



LIQUID ASSETS

BY ST. JOHN FRIZELL

OUR NAMESAKE'S COMEBACK

Why drink a Manhattan?

There are three well-known cocktails named for New York boroughs. The Manhattan is a classic, probably second in worldwide cocktail popularity only to the martini. The Bronx, a mix of gin, vermouth and orange juice, may not be ordered much these days, but it was all the rage in the 1930s, only slightly less popular than the Manhattan is today. Then there's the Brooklyn cocktail—and every Brooklynite knows that one, right?

Wrong. If you haven't heard of our eponymous elixir, you're not alone. The drink, never as known as its borough brethren, all but disappeared from cocktail menus long ago. Its recipe appears in a few cocktail books from the 1930s, but, by the 1960s, the Brooklyn wasn't even included in the *Old Mr. Boston Official Bartender's Guide*.

But like the borough itself, the Brooklyn cocktail is experiencing rebirth—gentrification, one might say. Local bartenders and restaurateurs are approaching the Brooklyn like an old brownstone—some give the drink a new coat of paint, while others gut it completely. In either case, the Brooklyn is back.

In 1925, a young American named Harry Craddock became the head bartender of the American Bar of London's Savoy Hotel. Craddock had learned his trade at various New York City watering holes and left for Europe soon after Prohibition began in 1920. At the Savoy he upheld the American tradition of mixed drinks, serving cocktails to well-to-do Brits and liquor-starved Americans who sought succor on the Thames's damp shores.

Craddock became one of the most famous bartenders of the day, and his *Savoy Cocktail Book* is still considered one of the essential works of cocktail literature—"perhaps the most stylish drink book ever produced," according to William Grimes. Many of its recipes were borrowed from pre-Prohibition American texts that Craddock surely brought with him to London, including *Drinks* (1914) by

Shaken, not stirred. The post-makeover Brooklyn cocktail at (opposite, clockwise from bottom left) Chestnut, Franny's, and iCi; the original Brooklyn mixed by the writer in the name of research.

Jacques Straub, who also tended bar in New York; one recipe that appeared in both books is the Brooklyn cocktail (see sidebar).

In future years, numerous recipes for Brooklyn cocktails would surface, including variations calling for sweet vermouth, orange juice, gin, even an egg white—but it was Craddock's recipe that survived.

Like the borough itself, the Brooklyn cocktail is experiencing a rebirth.

There are two reasons why the original version of the Brooklyn cocktail is not known today. The first is inaccessible ingredients. Maraschino, a bittersweet cherry liqueur, and Amer Picon, a bitter French aperitif, would have been common behind well-stocked London bars in the 1930s. But today the first is rare and the latter is not available in the States.

The other reason is taste. "You will note that the Brooklyn is nothing but a dry Manhattan with a dash of maraschino," writes David Embury, with a note of derision, in his authoritative cocktail tome, *The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks* (1956). Embury recounts that the Brooklyn was a specialty of that grand old Brooklyn hotel, the St. George, once the city's largest. He continues: "I would be willing to wager, however, that even in Brooklyn there are at least 5 to 10 times as many Manhattans consumed as there are Brooklyns. Try both and you will understand why."

Though it pains this publication, I must agree. Canadian (or rye) whiskey and dry vermouth just don't play well together. Sure, dry vermouth mixes well with gin—that's a martini. And whiskey mixes well with sweet vermouth—that's a Manhattan. The Brooklyn cocktail is neither fish nor fowl. Like a child who inherits the unfortunate qualities of both parents, its name is seldom called.

Today, a new generation of borough-proud bartenders and restaurateurs, determined to bring the Brooklyn back, are updating the



Bartender Lydia pours a Brooklyn at Franny's.

BROOKLYN COCKTAIL

From *The Savoy Cocktail Book* (1930)

By Harry Craddock

1 dash Amer Picon
 1 dash Maraschino
 $\frac{2}{3}$ Canadian Club whiskey
 $\frac{1}{3}$ French vermouth.

Shake well and strain into cocktail glass.

CHESNUT'S 21ST-CENTURY VERSION

By Daniel Eardley

1½ oz. rye
 1½ oz. sweet vermouth
 1 oz. Amer Picon (or an Italian amaro,
 like Amaro Nonino)

Shake well and strain into cocktail glass.

recipe to fit contemporary tastes.

When the restaurant iCi debuted their cocktail menu last fall, the Brooklyn was the first on the list. Their version is true enough to the original—a slug of Maker's Mark bourbon, a splash of dry vermouth, a splash of Luxardo maraschino and a dash of Angostura bitters.

David Eardley, chef of Smith Street's Chestnut, solves the whiskey-with-dry-vermouth situation by substituting sweet vermouth. But he honors the original by sourcing otherwise-unavailable authentic Amer Picon. "Friends and family bring bottles of it back for me when they travel to Europe," he confides. "When I run dry, I substitute a good Italian amaro, like Amaro Nonino."

The drink has its fans, but Eardley admits, "it doesn't come close to our margarita." Similarly, Sean Curneen, co-owner of Lodge in Williamsburg, confesses that his Brooklyn cocktail never sells as well as his summer

drinks, even on a frigid winter day. "Believe it or not," he says, "people still order mojitos."

Matt Dawson, co-owner of the Carroll Gardens cocktail lounge, Brooklyn Social, knows the recipe for the original Brooklyn cocktail—but that's not the one he pours. "We decided to invent our own," he admits. The result pays homage to the neighborhood's roots neighborhood and the bar's Italian social club legacy: the key ingredient is the Italian orange liqueur Gran Gala. At Flatbush Farm, they invented their own Brooklyn cocktail, too—a mix of bourbon, Southern Comfort, and bitters that bears no resemblance to its Brooklyn cousins. There is a Brooklyn, Kentucky—perhaps this drink would be popular there.

And at Franny's, the Brooklyn gets a modern makeover by adding fresh lemon juice—the result is a tart, tasty, dressed-up whiskey sour. "Our version is different from a Manhattan," says bartender Lydia, perhaps waxing philosophical. "It's a little less serious." □