

# imbibe

LIQUID CULTURE

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## MAISON PREMIERE

Brooklyn, NY

An absinthe-fueled oyster den? Welcome to Brooklyn's Maison Premiere. Like a favorite cashmere sweater, Maison Premiere evokes a well-worn, distressed-yet-cozy vibe thanks to John McCormick's design. Pastel-painted walls intentionally smudged dark, fine-grain leather banquettes, and a burnished marble bar all center around a working replica of the absinthe fountain at New Orleans' Old Absinthe House.

*maisonpremiere.com*

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COFFEE'S  
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# MAKE IT NICE

PERFECTING THE ART OF THE  
GARNISH AT MAISON PREMIERE.

Cocktails may originate as culinary creations, but a drink's eye-candy factor also comes into play. At Maison Premiere in Brooklyn, New York, bartenders have tightened their garnish game to such a degree that the drinks have become veritable works of art. "When we first opened, we didn't have a unified mindset of what Maison drinks should look like," says bar director Will Elliott. "We soon realized there was something special about the space, and the drinks wound up amplifying that effect as we put heavy design into the garnishes." New drinks are evaluated not only for flavor and balance, but for how they'll appear, so a process of trying different glassware and ice, and experimenting with assorted aromatics and visual touches, becomes a part of a drink's development. "We realize the power of the interested eye—the curiosity of a guest looking across the bar or across the room," Elliott says. "If a drink looks stunning from 25 feet away, they'll call a server over."

## BARBER OF SEVILLE

"This drink was a happy accident," Elliott says, the product of experimenting with seemingly disparate ingredients and finding a common ground, with the nuttiness of sherry meeting the spice of whiskey. "I wanted to make this drink smell like walking into an Italian bakery in the morning, with marzipan, baking spice and citrus." A paper umbrella provides not just a colorful touch, but a surface on which aromatics can be added—in this case, shaved candied marcona almonds and a stack of citrus-peel shards, which add an arresting fragrance to the finished drink.

1 oz. manzanilla sherry  
¾ oz. Cappelletti Aperitivo  
½ oz. rye whiskey  
½ oz. fresh lemon juice  
½ oz. orange flower water  
¼ oz. orgeat  
3 dashes orange bitters

Tools: microplane grater,  
fine grater

Glass: julep cup

Garnish: parasol, candied  
marcona almond,  
orange zest

Fill a julep cup with crushed ice and add the ingredients. Stir to combine, then add more crushed ice to fill. Open an umbrella and add it to the glass; use a fine grater to create a fluffy mound of orange zest on top of the drink, then use a microplane grater to shave a candied marcona almond over the top of the umbrella and orange zest. Serve with 2 short straws.

**WILL ELLIOTT**



### THE GARNISH ARC

Early drink garnishes ranged from basic and utilitarian to madly baroque. Dustings of nutmeg and sprigs of mint enlivened the aroma and flavor of punches and Juleps, and citrus arrays and piles of fresh berries transformed simple Cobblers into ornate fruit-stands of color and composition.

As the cocktail matured, though, such touches became more modest. A simple twist or slice of citrus satisfied most drinks' visual demands, while brandied or maraschino-preserved cherries also appeared as colorful accessories. And in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the green olive began its ascendance to icon status, the Martini's toothpick-speared garnish achieving immortality in countless neon signs and clipart files.

The tiki takeover that began in the 1930s added orchids, ice cones, pineapple fronds and dancing flames to the garnish game. And as today's cocktail renaissance continues to change the bar, such touches have merged into the mainstream, with herb gardens' worth of greenery joining ornately carved citrus peels and fanciful fruit sculptures in the modern garnish arsenal.

## WINTER PIMM'S #14

A new variation on the Pimm's Cup appears seasonally at Maison Premiere, which inspires the restaurant's bartenders to regularly re-imagine the drink. For this version, fresh mint offsets the rich flavors of bourbon and grapefruit, as well as the color and aroma of dried rosebuds in the garnish.

1 oz. Pimm's No. 1  
¾ oz. bourbon  
½ oz. grapefruit cordial  
½ oz. fresh lemon juice  
¼ oz. ginger syrup  
¼ oz. Strega  
3 leaves fresh mint  
4 dashes Angostura bitters  
Soda water, chilled

Tools: shaker, strainer, fine-mesh strainer

Glass: Collins

Garnish: mint bouquet, 4 dried rosebuds, rosemary sprig

Shake ingredients with ice, fine-strain into an ice-filled glass. Top with soda water and garnish.

**Grapefruit cordial:** Remove the zest from 4 grapefruits; set aside. Juice the grapefruits and measure the amount of liquid; add the juice to a covered container with an equal amount of sugar and the zest. Shake until the sugar dissolves, then refrigerate for 24 hours. Strain into a bottle and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

**Ginger syrup:** Juice 1 lb. of fresh ginger with a juicer (or place in a food processor and process into a pulp; then strain the liquid through cheesecloth). Measure the liquid and combine with an equal amount of sugar, stirring to combine. Refrigerate for up to 1 week.

**STEPHEN PALAHACH  
AND WILL ELLIOTT**



## RATTLESNAKE

Elliott tinkered with variations on this obscure classic cocktail for several months before finding the key to its puzzle when considering the appropriate glassware. "I needed a glass that could allow you to stick your nose in and sniff the absinthe," he says, leading him to choose a snifter—and this had an added benefit of creating a broad surface of foam on which to perform a little bitters-based artistry.

1¾ oz. rye whiskey  
¾ oz. fresh lemon juice  
½ oz. demerara simple syrup (1:1)  
¼ oz. absinthe (plus a few drops for the atomizer)  
1 large egg white (pasteurized if you prefer)

Tools: shaker, strainer, atomizer (optional), toothpick  
Glass: snifter  
Garnish: Angostura bitters

Shake the ingredients with ice until the drink is chilled and very foamy; strain into a chilled snifter. Spritz the foam with an atomizer filled with absinthe (or drip a few drops of absinthe on the drink's surface) and carefully add drops of bitters to the foam's surface to create an S-shaped pattern. Use the tip of a toothpick to connect the droplets into a snake shape.

ADAPTED BY  
WILL ELLIOTT





## MAISON MAI TAI

"We really love tiki cocktailing, but we do it in a different way than a lot of bars," says Elliott. "We're trying to reimagine these drinks in our own space, both on a flavor level, and with garnishing." For Maison's approach to the classic Mai Tai, Elliott tweaked the rum selection and opted for alternate glassware to the typical double-rocks glass. This also opened the opportunity for finishing flourishes, adding pineapple or banana leaves to the mix, along with parasols and colorful orchids.

¼ oz. blackstrap rum  
¼ oz. overproof Jamaican rum  
½ oz. aged rum  
½ oz. orange curaçao  
¾ oz. orgeat  
1 oz. fresh lime juice  
1 oz. amber rhum agricole

Tools: shaker  
Glass: Poco Grande  
Garnish: mint sprigs, cherry, pineapple or banana leaves, parasol, orchids

Shake the ingredients with crushed ice and pour (unstrained) into a glass; fill with crushed ice and garnish.

ADAPTED BY WILL ELLIOTT