

Spirits for the Mind and Body: 2101 Cocktail and Alcoholic Beverages

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Trafford Publishing (September 2009)

Softcover \$32.22 (541pp)

978-1-4269-1351-8

The cocktail was originally a mixture of distilled spirits, sugar, water, and bitters, and appears to have originated in the early 1800s. There are various theories regarding the name's derivation, but in any case, there is something about cocktails—their titles, origins, and ingredients—that seems to give a glimpse into a culture or an era. While the sloe gin fizz and whiskey sour were once the rage, time and fashion have seen the Harvey Wallbanger and banana daiquiri come and go, replaced by jello shots and pomegranate martinis.

Numerous books have explored the history of mixed drinks, focusing on the impact of art, politics, or contemporary culture, such as *A History of the New World in Ten Cocktails* and *Drink: A Social History of America*. There are also loads of books just offering drink recipes and mixology. So when a new title appears, it begs the question, why bother?

This particular compendium does not pretend to address cultural questions or mixology techniques. Nor does it offer original recipes; it has simply gone for quantity, listing, as the subtitle indicates, 2,101 drink recipes. Fair enough: there are likely readers who will welcome the efficiency of a single-volume listing arranged alphabetically. But given that basic mission, this book is problematic in that the author has grouped drinks under somewhat confusing section headers. Under “Champagne” for instance, the listings include a Peach Mimosa and other drinks that include champagne as an ingredient, but also drinks that are simply served in a champagne flute—Coconut Toastie anyone? (Rum, Ice Cream, Cream, and Coconut). The “Collins” section includes a mix of recipes that don't seem to share any common characteristics at all; the Florida Daiquiri, the French 125, and Frog in a Blender (Tequila, Sweet Vermouth and Sloe Gin) have not a single ingredient in common, nor the use of a Collins glass in every case. So a thirsty reader who says to herself, “I'd love to shake up a Banshee today,” for instance, would have a hard time locating the recipe—it's not in the “Irish Mug” section as one might guess, but rather in “Cocktails.” An index with page numbers or a break-down by liquor type might have been helpful.

The text is printed in large, clear type, and directions are simple and direct. The wildly ingenious drink titles are entertainment in themselves: witness the Beige Blindfold, the Bikini Wax, Laughing in the Waves, and the Witch of Venice (Strega, Crème de banana, vodka, and orange juice). How to survive drinking the actual concoctions is another question. But simply reading through the listings, with something cool in hand, could be good fun. (December 2, 2009)

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