



RICHARD CARLETON HACKER

I'll Take Manhattan

The classic cocktail has hazy origins but enduring appeal.

There are not many cocktails named after cities, let alone cities built on an island, and few are as popular as the Manhattan. But oddly enough, the origin of the Manhattan is almost as mysterious as the beginning of the Martini, another famous American cocktail also traditionally served chilled and straight up.

According to the most-oft-quoted legend, in 1874, during a party at The Manhattan Club in New York City to honor Democratic presidential nominee Samuel J. Tilden, hostess Jennie Churchill (the American wife of Britain's Lord Randolph Churchill and future mother of Winston Churchill), asked for a drink made with an American whiskey that would be slightly spicier and sweeter than a straight pour. One of her guests, Dr. Iain Marshall, obliged by adding some vermouth, bitters, and a cherry and graciously presented his concoction to her. Unlike guest of honor Tilden, who subsequently lost the election to Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes and sank into obscurity, Lady Churchill's cocktail was the hit of the party and achieved immortality. Everyone agreed it should be called the Manhattan, after the club where it was invented.

However, the facts indicate that Lady Churchill may have been in England at the time, giving birth to the future prime minister (Sir Winston was born in Oxfordshire on November 30, 1874). Furthermore, the Manhattan may have already existed. Some sources say the cocktail was invented in the 1860s by a New York bartender named Black, who ran a saloon on Broadway, just below Houston Street. Due to this geographical location, it became known as the Manhattan. Personally, I prefer the first version because — to para-

phrase from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* — “When the legend becomes better than the facts, print the legend.”

Another controversy is whether a Manhattan should be made with bourbon or rye. I believe the original Manhattan was made with rye, as it was on the scene first and bourbon only gained in popularity during the latter part of the Victorian era. But once we entered the 20th century, Manhattans began being made with a greater variety of spirits, from Tennessee whiskeys to Canadian blends. *The Savoy Cocktail Book*, compiled in 1930 by the legendary Harry Craddock, head bartender of The American Bar at The Savoy hotel in London, lists four different Manhattan recipes, two made with rye, and two with Canadian Club.

Craddock's modern-day counterpart, Tony Abou-Ganim, describes the Manhattan perfectly and succinctly in his excellent book, *The Modern Mixologist — Contemporary Classic Cocktails*: “The Manhattan, made of straight rye whiskey, Italian sweet vermouth, and Angostura bitters, is simple, yet sultry.”



Photo: Richard Carleton Hacker

Sultry, yes. But simplicity can be a matter of interpretation, for there are numerous variations on the Manhattan. In its purest form, using an ice-filled cocktail shaker, it is a two-ounce pour of bourbon or rye, a splash of both sweet and dry vermouth, stirred (although some prefer it shaken), then strained into a chilled martini glass and garnished with a cherry. For a Perfect Manhattan, add bitters.

However, at Red O, the West Hollywood hotspot opened by celebrity chef Rick Bayless, head bartender Steven Calabro has created the Red O Manhattan, using 100-proof Knob Creek bourbon, Carpano Antica vermouth and grapefruit bitters, and a Luxardo cherry garnish.

Another celebrity chef, Michael Mina, opened his now-famous Clock Bar at the Westin St. Francis in San Francisco two years ago by having his head bartender at the time, Marco Dionysos, create his Uptown Manhattan — one of the best I've ever had. Here's his award-winning recipe:

2 oz. Maker's Mark bourbon

3/4 oz. Amaro Nonino Italian bitters

1 dash Regans' Orange Bitters

1/4 oz. juice from Luxardo brandied cherries (or substitute Cherry Heering)

Stir, strain into chilled cocktail glass, rim with flamed orange rind, garnish with three brandied cherries.

Indeed, the simple Manhattan can be multi-faceted. So it's not surprising that on the back of his business card, Chris Morris, Master Distiller for Woodford Reserve, lists a Manhattan recipe. Made with Woodford Reserve bourbon, of course. ○

Head bartender Jaren Singh serves up a Perfect Manhattan made with Basil Hayden bourbon at Michael Mina's Stonehill Tavern in the St. Regis Monarch Beach resort in Southern California.