rhum agricole* can also be grassy and assertive—positive qualities in a spirit category that's become known for its general lack of flavor. But pure cane juice can be very temperamental and difficult to ship, so Bridget decided to create a rum that, while made from domestic molasses, reflected everything that was desirable about the flavor profile of *rhum agricole*.

She starts with the top grade of molasses, which contains 80% sugar (as opposed to the 10% of blackstrap), because it hasn't had all of the

sugars refined out of it. This leaves the molasses flavorful and aromatic and full of potential. The high sugar content enables her to ferment the molasses similarly to how cane juice is distilled. She explained to us, "I do five-day-long cold fermentations as opposed to the typical 48 hours for a blackstrap molasses. I keep the yeast alive, happy, and eating those sugars. Because of all of the sugar in the molasses, there is a lot of clean alcohol available in the wash to extract during distillation." This process also leads to a lot of desirable flavor by-products (esters) that help give Owney's its unique flavor.

Next, she distills the fermented wash to 82.5% alcohol (165 proof). Again, this is a cross between the two styles of rum, where white rum (from Spanish-speaking countries) is typically distilled to upwards of a flavorless 95%, and *rhum agricole* is distilled to maximize natural flavor at as low as 70%. Bridget explained, "I'm meeting in the middle at 82.5%. It's where I think it's got a perfect balance: not too much bite, and a lot of flavor."

It's hard to mistake a cocktail made from Owney's rum—and that's a good thing. Owney's is often described by an adjective that is only positive in music and rum: *funky*. Rum drinkers look for a little bit of funk in their rum to help it stand out in a great cocktail, rather than just blending in the background and adding sweetness and viscosity to what might already be a sweet, heavy drink. That funk is a sulfurous, tangible tang that usually results from the distillation of sugar cane juice. Since Owney's is distilled in a hybrid process, it has the best qualities of a molasses-based rum and *rhum agricole*...just funky enough.





## MIDTOWN BOOTLEGGER

2 oz Owney's rum  
3/4 oz lime juice  
1/2 oz cinnabark syrup  
1/2 oz Licor 43  
1 pinch grated nutmeg

*Place the first four ingredients in a cocktail shaker mostly filled with ice. Shake well and fine-strain into a frozen coupe. Garnish with grated nutmeg.*

### CINNABARK SYRUP

This cinnabark syrup recipe comes from the famous Clover Club, Nate Dumas's home before the Shanty. Bartender Tom Macy gave us the house recipe and his take on cinnabark versus cinnamon syrup. He tells us, "The two are kind of interchangeable. We use cinnabark at Clover because it's a little more flavorful, but it's harder to find, so cinnamon sticks work too."

1 quart sugar  
1 quart water  
2 cups cinnabark (or 10-12 cinnamon sticks)

*Break up the cinnamon sticks into small shards, or crush the cinnabark. Combine the ingredients in a small pot and bring the mixture to a boil, then remove from heat and let sit overnight for best results. Strain and bottle.*

Designed by Clover Club's head bartender, Tom Macy, the Midtown Bootlegger is his personal, seasonal riff on his favorite cocktail six months out of the year—and one that appears a lot in this chapter—the Daiquiri. He explains, "I was working on drinks for Clover Club's fall menu, so that meant I was looking for classic autumnal flavors. Instead of the traditional sugar, I decided to sweeten the drink with cinnamon syrup and Licor 43, which is a Spanish liqueur with forward notes of vanilla that paired perfectly with Owney's rum. I find the Owney's has a lovely rich and buttery finish that remains light enough to keep the drink true to its roots." Still, Tom felt there was an element missing. "It wasn't until I added the grated nutmeg, a very traditional ingredient in old rum punch recipes, that the cocktail really started to sing."

The drink's name is an obvious allusion to Owney Madden's infamy as a bootlegger. "I was initially going to call the drink Hell's Bootlegger, but it just seemed a little over the top."



## ORGEAT WORKS

They call him Tiki Adam. He is one of the great characters on the New York/Brooklyn bar scene. Adam Kolesar developed a cocktail obsession after taking a rum punch class from Dale DeGroff. Kolesar shared some historical perspective. “The birth of Tiki is really about the post-Prohibition availability of rum. Rum was the cheapest and best spirit available post-Prohibition, and it was something that Don the Beachcomber knew a lot about from his travels. With his intimate knowledge of rum, it just made sense for him to do rum punches.”

But Kolesar’s mania for cocktails isn’t rooted in the usual causes. “Drinking isn’t about the drunk for me,” he told *New York Times* food critic Frank Bruni in 2011. “It’s about creating the taste profile of an era I romanticize and care about.”

For him, that means knowing every detail of Tiki culture from its true origins, to its appropriation at Trader Vic’s, to its renaissance in the last 10 years. “My approach to drinking is anthropological,” he told us at his home bar, made out of an old Airstream. “I don’t create drinks. I’m about researching and developing the taste profiles that Don the Beachcomber and Trader Vic developed in the origin of Tiki. I’m most interested in experiencing what our forefathers experienced when these drinks were conceived.”

In 2013, Kolesar started Orgeat Works. Orgeat is an almond-based syrup that is a *sine qua non* in many Tiki classics, from the Mai Tai to the Scorpion Bowl. His signature product is a lightly toasted version of a classic orgeat, but he also makes a heavy-duty orgeat and a macadamia nut version. “I’m looking for products that will work well with all these amazing recipes,” Kolesar said. “And I want to make syrups that cocktail lovers and Tiki geeks will really like and want to try.”

## MAI TAI

1 oz Owney's rum  
1/2 oz Appleton Special Jamaica Rum  
1/2 oz El Dorado 15 yr old rum  
1/2 oz Orgeat Works' Toasted Orgeat Syrup  
1/2 oz Pierre Ferrand Dry Orange curacao  
1 oz fresh lime

*Fill a rocks glass with crushed ice. Pour the Appleton's and El Dorado over the ice. Next, combine the Owney's rum, lime, Orgeat, and curacao with plenty of ice in a shaker. Throw in the lime hull to scuff the remaining lime essence from the rind. Shake away and strain over the crushed ice. Garnish with a generous sprig of fresh mint.*

The Mai Tai is the *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* of Tiki drinks. In one bold move, Trader Vic changed and reinvigorated an entire genre of cocktails, if not a whole lifestyle, and the rest of the world has been trying to catch up ever since. We asked Adam Kolesar to describe the importance of a good orgeat (read: his) in a Mai Tai. Not surprisingly, he had a good answer:

"The working theory behind my orgeat was that in 1944, when Trader Vic invented the Mai Tai, the orgeat had some semblance of the taste of almond. The toasting, for me, is what helps bring the real essence of the almond forward. It's a way to get almond flavor prominent without resorting to anything artificial. It just makes sense in that drink that you should have an almond component with a bitter finish, rather than a perfume product, which is what commercial orgeat had become. That combination, along with the rum and the curacao, is what makes a Mai Tai a Mai Tai. You don't have a Mai Tai without orgeat. You can't sub it out without destroying the drink's complexity.

"In this Mai Tai, Owney's rum provides the critical 'funk' element, traditionally expressed through an aged agricole rum. The Owney's plays well with the Appleton's Gold and El Dorado Demerara rums to create a unique Mai Tai that celebrates Trader Vic's original vision."

The result is spectacular.



## THE RICHARDSON

(Williamsburg)

“A return to classics, across the board, is a good thing,” Steven Spate, manager and senior bartender of the Richardson says. “That pretty much defines the idea behind our cocktail program. We’re rooted in classics: classic sprits, classic drinks, and a conscious avoidance of any sort of nouveau approach to drinks—whether that means over garnishing or over muddling or overdoing it with house-made stuff. We make our own grenadine because it tastes better than any grenadine you can buy, but we don’t need to make everything. We’re not looking down on any of that stuff, it’s just not what we do here. We’ll continue to experiment and adapt, but we’re also going to be rooted in the classics.”



## DAIQUIRI

2 oz Owney’s rum  
1/2 oz fresh lime juice  
1/2 oz simple syrup (see page 11)

*Pour into an ice-filled shaker, shake, and strain into a cocktail glass or coupe, preferably chilled.*

When you take a tour of The Noble Experiment distillery, there is a question-and-answer segment at the end. People frequently ask Bridget how she likes to enjoy her rum. Her answer makes jaws drop to the floor—such is the state of the poor, beleaguered Daiquiri to many drinkers in America.

In reality, the Daiquiri is as classic and simple as it gets. It’s the way most bartenders like to test-drive a new rum. But over time, the Daiquiri has morphed, eroded really, into something else.

“I would spend an hour on the tour lovingly describing my process and my rum, and then people would think I was telling them to dump it in a blender with ice, a box of sugar, and all these artificial flavors. But a real Daiquiri isn’t like that at all. It’s a template from which you can create this whole world of interesting flavors.”

The basic daiquiri recipe listed here comes from The Richardson. It’s a fine cocktail as is—with no special DIY requirements or even bitters to add. You should feel free to change the proportions and/or substitute/add different elements to cater to your own tastes, but we think the Owney’s acquires itself beautifully in this preparation.

## MISS MILLIONAIRE

3/4 oz Owney’s rum  
3/4 oz Rothman & Winter Orchard Apricot Liqueur  
3/4 oz Averell Damson Gin Liqueur  
(you could try GG Plum Gin Liqueur instead)  
1/2 oz lime juice  
1/4 oz Homemade Grenadine

*Place all ingredients in a shaker mostly filled with ice, and shake well. Strain into a cocktail glass.*

## HOMEMADE GRENADINE

*Guillermo Bravo: “We make it by combining equal parts organic pomegranate juice and sugar brought to a simmer with constant stirring. Once all the sugar is combined, turn off the heat and let it cool. It ends up the right amount of bitter and sweet.”*

Manager and senior bartender Steven Spate of the Richardson is a big fan of Owney’s in cocktails. “Owney’s holds up great even in cocktails where you initially think it might not fit. The Millionaire is a classic example. Usually you’d use an overproof rum, but we wanted to try Owney’s in there and it really works. You get a lot of the character of the molasses Bridget is using. It has so much character that even as a white rum, it can stand in in classic cocktails for a gold or dark rum.”

## THE BAD HABIT

- 1 1/2 oz Owney's rum
- 1/4 oz cocktail cherry syrup (*Blegen uses syrup from Luxardo brand cherries*)
- 1/2 oz fresh squeezed grapefruit juice
- 3/4 oz fresh lime juice
- 2 tsp sweetened ginger purée\*

*Place all ingredients in a shaker mostly filled with ice. Shake vigorously to incorporate ginger.*

*Double strain over a grapefruit cube.*

### TO MAKE GRAPEFRUIT CUBE:

*Cut away the sides of the grapefruit to leave you with a cube. Reserve the sides for juicing. Place grapefruit cubes on a parchment lined-tray and put them in a freezer for two or three hours. Once they are frozen, wrap individually with plastic so they don't stick together while being stored.*

*\*Blegen uses a ginger purée from Perfect Purée in Napa Valley but you could experiment by using puréed ginger and sugar.*

This cocktail, designed by Alicia Blegen of Marietta, was inspired by an unlikely source: a donut.

"I was over at Pies and Thighs in Williamsburg, having lunch with a colleague, and I ordered a grapefruit-ginger donut, and it was so juicy and delicious. At the time, I knew I wanted to use Owney's on the menu. I love Bridget and her rum is so unique and great, and the Owney's doesn't mix quite the same as your typical light rum. It's a little rawer and reminds me almost of a tequila. I thought about a Daiquiri, then I thought about adding grapefruit and doing a Hemingway Daiquiri, and then I remembered that delicious donut from Pies and Thighs. I wanted to recreate that donut in an intoxicating form."

Another really cool and special thing about this drink is the garnish, which reflects Marietta's nose-to-tail, or in this case, core-to-rind ethos. Every part of the grapefruit is used: the zest gets shaken in drinks, the outer fruit gets juiced, and the big block in the center gets frozen for this drink. It's a treatment that world-renowned chef and ice enthusiast Grant Achatz would be proud of. But this drink is no mere gimmick—the flavors amplify one another perfectly, and it's an excellent application of the Owney's rum.





BROOKLYN  
CRAFT WORKS



GOWANUS/WARWICK, NY  
brooklyngin.com

Brooklyn Gin's founders, Joe Santos and Emil Jättne, are both spirit industry veterans who met while working for one of the biggest spirits companies on the planet. They bonded over their desire to do things differently from the corporate status quo. So, like others on the local distilling scene, they left lucrative, secure, and successful careers behind them to pursue their dream of opening a business making craft spirits. ►

Said Santos, “I had some great mentors in the industry who are master distillers and basically made everything under the sun, and I really fell in love with the whole process. Even though I started out in marketing, I ended up really loving the whole concept of making something from scratch, from just an idea in your head to being an actual spirit on the shelf.”

For Santos to really engage his creative side, he knew he’d have to start an independent business. “There were a lot of politics in the corporate world, and I got sick of the handcuffs that were put on my creativity to make new stuff.”

Enter Emil Jättne. “When Emil and I met, he was going through some similar frustrations, and we started talking and realized that we both had a real aspiration to do something on our own, to do it our way, without compromises, and not having accountants, engineers, and lawyers constantly telling us ‘No.’”

But why Brooklyn and why gin? Jättne said, “Brooklyn has so many like-minded neighbors. They come to Brooklyn because they share similar values and aspirations. They have big ideas. They want to contribute. They want to build something. We chose this name because it meant something to us. It articulated our values and aspirations.”

“Emil and I have talked about what Brooklyn means in Sweden, where he’s from,” said Santos. “There’s the artisanal side that we were talking about, the whole do-it-yourself movement. That idea of ownership was instilled in Emil from an early age. His father owned a lumberyard and his mother owned a flower shop in



Sweden. Now, even abroad, Brooklyn is seen as the epicenter of the craftsman movement. I think that’s why Emil wanted to raise his two children here in Park Slope.”

While they maintain a lofted workspace in the neighborhood of Gowanus, they distill their gin in the Hudson Valley, where they have partnered with one of the oldest craft distilleries in the state, the beautiful Warwick Valley Winery and Distillery. There, surrounded by forests and fruit orchards, they make 300 bottles of gin at a time over three days, before shipping it down to Brooklyn.

Some have questioned the assertion that a “Brooklyn” gin could be made in upstate New York (hey, to a true Brooklynite, anything north of Fordham University’s Rose Hill campus is considered upstate). But it seems



very much in keeping with the Brooklyn ethos that Santos and Jättne chose to get the exact product they wanted made by whatever means necessary. “We wanted to make our gin our way with no compromises,” Jättne said. “Warwick Distillery has one of the best stills for the gin we wanted to make, and the Hudson Valley is great. We love living and working in Brooklyn, but we also enjoy getting our hands dirty at the distillery. Not a bad place to make gin.”

Why did Santos and Jättne decide to focus on gin and gin alone? “Gin was actually one of the first ideas that popped up. We love gin. Emil’s go-to drink has always been the gin and tonic, and I really got into gin through the cocktail scene. So I was doing more of the classic cocktails, and when we started really looking at what we were both passionate about, gin was the clear winner. We wanted to pick a spirit

where we could make an impact in the category and in the industry.”

Santos and Jättne have done just that. Brooklyn Gin performed well in several informal tastings conducted with industry types. It is currently available all over the Northeast and in California, plus internationally in Spain, Sweden, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand.

“There are a couple of things we do that really stand out versus all other gins,” Santos explained. “One is the way we use citrus peels. Citrus is not an uncommon element in gin. Typically what’s used is dried or frozen peels. We’re one of the few gins in the world that use 100 percent fresh citrus peels. So when we were starting out, I was running down to Red Hook, buying all my stuff over at Fairway, cutting and peeling in my kitchen.”

## SEASONAL BROOKLYN GIN AND TONICS

2 oz Brooklyn Gin  
4 oz tonic water

*Pour the gin in a collins glass filled with ice and top with tonic water. Garnish with fresh, seasonal ingredients as suggested here.*

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”  
—Ecclesiastes 3:1

It's impossible to know now if the accompanying Biblical passage referred to Gin and Tonics, but we suspect it might have. Since almost every gin has to fit into its most consumed cocktail, we asked Damon Dyer to give some options that work particularly well with Brooklyn Gin year-round. The following were his suggestions, and you should feel free to get creative and make some of your own (sugar snap peas in spring and pomegranate seeds in winter?):

Seasonal Brooklyn Gin and Tonics—all served in a collins glass with a clear ice spear and great tonic water. Grab a straw and turn, turn, turn.

### SPRING

Garnished with the peels of entire fresh navel orange, lemon, and lime. The essential citrus oils from the peels slowly release additional flavors into the cocktail, and the tonic's effervescence brings the fragrant citrus peel aromatics to the surface, highlighting the fresh citrus in the gin and evoking the fresh smells of spring.

### AUTUMN

Garnished with fresh lemon, juniper berries, and a rosemary sprig in a way that underlines the spice and complexity of the gin. The spice and herb elements are the perfect complement to the fruits of the harvest you'll find on fall tables.

### SUMMER

Garnished with fresh cut lime, lemon, ruby grapefruit, and kumquat. Bright and vibrant, the bitter grapefruit is a refreshing palate cleanser in the dog days of summer.

### WINTER

Garnished with fresh Meyer lemon and blood orange. Using winter citrus fruits at the peak of their season, this is a terrific cold weather cocktail. The intensely sweet perfume of the fruit will evoke warmer days to come, transporting you beyond the cold winter night and into your next drink.



Books

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**Brooklyn Spirits: Craft Distilling and Cocktails from the World's Hippest Borough**

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[www.brooklyn-spirits.com](http://www.brooklyn-spirits.com)

# Brooklyn Spirits

By Peter Thomas Fornatale and Chris Wertz

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