

SOCIAL SPIRITS

With its long history and celebratory nature, the punch bowl is a mixology trend on the rise

BY SALLY KRAL

Though cocktail culture has been proliferating for more than a decade, growing interest in punch bowls has been a more recent phenomenon. “Punches have been gaining popularity since the 2010 release of David Wondrich’s book ‘Punch: The Delights (and Dangers) of the Flowing Bowl,’” says Willy Shine, brand ambassador for Appleton Estate Jamaica rum.

Shine isn’t the only mixologist crediting Wondrich with reviving punch culture. “He really dug deep into the history of the cocktail and found that all cocktails were born from punch,” says Timothy Miner of The Long Island Bar in Brooklyn, New York. “That’s when bartenders stood up and took notice. They started to learn about historic punches

and found, to no one’s surprise, that these concoctions could be incredible. The next step was to introduce punches to the consumer.”

And that’s exactly what they’ve done. Punch-focused bars are popping up in cities nationwide, while existing cocktail venues have added punches to their regular lineups. “We’re seeing more and more established bars and several bespoke places around the country devoting their efforts to punches, such as Punch House in Chicago and The Dead Rabbit in New York City,” says Jacob Briars, global advocacy director at Bacardi. In the last four years, punch bowls have come to embody everything consumers enjoy about cocktails: socializing, community and fun.



At New York City’s Da Claudio, Jason Cousins offers the Riley’s Punch, made with Cognac and Earl Grey tea.

The Alchemist Punch features Bénédictine liqueur, orange purée, lemon, honey, orange and tangerine wedges, cinnamon, cloves, and thyme.



PHOTO BY ANDREW KIST

Historical Value

“Punches have grown in popularity because everything old is new again,” notes Carlton Grooms, director of operations at Hemingway Rum Co. “Punches were offered to arriving guests in revolutionary America. They were considered the mark of civilized and social society.”

Indeed, consumers and mixologists are flocking to storied recipes that have a legendary quality to them. For Appleton Estate’s take on First Lady Martha Washington’s Rum Punch, the brand enlisted the Cocktail Collective, a team of mixologists that includes Willy Shine, Misty Kalkofen, Eric Alperin, Richard Boccatto, John Lermayer and Simon Ford. The drink comprises Appleton Estate White rum, Appleton Estate Extra 12-year-old rum, Grand Marnier orange liqueur, fresh lemon and orange juices, and spiced simple syrup, topped with grated nutmeg and garnished with orange and lemon wheels.

“Punches are best when they’re classic, simple and fun,” says Jessica Wohlers, beverage director at Cienfuegos in New York City. “Every bar has a specialty that dictates the punches it creates, but classics are classics for a reason, and all new drinks are derived from those recipes.” Max Seaman, general manager of Los Angeles cocktail bar The Varnish, pays tribute to such classics with his bar offerings. On a previous winter menu, the venue touted a version of the traditional Milk Punch. “It’s adapted from a 1711 recipe by Mary Rockett that was published in Wondrich’s book,” Seaman explains. “According to him, it’s ‘the oldest extant recipe for Milk Punch.’” The Varnish Warm Milk Punch (\$13 for one serving) mixes Pierre Ferrand 1840 Cognac, El Dorado 5-year-old rum, fresh lemon juice, turbinado simple syrup, hot whole milk and an oleo-saccharum made from lemon peel and superfine sugar.

“Historically, the most important part of making punch is creating the oleo-saccharum, which consists of citrus oil, the peel and granulated sugar,” Appleton Estate’s Shine explains. “By peeling the skin of a lemon, lime, orange or grapefruit, adding sugar and muddling them together or letting them sit for a period of time, the oils become extracted from the skin and you have this sweet citrus paste.” For Bacardi, mixologist Jennifer Contraveos makes an oleo-saccharum of grapefruit peel and brown sugar for her Mason-Dixon Line Punch, which also comprises Grey Goose vodka, Bénédictine liqueur, rooibos tea, pineapple, lemon and apple juices, and Angostura bitters—infused vanilla-fig syrup, garnished with lemon and pineapple wheels.

Both Punch House and The Dead Rabbit feature historic punches. Punch House partner and director of operations Will Duncan offers the Hot Charles Dickens Punch (\$8 a glass; \$32 a carafe; \$59 a bowl), which mixes Appleton Estate V/X rum, Landy Cognac, black tea, lemon juice, and a flamed oleo-saccharum of lemon peel and white sugar, while his American Orange Punch (\$8; \$32; \$59) blends Redemption rye whiskey, Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao, Tyrannena Chief BlackHawk porter, orange, lemon, cinnamon, star anise, nutmeg and allspice. The Dead Rabbit’s Bantam punch (\$55 for four servings; \$75 for six servings; \$90 for eight servings) mixes Batavia-Arrack van Oosten, lime sherbet, fresh lime juice, coconut palm sugar and Earl Grey tea.

Basic Balance

All mixologists agree on one fundamental rule: A punch must include five key ingredients. “The word ‘punch,’ derived from the Hindi word for ‘five,’ refers to its five components: citrus,



The Catch & Release punch, made with Papa’s Pilar Blonde rum, follows a time-honored Caribbean formula: one part sour, two parts sweet, three parts strong and four parts weak.

sugar, water, spirit, and tea or spices,” Shine explains. Some mixologists call these elements sour, sweet, weak, strong, and spice or bitter. With this recipe blueprint in mind, Shine concocted the Jamaican Blue Mountain punch, featuring Appleton Estate Reserve rum, Sandeman Character Superior Medium Dry Sherry, Grand Marnier, hibiscus tea, orange peel, lime juice, superfine sugar, sparkling water, grated nutmeg and a dusting of Blue Mountain coffee grounds, garnished with edible orchids.

In many punch recipes, individual ingredients may cover multiple components. For example, a fruit liqueur can be both sweet and strong or a tea can represent both spice and water.

The Calvados Cider Punch—created by Spirit France’s U.S. sales manager, Jack Mulhern—comprises Boulard Calvados, Clos Normand Brut hard cider, Musselman’s apple cider, Gosling’s ginger beer, fresh lemon juice and Angostura Orange bitters, garnished with orange wheels. “I like to mix a brown base spirit like whiskey or brandy with fresh juice or cider and fresh ingredients like orange slices, cinnamon and thyme,” Mulhern says. In his punch, the Calvados and hard cider bring both sweet and strong components to the finished drink. At The Varnish’s sister venue Caña Rum Bar in Los Angeles, the Jitterbug Perfume punch (\$50 for six servings) blends jasmine-infused Bulleit rye whiskey, Smith and Cross Navy Strength rum, Coruba Dark rum, Montenegro amaro, Luxardo Abano amaro, honey syrup, fresh grapefruit and lime juices, and strawberries. Crushed ice serves as the water component, while the jasmine and bitter liqueurs provide the spice.

“I apply the Jamaican and Caribbean rule of thumb: one part sour, two parts sweet, three parts strong and four parts weak,” says Grooms of Hemingway Rum Co., which owns Papa’s Pilar rum. “Today, we substitute various island fruit juices for the water component. I particularly love guava and passion fruits in my punches.” The Catch & Release mixes Papa’s Pilar Blonde rum with guava, pineapple and passion fruit juices and serrano peppers.



Calvados brings both sweet and strong components to the Calvados Cider Punch, which also includes hard cider, ginger beer, apple cider, lemon juice and bitters.

Abundant Alternatives

Even within the basic parameters of a punch, there’s plenty of room for bartenders to be experimental and original. “Punches are really great for their adaptability,” The Long Island Bar’s Miner says. “Mixing and matching different styles of rum with

various citrus and teas make wildly distinct punches.” He notes that a punch using lime juice, Jamaican gold rum, Cognac and black tea will taste entirely different from a punch made with lemon juice, agricole rum, Cognac and green tea. “There’s no limit to the flavors you can work with in a good punch,” Miner says.

Jason Cousins, bartender at New York City bar and restaurant Da Claudio, concurs. He adds that the quality of the ingredients is key. “Punch is always best

with the freshest ingredients,” he says, noting that practically any type of spirit can work in a punch, depending on the desired flavors and drink style. “For warm weather punches, I prefer unaged spirits like gin, vodka, light rum or blanco Tequila. For cold weather punches, I prefer barrel-aged brown spirits, such as Bourbon, Cognac and dark rums.”

On the heavier side is Cousins’ Riley’s Punch (\$9 for a single serving), comprising Louis Royer Force 53 VSOP Cognac, Earl Grey tea, sparkling water, lemon-cocoa oleo-saccharum, lemon juice and Bittermens Xocolatl Mole bitters, garnished with orange

Punch Recipes

BACHELOR’S BOWL

By Patrick Williams

Eight Servings

Ingredients:

6 ounces Old Forester Bourbon;
6 ounces Pimm’s Blackberry & Elderflower liqueur;
12 ounces mango black tea;
4 ounces lemon juice;
6 ounces simple syrup;
Sage leaves.

Recipe:

Combine Bourbon, liqueur, tea, lemon juice and simple syrup in a large punch bowl. Add ice and stir vigorously with a ladle. Garnish each serving with a tapped sage leaf.

CALVADOS CIDER PUNCH

By Jack Mulhern

15 to 20 Servings

Ingredients:

1½ cups Boulard Calvados;
1 750-ml. bottle Clos Normand Brut hard apple cider;
8 cups Musselman’s apple cider;
36 ounces Gosling’s ginger beer;
Several dashes Angostura Orange bitters;
1 lemon, juiced;
1 orange, sliced into wheels.

Recipe:

Pour Calvados, ciders, bitters and lemon juice into a large serving bowl. Add ginger beer and stir lightly. Garnish with orange wheels.

RILEY’S PUNCH

By Jason Cousins

32 Servings

Ingredients:

1 750-ml. bottle Louis Royer Force 53 VSOP Cognac;
750 ml. Earl Grey tea;
750 ml. sparkling water;
Juice of three large lemons;
Lemon-cocoa oleo-saccharum¹;
3 teaspoons Bittermens Xocolatl Mole bitters;
Orange wheels; grated chocolate.

Recipe:

Stir lemon juice and oleo-saccharum until the sugar is dissolved and strain the peels. Combine with Cognac, tea, bitters, ice and sparkling water to taste. Garnish with orange wheels and grated chocolate.

¹Muddle the peels of three large lemons with 6 ounces granulated sugar and 3 teaspoons cocoa powder and allow the mixture to sit for 30 minutes to an hour.

wheels and grated chocolate. Meanwhile, Appleton Estate's Holiday Caribbean Bowl mixes Appleton Estate Reserve, Appleton Estate 12-year-old, Sandeman Fine Rich Madeira, Pierre Ferrand Dry Curaçao, David Wondrich's Demerara-orange shrub, fresh lemon juice and filtered water, garnished with star anise and lemon and orange wheels. On the lighter end, the Gin Pear punch (\$8 a glass; \$32 a carafe; \$59 a bowl) at Punch House features Letherbee gin and Besk Swedish bitter liqueur, Mathilde Poire liqueur, fresh-pressed pear juice, Earl Grey tea, lemon juice, soda water, and an oleo-saccharum of lemon peel, white sugar and honey.

"Floral and spice elements give punches their unique flavor profiles—lavender and cardamom are especially prominent in our punches," says Patrick Williams, beverage director at Denver-based Punch Bowl Social. The venue has locations in Denver; Austin, Texas; and Portland, Oregon, and will soon expand to Detroit. The Bachelor's Bowl (\$9 a serving at the Austin unit) is made with Old Forester Bourbon, Pimm's Blackberry & Elderflower liqueur, mango black tea, lemon juice, simple syrup and sage leaves.

"Concentrated flavors with high acidity work really well to balance out the flavors in a punch. Our house-made watermelon shrub is a great example," Williams adds. The punch You Must Bring Us ... A Shrubbery! (\$8 a serving at the Austin location) features Skyy Infusions Moscato Grape vodka, house-made watermelon shrub, house-made cardamom syrup, lemon juice, orange slices and a float of Ensemble Red Blend wine.

Bacardi's Briars notes that Bénédictine liqueur is great for punches because it can take on many roles. "Bénédictine is made with 27 herbs and spices, including saffron, angelica and nutmeg, and sweetened with honey," he says. "It can be used as a sweetening agent, a bitter element, a modifier or a base spirit." The brand's Alchemist Punch comprises Bénédictine, Boiron Mandarin orange purée, fresh lemon juice, tangerine and orange wedges, organic honey, water, cinnamon, cloves, and fresh thyme.

Communal Cocktail


Along with an overall attraction to the history behind punches, consumers and mixologists are drawn to the inherent social aspect of gathering around a communal punch bowl. "Punches bring people together," Cienfuegos' Wohlers says. "They're fun to drink and symbolize gatherings with friends, parties and celebrations." The Better Half (\$38 for three servings; \$74 for six servings; \$114 for nine servings) blends Diplomático Añejo rum with Rothman & Winter Orchard Pear liqueur, honey syrup, lemon juice, Fee Brothers Whiskey Barrel-Aged bitters, and a Gruet sparkling wine float, garnished with pear slices and grated nutmeg. "The Better Half is a newer addition that employs the classic punch recipe, but with bubbly added for a more celebratory twist," Wohlers explains.



Punches often highlight floral and spice elements. At Punch Bowl Social, the Bachelor's Bowl combines Bourbon, blackberry and elderflower liqueur, tea and sage.

Punch Bowl Social's Williams agrees that punch is often equated with fun and serves as a conversation starter. "It's a shared, communal experience," he says. "Having four guests all drinking from the same bowl starts an instant conversation. It makes any given day or night an celebratory occasion." The Bat Bridge Bowl (\$8 for one serving) is particularly popular at Punch Bowl Social's Austin location and features White Hat rum, coconut chai, simple syrup, lime juice, mint sprigs and expressed orange peel. At Caña Rum Bar, bartenders Erbin Garcia and Harry Chin agree that punches tend to be associated with party and celebration. "We think that's a lovely association and will only help the punch trend become more widespread," Chin says.

"Punches are popular specifically because drinking them is such a social activity," says Sother Teague, bartender at Amor y Amargo in New York City. "It's communal—you're literally sharing the same drink with your friends." The Uppercut punch, which he created for Louis Royer Cognac, blends the Force 53 VSOP expression with Laird's Applejack apple brandy, Montenegro amaro, Becherovka herbal liqueur, Bar Keep Organic Apple bitters and Doc's Draft hard apple cider, garnished with orange twists, and apples and grapes soaked in apple cider vinegar and sugar.

"The communal nature of a punch bowl really resonates with people," Da Claudio's Cousins says. "Drinking has always been a social exploit, and as our palates and social habits change, I think we're going to be drinking and sharing a lot more punch." 

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