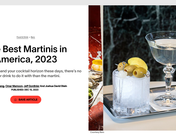

TASTING • 9m

The Best Martinis in America, 2023

If you want to expand your cocktail horizons these days, there's no better drink to do it with than the martini.

By Nick Mistrzyszyn, Chase Stevens, Jeff Gordinier, Kate Lanier, Kevin Pham
PUBLISHED: MAY 15, 2023

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Or other a martini and you may be asked: gin or vodka? Shaken or stirred? Wet or dry? Olives or a twist? Perhaps it's the ritual of hospitality—which is the exception ingredient in every martini—that makes it a sacred icon of cocktail culture. Treat the martini with respect and it will respect you.

There's an efflorescence beauty to the of standards of martini personalization, and it's a ritual that's been taken up by a generation of bartenders and chefs. The martini is an American invention, is it not? Does making you have to feel like playing chamber music? Peer pause. The youth revolt (or forgot). And thanks to a growing number of bartenders who pay less reverence to the gin-flavored soil on that the martini has been anointed—and who are pushing the boundaries of what it means to be an Gin Martini other has American invention (see and punk rock.

Today you'll find martinis that better reflect the diaspora of American drinkers and drink makers, like the mount South that is the MSG martini at Bestial's, a Cantonese-American restaurant in Brooklyn, or one with a Mexican-inspired twist at Cosme in New York City. Bartenders are heading into the culinary pressure that the bar has pursued, like the Old Fay martini at Downey's Bedo Club, which capsizes licking your fingers after eating crabs and taking a swig of a gin martini. You may even run into a real cocktail, like the tequila martini at the Beverly Hills location of the martini temple Dante.

Tequila! Is a martini? For me, that's within the rules. The essence of the martini is that it's a cocktail that's been shaken or stirred, served in a cone, it will, and it has the power to change. In fact, creating martini that revel the sea or fresh rainfall has become a pursuit among mixtlor themselves. The martini is like a room in a glass for the modern world. And a Dream tequila lands itself well to that goal.

Our curating team spent the past few years sipping hundreds of martini across the country to find modern classics and the essential, old-school classics. The result is a list of 50 martinis that represent the country alphabetically by state, kicking off with our Martini of the Year.

Now, there are some folks putting cocktails into martini glasses and calling them martinis, so they did in the 1960s and early aughts. Fad all for innovation, but you have to know what the martini is and make a special martini for it to matter, I'Ventions were developed tailor-binding on this recipe. A blend of three gins: a London dry, an Old Tom, and a Plymouth, plus a dash of Dolin dry vermouth and orange bitters "Chandelier Bar," a mix of grapefruit lemon, absentee, and nonsenicine—it's like a Tomolo cocktail, reduced to a whisper. Some of it goes in the drink. Some is atomized on top of it after the drink is stirred 20 times. (Give or take a stir or two.)

The arrival of the drink is a moment. Heavy glass, atop a silver tray. A lemon peel, Gamboverse olives, and pickled Louisiana millions (Mexico, Spain, and Greece, for the record) are placed with mysteriousness to the drink all at once—that Chandelier Magic really is magic. I'm hopsu and ended eights in New Orleans with this drink. It can be charming. And it can be contemplative. And that's the true test of a great martini. It will serve its purpose, no matter what that purpose is. —K.S.

THE DESERT MARTINI
Bar 1912
(Phoenix, Arizona)

Ian Wilt

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Andy Ryan

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There are a multitude of pizzas, tortunas, and vino represented in this lofty bar of the newly revived Lafayette Hotel but somehow, it just works. The same could be said for the bar's martini. It's a play on the century martini ensemble, the Alaska. Normally a mishap of a cocktail with Green Chartreuse and orange bitters, the Progress's version is a delicious, milk-textured, dearly and pieces chartreuse. It feels thoroughly classic, yet absolutely weird. And that's a pretty wonderful space to play in. — R.S.

APHOTIC MARTINI
Aphotic
(San Francisco, California)

Sipping on the Aphotic Martini at the dark and moody economical Michelin-starred restaurant is like taking a sip of the ocean, their version is made with a blend of five different house-distilled spirits and botanicals including seaweed gin and green tea liquor. The drink is garnished with a seaweed salad and a dash of bitters. Is it for the bare-ass? The virtual seafood dive garnish, brine, and seaweed—yes. — A.S.

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THE PROGRESS MARTINI
The Progress
(San Francisco, California)

Jim Hoffman

The martini belongs to every drinker who prefers savory over sweet, which is why the Cali Mediterranean version served at The Progress has become a legend. Has like herbs and smoke? Well, this team actually goes so far as to distill seaweed into Californian Mediterranean sea water and a crowning squiggle of rosemary oil delivers the coup de grâce. — J.M.H. Gentlemen

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MARTINI
Martini's
(San Francisco, California)

Andrew Kornberg

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Come for the martinis—a couple of those giant, generous drinks will set you right for the night. Olives or lemon twist, vodka or gin. The choice is yours, and it's hard to control. But stay for the pizza bar in the back—it's one-bite-stop-along-bar that goes until 2am nightly, and everyone is welcome. — G.M.

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OLD BAY MARTINI
Yacht Club
(Denver, Colorado)

Yelp

Co-owner Mickale Hedges says he got the inspiration for this drink while eating crabs dressed in Old Bay and washing them back with martinis and cocktails at Baltimore's Harborplace. Hence the name. Hence the superimposition, there is a drink with Bombay 1st Class Gin, Stolly Pear Extra Dry and the right wings of old bay solution and celeb spice. A garnish of pulled shrimp chips on the side to make the drink feels like a small appetizer to kick off a big night out. — A.S.

THE TELEGRAPH
Death & Co Denver
(Denver, Colorado)

Yelp

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The style-high souvenir of the legendary cocktail bar has had this alpine-variety off on the market since its opening in 2010 in the cozy lobby of the Ramble Hotel. Served straight out of the freezer, it's a potent cocktail that delivers notes of pear, eucalyptus, pine and juniper, like a walk through the mountains. — R.S.

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COLD AF MARTINI
Medium Cool
(Miami, Florida)

Andrew Kornberg

It's fitting that the signature martini at Stock Bowl's most eleganty chill cocktail bar would fall itself as something that is simply cold af. But the bar itself, which perfectly straddles the line between dance club and cocktail lounge, is also a place where you can find a martini made with Grease Vodka or Fresh Gin, of a subtly dirty with a blend of olive and peppercorn brine, and an almost a coveral spa like quality brought on by the Ahma, Sodoca and celery bitters. Not all you really need to know? It's cold af. And delicious. — R.S.

FINO MARTINI
Jaguar Sun
(Miami, Florida)

Andrew Kornberg

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If there were a martini that made perfect sense for Miami's humid, tropical climate it would be Jaguar Sun's fino martini. There's not a lot to it, but that's the point: a bottle of Bordeaux from the Entente, fino sherry in place of the usual vermouth, and a whole ocean of distilled fresh passion fruit juice. It is the right amount of sweet you want when you're this close to the water and the right amount of hearteagl cool gin for a hot Miami night. — A.S.

BAR BLANC MARTINI
Bar Blanc
(Atlanta, Georgia)

Andrew Kornberg

One could live happily if not for long on the offerings of Bar Blanc. Food is great, the wine list is thoughtful and delicious, the cocktail menu is pretty nice's steals in Inverness Intern Inclusive, a leaf crisps brunch bread, unlimited fries and a salad for show. That's it. Not too, and should, choose cocktails and, if time is flowing anyway, choose the martini, made with Ketel a London dry and a more vinous gin, aerated Jeanne dean cold and dilated with natural water, neither shaken nor stirred. — J.J.G.S.

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MARTINI
Cherry Circle Room
(Chicago, Illinois)

It is impossible to not start salivating for a martini when you enter the Cherry Circle Room, a mid-century time warp of a bar/restaurant located in the heart of the gothic Chicago Athletic Association hotel. They will make a martini exactly to your liking, but we find it best to order the ever-changing seasonal martini, which is currently a blend of Ketel One vodka, Aplenty, which uses a crush of oranges, mix ships to give a martini a time of mesmerizing—— R.S.

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MARKET PRICE MARTINI
Queen Mary
(Chicago, Illinois)

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THE SPANGLISH
Asador Bastian
(Chicago, Illinois)

Jason Lewis

Dates a maritime heritage is an oversized shot glass? No, it's the obvious answer. But does you order up to the bar here to order the Spanglish, and it comes straight out of the freezer, a boating mix of Cointreau Dry gin, Manzanilla sherry, and vermouth, and poured into a small glass that just becomes one with your hand as you easily simply with them over to you, and you take a sip, and it's so cold and refreshing, and it's so full of flavor, delicious, and delectable, the consistency of a martini in a shot glass can be the most disarming welcome. —R.S.

SMOOTH OPERATOR
St. Elmo Steakhouse
(Indianapolis, Indiana)

Jason Lewis

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Let's keep it simple: chilled vodka and a cooling zilion of cucumber Marie pong is as hot as a cucumbersnake in St. Elmo's Agnostic appetizer: shrimp cocktail whose tower mesa is the packed with enough horseradish to blot out organs of your kelvin with the most serene of heat. Burn, cool. Burn, cool. Repeat as necessary. — J.G.

TUXEDO TAILS
Jewel of the South
(New Orleans, Louisiana)

Jason Lewis

The world's greatest martini pairish is not so often, an onion, or a caper. It is a quail egg. That alone will have other folks order the Suzuki Sidecar right between, well, pickled quail eggs are just so cute and irresistible. But it is not a pickled quail. This is lower of the South, after all, run by Chris Hannah, one of the country's great bartenders. And at the drink table, it's a quail egg, yes, but it's also a Suzuki Sidecar, with Cognac, Suzuki sherry, maraschino, and orange bitters. Soak the egg in the drink for a bit, take a bite, and you'll see why this must be accompanied by an egg. It's a martini off more than worthy of its caper garnish. —J.G.

THE SEAWORTHY MARTINI
Seaworthy
(New Orleans, Louisiana)

Jason Lewis

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Gin goes well with oysters. Vodka too. But oysters? That is the subtext behind the Seaworthy, a martini made with Ford's gin, Cointreau, Cocchi Rosa Vermut, a touch of dry vermouth and olive brine, some drops of olive oil, fig and sheep dairy oyster and imagine yourself near a bender by the ocean. —R.S.

PISCO MARTINI
La Royal
(Cambridge, Massachusetts)

Jason Lewis

Here's one of the most underrated spirits on the planet. Sure you may love it in a pisco sour, but does you have this drink and you're like, "I didn't know pisco could do that?" Created by head scholar Jesse Goldstein, what makes La Royal's signature cocktail sing is its unexpected combination of pisco, Cocchi Americano, and cream genoise. It's earthy, spicy and deliciously strange. —R.S.

GARDEN STATE MARTINI
La Olivo
(Aberdeen, New Jersey)

Jason Lewis

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They don't call it the garden state for nothing. And so, naturally, one of the state's best bars would have a martini that included the pride of Jersey a leafy farm. The tonics. Take a martini with reasonably dowry (mined from Bombay Sapphire) and add a little Cocchi Americano (made from olive oil, and you've got a savory martini to pair with one of Jersey's other great things on offer at La Olivo: three fries. —R.S.

IS IT REALLY A MARTINI? HERE ARE THE RULES

1. The drink should ideally contain gin or vodka, but most importantly, it needs to be relatively clear. It haunted bars in the 1950s and 1960s, when Mad Men-era Martini Mondays (or even cocktail wednesday) will reveal, only Vermouth (If you one aspect whiskey, then it's just a Manhattan-ish. Sorry.)
2. It must contain a vermouth, or any modifier, like vermouth or Cointreau, or Lillet, or Cocchi Americano, or Dolin Blanc, or Noilly Prat, or, if you add a martini dispensary, you shouldn't be surprised if it's a martini.
3. The "Martini-type martini," which is often just vodka or whatever with only a little bit of vermouth and amounted by a single one-ATI martini, is a martini.
4. It can contain olives, but any other ingredients that go overly sweet, acidic, or cloying just you're now in cocktail territory.
5. It needs to be cold. But that we won't or just.
6. It doesn't have to be a good drink, it should be always welcoming.
7. Things that aren't martini: The martinez, the pisco martini, a drink that's just a cocktail with a martini name, the "martini" of an a martini Triple Sec? If someone asks for a martini off and they don't specify what kind of martini, they don't want a Dome guess for the expressos martini, the pizzo-star martini, and the Espresso Martini. Espresso Martinis are fine, but they aren't really just that martini, the high-to-off-martini.

MSG MARTINI
Bonnie's
(Brooklyn, New York)

Jason Lewis

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Take the wrongfully maligned yet essential element to a much Asian martini, and make it the star. Take the umami bomb that is MSG, a martini, and you've made yourself one of the country's most punk rock riffs on a martini. Despite the big flavors of Shaoxing wine, a veneer and vermouth, and a dash of the MSG crystals, the drink moves out of Chinatown and into the East Village, and Jackson Heights and Jackson Heights gin at a Grey Goose vodka. —R.S.

SAKURA MARTINI
Bar Goto
(New York, New York)

Jason Lewis

Sake, gin, and maraschino liqueur rip Bemo Green Lower East Side legend into the same territory of a Tuxedo #2, but when brings it all into Hemmeleh-esque dirty martini, Bonnie's Brooklyn, which floats at the terrace at the crepe place like a spaceship. —J.G.

EARTHA
Rosebonnes Bar
(New York, New York)

Jason Lewis

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The golden light, the illuminated murals, the vanishing pianos. There is so much history in these walls that it seems one of the to order anything but a classic martini needed to your liking. And they will do that or Rosebonnes's Eartha martini, a mix of Ketel One vodka, Lillet Blanc, and Scup Jam Rosebonnes' martini menu, and you will be rewarded. My favorite is the Earthe, vodka, Lillet Blanc infused with rosemary, and a little serve of French hoisons liqueur. It's a plummed up martini that can still blend in with money. —R.S.

DANTE MINI MARTINI
Dante
(New York, New York)

Jason Lewis

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Gage

Hot take: the linear mint martini is the perfectly timed martini. At about 2.5 minutes, it's tiny enough that it never gets warm, big enough for a gentle buzz to start the evening, and you can always order another and still be home before anyone notices. Gage & Tollner's linear mint martini uses that modern Dewar's Mint martini as remarkable, a mix of vodka and gin, sweet and dry vermouth and Sandra Cedro gives the drink a Mediterranean vibe pouch ease to cut and with. —R.S.

LEEK MARTINI
Eleven Madison Park
(New York, New York)

Eleven Madison Park

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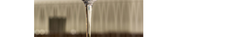
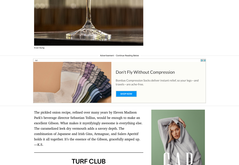


The pickled onion swipe, refined over many years by Eleven Madison Park's beverage director Jeffrey Pogorzelski, transforms the classic gin and vermouth Gibson. What makes it mysteriously awesome is everything else. The unsweetened herb dry vermouth adds a savory depth. The combination of Japanese and Irish Gins, Ketsuga, and Sakura Spirits# holds it all together. It's the essence of the Gibson, gracefully amped up. —R.S.

TURF CLUB
Gage & Tollner
(Brooklyn, New York)



Gage & Tollner

The Brooklyn Turf Club is a lot of fun. It's a Kentucky Derby-themed bar with a Mediterranean twist, and the bar program leans into that with a bit of everything, often that means fun, sun-soaked, and a little bit of a dare. The cocktail menu is organized by spirit, and the Bourbon section is where the Turf Club's personality shows up most clearly. The Bourbon Sour is the kind of drink you order when you want something that feels like a celebration but still tastes like you could have one more and be fine. It's built on Bourbon, with a bright, balanced sour profile that keeps it from getting heavy or sticky, and it's the kind of cocktail that pairs well with the room's energy: people talking, glasses clinking, and the feeling that something good is about to happen. —R.S.

ADOBO MARTINI
Neng Ji's
(Asheville, North Carolina)

Neng Ji

by mentality often serves as the martini's default mode, but here, bold Southeast Asian flavors take over the classic recipe. Adobo, black pepper and bay leaf floats within, from the olive has been tasted in Zesty Paté cane vinegar. A lot is happening, yes — but the result is harmony. —JG

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IMPERIAL JADE
Takibi
(Portland, Oregon)

Takibi

Takibi is located inside the Portland outpost of the cult Japanese omakase brand Sasan Bar, so it's natural that one of their more interesting cocktails would combine both worlds. The Imperial Jade blends Suntory Roku Gin with Apple Brandy from Sonoma Boon Brandworks and Ocimapan Flora Green, two local liquors. It's a martini worthy of the Pacific Northwest's lush landscape. —A.S.

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DIRTY PASTA WATER MARTINI
Fiorella
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Fiorella

Dirty pasta water is often referred to as liquid gold, that secret ingredient that transforms a mediocre sauce into something rich and silky. It can be used for the same purpose in a martini. The brinely solid pasta water takes the place of vermouth in this martini. The only other ingredients are gin and olive brine, making for an incredibly food-friendly martini. Try it with Fiorella's fine pandoro spaghetti. —A.S.

FARMER'S DIRTY MARTINI
Poste Haste
(Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

HANNAH BRAS

Poste Haste is a neighborhood bar, with the lofty mission of using local ingredients whether it be gin, or whiskey, or vermouth. Easy enough to find these ingredients within a few hundred miles. But olives? Almost impossible to grow in the Northeast. So when it came time to make a dirty martini, the Poste Haste bar team opted to make a brine from local ingredients that would be readily accessible to anyone. The result is a dirty dressed that all you drinker have the gentle fullness of cherry tomato brine. —A.S.

THE DIRTY GREEN TOMATO
The Grocery
(Charleston, South Carolina)

Erin Fortune

For a smart southern spin on the dirty martini, the clever folks at The Grocery in Charleston combine the brine from pickled green tomatoes with gin fresh nearby Tight Wire Distilling, whose piney and floral notes play well together with the slightly spicy and vinegary brine. This one is shaken, not stirred—HRT would approve. —GGR

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SMALL VICTORY MARTINI
Small Victory
(Austin, Texas)

GGR

Austin is very much a beer, shot and margarita town, for when I need a break from that and yes, you need a break from that I find myself thinking a martini is a perfect prompt to find the hidden entrance to a speakeasy, or a secret garden, or a secret lair, or a secret society. There's a floor show on the menu that will guide you through some pronouncements. But you can also leave it to the hands of the bartenders, who have dozens of riffs of the martini on hand. Be ready to discover a new favorite. —A.S.

GOLDEN MARTINI
Little's Oyster Bar
(Houston, Texas)

Few things cut the bitterness of beautiful bivalves quite like the smooth, ice-cold embrace of gin and vermouth. At Little's, the addition of grapefruit bitters and chamomile lavender soak adds a complex floral, citrus layer and imparts a beautiful golden hue to the drink. —GGR

Linda Allard

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AMIS MARTINI
Roquette
(Seattle, Washington)

Linda Allard

Named after Martin Amis, one of the patron saints of the martini, this variation is a wild one. It's a bit vegan it contains Kin Vodka and Ketel One Citroen, but it's also a bit Mediterranean with Amontillado, Manzanilla sherry, cocoa, lemongrass, and mature lime. There's incredible depth here, a thinker of a drink, but somehow the sheer dryness just pulls it all together like a magic trick. —A.S.

MEDINA'S MARTINI SERVICE
Medina
(Washington DC)

Jennifer Chase

Too many martini cart operators insist on cool in applause but only in the background gawkers, "Can I just have my 110 drink over?" My opinion: if the cart signaturist isn't functional dig it. At Medina, from the Mandos crew, the bar cart brings out jaw dribbers for dalmatians. The dirty martini, served with other Mandosian cities of scandal, gin or vodka, olive juice, olives, and a dash of Medina's proprietary bitters, cocoa, cocoa, and, if requested, a bump of Sardinian bottarga, the more light for your taste buds. —GGR.

SILVER SERVICE MARTINI
Silver Lyan
(Washington, D.C.)

Silver Lyan

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When I was a boy, reading my mother's four Gordon novels, wherein inevitably some handsome man would meet a bombshell blond at a hotel bar for drinks and, echo boom echoe. The martini service at Silver Lyan at the Hugo Hotel in DC was what I unknowingly had in mind. Ryan Chetiyawardana, aka Mr. Lyan, offers four perfectly balanced Martini variations, from classic to modern, with a bit of Lyan's signature, house-brined olives, pickled onions, a lemon twist and a fresh shocked oyster. (I mean, I did not intend to dispute crystal glasses, TV or deep in her decolletage, so cold as a kiss, as strong as the attraction between them, yadda yadda. It's sexy sophisticated and so very adult. —JG.S.

ICE COLD MARTINI
Harvey House
(Madison, Wisconsin)

Nicole Krasinski

I've always believed that hospitality is one of the martini's key ingredients. But I didn't truly understand that and experiencing it at this Madison institution where the bar team has been shaking martinis for years, a server elegantly managed to exchange the remainder into a fresh, ice-cold glass. It made what was a very excellent martini to one that I would remember forever. —A.S.

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