

Stirred not shaken: Did James Bond get it wrong?

Has James Bond got it wrong when it comes to cocktails? In Ian Flemmings 1953 book, "Casino Royale", Bond asks for his martini to be shaken rather than stirred. While most people are particular about the type of martini they order, this is quite an odd request as we will come to see. To understand why this is such a controversial choice in the mixology world we should look to the long and mysterious past of the classic martini. There are various stories behind the cocktails origin which trace back to the mid 19th century. It's up to you which to believe! Our first story begins with a gold miner in Martinez, California who walked into a local bar to celebrate his new fortune with a glass of Champagne. Unfortunately, the bartender had run out, so instead offered the man a Martinez Special. A drink consisting of gin, vermouth, bitters, maraschino liqueur and lemon. As is no surprise by now, the cocktail became a success and began to spread across the country.

Another variation of the tale tells that the gold miner was actually in San Francisco on his way to Martinez where he met a bartender named Jerry Thomas at the Occidental Hotel. In return for a gold nugget the miner asked him to make him something special; and Thomas being a famous bartender lived up to his status. He concocted a drink mixed with Old Tom gin, vermouth, bitters and maraschino. Later, Thomas published one of the first cocktail recipe books, 'The Bartenders Guide' in 1862, where the martini makes its first debut. Does this fact sway you to believe San Francisco was indeed the birthplace of the martini? Well the debacle became so intense that it was taken up to The Court of Historical Review which determined that the martini was indeed invented in San Francisco. However, an appeal from Martinez got the ruling overturned and assigned the martini's origin to Martinez. Suffice to say there has been some tension between the two cities over this debate. Whichever version of the story you choose to believe, the cocktail has undoubtedly passed the test of time. Although if you're familiar with the modern martini you may have noticed that it looks slightly different to its ancestors.

A classic modern martini recipe consists of: two ounces of gin/ vodka, one ounce of vermouth and garnished with an olive or a lemon twist. However this is not strictly true. If you have ever ordered a martini at a bar you may have felt overwhelmed by the different variations you can have. Vodka or gin? Dry or wet? Dirty or with a twist? These are the line of questions a bartender will ask you if you ever order a martini. The ratios of these ingredients can be altered to personal taste. First you should decide whether you would like vodka or gin to be the base of your drink. Next the ratio of vermouth (aromatised fortified wine) you would like with it. A dry martini will have less vermouth, while a wet martini will have more. Finally you may have a dirty martini if you would like an olive or ask for it "with a twist" of lemon.

You may have noticed that although the older version of the martini used gin as a base, the modern version can substitute this for vodka. This came around during the 1980's when Absolut Vodka began to rise in popularity. Other ingredients have been skipped out entirely, such as bitters (spirits infused with botanicals) and maraschino (a sweet cherry liqueur). The type of gin has also changed, with the modern version often using London Dry gin compared to its predecessor which used Old Tom gin which was more sweet. The original martini also preferred sweet vermouth rather than dry vermouth, which the newer version has replaced

it with. What was once a sweeter drink has evolved to lose or swap these ingredients for a dryer alternative. As time progressed, those who wanted to seem sophisticated jumped on this trend and opted for a dry martini, with as little vermouth as possible.

Although you may find some, like James Bond who go a step further and order their martini to be shaken not stirred. It also varies from the classic cocktail in that it contains both vodka (one ounce) and gin (three ounces). It also has 1/2 ounces of Lillet Blanc or dry vermouth and a lemon peel for garnish. This new type of martini was nicknamed the 'Vesper', after one of Bond's love interests, Vesper Lynd.

Now this order doesn't seem so out of pocket until the odd request for the drink to be shaken. Traditionally the martini has always been stirred for several reasons. Firstly, as a rule of thumb, bartenders will stir drinks when they mainly contain a spirit. Therefore it makes sense to stir the martini which is mainly vodka or gin. Stirring the ingredients allows them to blend together as well as slightly diluting the drink to make it more palatable. However, by shaking the drink the ice will be broken up, diluting the cocktail more and causing the liquid to look more cloudy. This is typically the opposite preferred outcome for a martini. Nevertheless, although this is perhaps unconventional, the martini has had a varied history and has evolved over the years to become the popular cocktail we know today and the Vesper certainly adds to its intrigue.