

# BAR FUN

*With the right tools and recipes, your home could be your crowd's newest destination lounge.*

**By Katie Loeb**

Cocktail culture has made a real resurgence in the last few years, and craft cocktail bars are now popular destinations in almost every major metropolitan area of the country. But to those of us who have long since grown



ONCE YOU GET PROFICIENT ENOUGH WITH YOUR DRINKSMANSHIP, YOU CAN SUGAR-RIM A COLORED MARTINI WITH THE BEST OF THEM.

## quaff

tired of the bar/nightclub/see-and-be-seen scene, there is something undeniably appealing about gathering at a friend's home to share some conversation, nibble on charcuterie and sip a perfectly mixed drink. It isn't nearly as difficult to do this as it might seem, and you could be the host with the most if you choose to become a Home Cocktail Hobbyist as a new means of entertaining yourself and your friends. You can make the classics at home just as well as any bartender, provided you have the right ingredients, tools and, of course, the desire to do it.

Stocking a home bar doesn't have to be an expensive proposition. A bottle each of vodka, gin, rum, tequila, bourbon and whiskey (either American or Canadian) should cover virtually any guest you might encounter with a simple mixer or straight. If you know you enjoy a particular spirit, then by all means purchase the one you order when you're out. But a little experimentation might surprise you. The most expensive choices in each category aren't necessarily the "best" or, more importantly, to your taste. A lot of folks tend to order the same thing over and over again, without necessarily trying other brands to see if they might enjoy them more. I suggest going to a well-stocked bar and trying something new. If you always order a Tanqueray and

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tonic, try Bombay or Beefeater instead. Or perhaps taste one of the new-generation gins like Hendrick's or Bluecoat (which is distilled right here in Philadelphia), that contain less juniper in their flavor profile. The other alternative is to buy the mini-bottles at your local liquor store and give them a try at home. You might be surprised that you've been paying premium prices when your palate likes something a bit more affordable. Of course, you might also encounter the opposite problem. I tend to have expensive tastes. I don't know why. But I've learned to compromise. If a liquor is getting mixed with a lot of other ingredients, it tends to get into diminishing returns in terms of detectable flavor differences between the brands. Maker's Mark works just fine in a Manhattan, once it's mixed up with sweet vermouth and bitters. I'd rather sip the premium bourbons like Woodford Reserve or Basil Hayden on the rocks or neat with a splash of water, where I can really taste the flavors better. This applies to almost all spirits. Save the high-end stuff for sipping straight or for mixing with the least ingredients. You'll appreciate them more that way.

A couple of liqueurs and aperitifs are also standard for any bar setup. Triple sec or Cointreau, sweet (Italian) vermouth, and dry

(French) vermouth. If you have a bottle of each of these on your bar, you should be able to make most of the basic cocktails. Bottles of Angostura bitters are available either at the supermarket, gourmet shop or your liquor store. The same is true for maraschino cherries and olives. Always keep a few fresh lemons, limes and oranges in your refrigerator, and you should be set to start shaking.

Once you've stocked up your bar, make sure that you have some basic mixers around the house. Many of these are probably in your refrigerator already. Coke (regular or diet, depending on your preference), ginger ale, lemon-lime soda, club soda, orange juice, cranberry juice, pineapple juice and grapefruit juice are most commonly called for. Those little soda bottles or juice cans in the six-packs are very handy for this if you don't want to be wasteful. One small bottle/can has enough in it to make about three to four cocktails, and if you only end up making one cocktail you only waste a little bit of mixer, not a big two-liter bottle of it.

There aren't a lot of complicated tools necessary for this endeavor.

### Carrie's Cosmopolitan

Made immortal (or infamous) by "Sex and the City," the Cosmo is still a damn fine drink. Courtesy of [drinkboy.com](http://drinkboy.com)

2 ounces vodka  
1 ounce cranberry juice  
1 ounce Cointreau  
½ ounce lime juice  
½ ounce simple syrup

Shake with ice. Strain into a cocktail glass.

Optional: Before pouring the drink, you can moisten the rim of the glass with lime, then coat with sugar. Some people also add finely grated zest of orange to the sugar used to coat the glass with. A dash of Orange Bitters also works really well with this cocktail.

or. You will definitely need a cocktail shaker, either a Boston shaker (two halves, one glass and one metal) with a separate Hawthorne strainer (that goofy thing with the spring around the top) or a three-part strainer that has a bottom, a cap with a strainer and a lid. Both of these are available in the kitchenwares department of your favorite department store and at restaurant-supply houses (at wholesale prices). Proper glassware is up to you, although having a selection that includes a short "rocks" glass, a tall "highball" glass and a stemmed "cocktail" or "martini" glass should cover pretty much any circumstance. A small vegetable peeler for making citrus twist garnishes, and a juicer for squeezing lemons and limes is also highly recommended. Last, but not least, a set of "jiggers" (measuring tools) is recommended. Cocktails are always better when they are consistent. The only way to do that is to measure the ingredients. Free pouring should be left to the trained professionals. My favorite jigger is a



small two-ounce metal measure from OXO that has the measurements slanted inside the cup for ease of reading. I found it at a kitchenwares shop and have seen them readily available at several stores since, in both metal and plastic versions. Even drinks that are “built” in the glass, like a vodka and tonic, should have the alcohol portion of the drink measured. About 2 to 2½ ounces of liquor is more than enough for each drink.

If you’ve really never done this before, then a small amount of research might be in order. There are many reliable cocktail books you can order or purchase from any reliable bookseller. Even simpler: just avail yourself of the wealth of knowledge on the Internet. Cocktail recipe Web sites and blogs abound. Some of my favorites are [cocktaildb.com](http://cocktaildb.com), [drinkboy.com](http://drinkboy.com), and [cocktailtimes.com](http://cocktailtimes.com). Many of these have search functions where you can seek out your favorite cocktail by recipe name, or do a reverse search and look up recipes by main ingredient. I’ve sometimes found the most interesting recipes simply by trying to make do with what I had on hand.

Once you’ve found the drink you wish to create, fill the bottom half of your shaker with ice (that would be the metal half of a Boston Shaker, in case you were wondering), measure in your ingredients, place the top half on and give it a light tap on top to create a seal. Shake the drink hard for about 20 to 30 seconds. Make the drink travel the entire length of the shaker. You’re shaking the drink both to make it cold and to dilute it a bit. Take the top off and strain your drink into the glass either through the lid or the Hawthorne strainer, which fits quite nicely onto the opening of the shaker. Garnish appropriately, and voila! You have a cocktail. Other than to James Bond, the controversy over shaking versus stirring doesn’t really matter to most folks. The old-school rules say that if a drink consists of all alcohol (like a Martini or a Manhattan), it ought to be stirred. Anything with fruit juice or other mixers should be shaken. The real difference is you get a more viscous drink by stirring it, since you don’t break

up the ice into little bits, and don’t beat a lot of air into the beverage and make it cloudy. Drinks come out perfectly transparent and camera-ready. Most bars these days tend to shake everything, so it’s up to you if you want to follow the “rules” or not. If you want to stir, then buy yourself a long-handled bar spoon when you’re buying all your other supplies. Look for one that has a spiral handle you can twist between your fingers while stirring the drink—it makes the stirring much easier and more efficient.

A fine way to hone your skills is to pick a couple of basic cocktails and serve those to your guests for your first cocktail party. Perhaps serving Cosmopolitans and Daiquiris (see the sidebar on page 108 for recipe) for the first go-round would be simplest. These drinks only require a few ingredients and are quite simple to prepare. Or perhaps stick to one drink and vary it by purchasing different flavors of the base spirit to make different variations. There are certainly enough flavored vodkas and rums to keep you busy entertaining for a while with just a single cocktail in your repertoire.

Part of being a gracious host means making sure your guests have plenty of water or other nonalcoholic beverages and some food, as well as your well-crafted cocktails in their bellies. Measuring the alcohol in the drinks allows you to maintain some amount of control over what you’re serving. Hosting responsibly is a lot like drinking responsibly. Make sure that both you and your guests don’t overindulge, and everyone will have a wonderful time.

And be careful: Becoming a home mixologist can have dangerous side effects. Suddenly your library will be overrun with cocktail books and your china cabinet filled with a collection of antique barware—glassware, shakers and other accoutrements. It happens slowly at first, but can become an addiction. I know that’s how it happened for me.

Cheers! □

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