

Jazz Age Cocktails: History, Lore, and Recipes from America's Roaring Twenties

Cecelia Tichi

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Jazz Age Cocktails is a vivacious, accessible history of drinking and popular culture during Prohibition era America. Cecelia Tichi writes with enthusiasm and authority about this heady time, and her work is as easy to savor as a Champagne Julep. Its chapters cover aspects of Jazz Age society, including automobiles and airplanes; the gaudy, violent rise of organized crime; and the explosion of slang, games, and stunts. Vintage cocktail recipes conclude each section—most of them unfamiliar, wild concoctions that are spiked with unusual ingredients.

While only the wealthy could afford rumrunner and speakeasy prices, loopholes enabled others to obtain alcohol prescriptions for medical or “sacramental” use; others fabricated dangerous homemade hooch from denatured alcohol or worse. The book portrays a hedonistic, frenetic time when folks sought release from the nightmare of wartime carnage and the specter of the 1918 flu pandemic. Many “giddy imbibers” craved the excitement and frivolity of cocktail culture, and women indulged in their greater freedoms of fashion and social interaction. Cocktails and cigarettes in hand, the flapper generation emulated the glamorous lifestyles of the Fitzgeralds, aviators, gangsters, and silent screen stars.

Memorable descriptions of Harlem’s Golden Age, warts and all, are shared, as well as the fact that, underneath the glitz, many nightclubs were financially controlled by bootleggers and strictly reserved for white patrons. Duke Ellington insisted on desegregation at the Cotton Club in 1927—an achievement to be celebrated, perhaps with an Orange Satchmo (rye, triple sec, absinthe, bitters, and an orange twist). Ink and wash illustrations and quotes and summaries of Jazz Age literature further evoke this distinctive era.

Jazz Age Cocktails is a fun, illuminating look at an unusual decade that will appeal to cookbook and cocktail mavens who like their recipes with a history chaser. Just be sure to read responsibly, and not while squiffy, ossified, jingled, or boiled as an owl.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (November / December 2021)

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