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SAN FRANCISCO

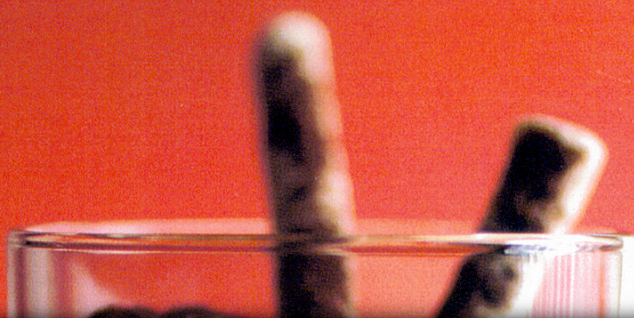
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Mixing It Up

WHEN IT COMES TO ORDERING A CLASSIC COCKTAIL, THINK OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE.
BY JORDAN MACKAY

Give me a vodka martini" or "I'll have a mojito"—mindless well-drink orders without a particular spirit in mind—are among the most common lines I hear delivered at bars. But even when people do get specific, they tend to order the classic combinations, such as Maker's Mark Manhattan or a Tanqueray and tonic—both great choices, but I'd argue that sometimes it's fun to try the less obvious.

One thing bartenders know is that, even within the top-shelf category, every brand has its own flavor profile. "I'm a huge believer that different brands and spirits influence cocktails," says Duggan McDonnell, who made his name at Frisson but will open his own bar, Cantina, this spring in the Tenderloin. "Absolut Mandarin is different from Hangar One Mandarin Blossom, which is different from Grey Goose L'Orange. Each one makes a unique drink, and it helps to know which one you like." With this in mind, I polled some top local bartenders for their suggestions for everyday cocktails and some lesser-known spirits to order them with. x



VODKA MARTINI

Scott Beattie of Cyrus, in Healdsburg, endorses **Hangar One**, locally made and brightened with distilled Viognier grapes. Bartenders also love **Square One**, a new vodka made from rye. "It's not heavily distilled," says Dominic Venegas of Range and Bourbon & Branch, "so it's actually got flavor and texture."

MOJITO

Does it matter what kind of rum is used in a mojito? Most bartenders say yes and almost unanimously praise **Flor de Cana**, a rum from Nicaragua. "It's the best rum for mojito in this country, period," says Jonny Raglin, bar manager of Absinthe. "It's beautiful, smooth, flavorful and not expensive."

MANHATTAN

When it comes to the Manhattan, try out bourbon's cousin, rye whiskey, for a change. Spicier, and often a little coarser, it's back in fashion. Impress your date by ordering your next Manhattan with **Michter's**, **Old Overholt** or **Black Maple Hill**, which, according to Greg Lindgren (who named his bar Rye for a reason), is the smoothest of the lot.

GIN AND TONIC

A flood of gins have entered the market, but by far, the favorite around here seems to be **Plymouth**. Because of its aromatic complexity, plus its compatibility with other ingredients, it's truly a bartender's gin. Also, several bartenders recommend **Miller's** gin, which is made in the London dry style, vivid and clean with a pronounced juniper edge.

MARGARITA

El Tesoro Platinum is one top pick. "In a margarita, there's no tequila that can match the earthy, peppery, agave-driven richness," claims Raglin. **Partida** tequila has also gained fans for its smoothness. McDonnell prefers reposado (slightly aged) tequilas to blancos (unaged) in his margaritas, and he recommends **Cazadores** as the "working man's reposado."

STEFANIE MICHEIDA

3 WINE COUNTRY WEDDINGS, 37 GOWNS AND THE IDEAL HUSBAND