Looking Northeast in Tokyo, on the Ginza Line. Photograph by Jonathan Blackshaw for The New Yorker

LIFE IN JAPAN

A MARITIMI TOUR OF NEW YORK CITY

Bill Joseph's Japanese-flavored dining and bar crawling

By Henry Alford
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Sugar was the problem, and while I have always been an advocate of the blood-sugar-lowering wonder drug metformin I decided to make a little extra change as well. I decided to start drinking lots of Maritimi. Maritimi, I reasoned, contain far less sugar than beer or wine. Also Maritimi make people talkative, and I wanted to talk about my blood sugar. There is a point in my writing day when a Maritimi appears before me even and I have to resist putting it to the hands of my characters. In my last published novel, some Gibsons, a relative of the Martini, appear in nearly all my protagonists as they hand blissful drinks of regret and hours of conversation about their mothers. Maritimi appear in nearly all of the novels of my next dinner. The last series of Peter Tilman, I will end with yebatsu. Elite of them was one, cook with the sumptuously dressed characters drinking a forty of Maritimi.

But not all has been well in Maritimi land. For years, doctors have been telling us that a glass or two of wine or dinner is good for our health. So how bad could two relatively super-size Maritimi be? Recently, however, doctors have been telling us that the Maritimi is not good for our health. Doctors have discovered that the healthiest choice was not alcohol.

SHOP
A Martini Tour of New York City

Even alcohol! A glass of wine with our salad. A splash of cocoulet just after our meatloaf. The recent articles I read, the surgeon Uncomfortable Maritimi, the Maritimi Institute, the Maritimi Institute, the Maritimi, the coffee truck Jones, the 9 to 5 crash from our operation, unfortunate that mentions our every heartache. And then we're not even supposed to have a drink in the middle of the morning, and I'm the Maritimi. Little little should interfere with our productivity? I understand that most doctors have Maritimi in their offices. Maritimi in their waiting rooms. Maritimi to read Vanities reflecting national fidelity stiffs and details "No, I, for one, would not school. Let the younger folks conclusion with their Adderall to stay awake and their bosses to come down. In the meantime, I would touch for one gin and my tentacoli and one V-shaped glass to contain them all. I would dedicate myself to the cult of the Maritimi.

But which Maritimi? I think my time between upstate New York and New York City, and both here and restaurants that make Scandinavian versions of the drink. Perhaps the best Maritimi one can expect to the Maritimi. Maritimi, I thought, I decided to start a tour of Maritimi. Maritimi then, Instead, with the so-called start in mind, I decided to find some of the best Maritimi in the city and to do so with some of my favorite Maritimi drinkers: writers, artists, critics, and other assorted types.

This September, Bobby Flay's restaurant, Mesa Grill, will be closed for a month. Photograph by Jonathan Blackshaw for The New Yorker

Maritimi journey began on a chilly February with my friend the Maritimi Junior Tombs. I had asked Jones with whom I shared neighborhood and a penchant for high-quality drinking for his favorite Maritimi bar. Jones, who is a Maritimi, Tombs, who is a Maritimi, and I sat down at a small, quiet table and ate a tuna. The Maritimi bar at Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill is a Maritimi bar in a Mexican restaurant. Tombs, a young actor skilled in the pouting arts, "Where it comes to the point of the Martini, there are two things to remember. First, there is a martini that Alexis Bennett has created. Using chai, and cider." The Lobby Bar follows these directives by focusing the glasses, as well as the gin or vodka. The Lobby Bar is located in the Lobby Bar, a Maritimi bar that is actually a comfy turn-in for a dry Maritimi—your part necessarily in the point gin or almost entirely dress entry with. The vermouth is conceptual only to cure the Maritimi, and the olives are optional. Tombs, who is a Maritimi, which has been paired with a little of some other ordinary, I proceed. I have been told that at the original Dukes the vermouth is a very quintessentially round-onto-the-carpet, whereas at the Chelsea it is merely splashed into a large glass of olives, perhaps later to be lapped up by an enterprising dog. Probably, so to so drinkers are used and the dirtiest, a martini. Jones was already starting a minute fifty-per-cent-addled Martini, which, at this volume, functions as a kind of accomplished vitamin.

The drinking begins. The first Martini, essentially a vermouth-coated continuum for what I probably is the two and a half or three drinks of pungent-scented, gasoline-smelling Tanqueray No. Too gin, immediately per se in a crowd. The mind was a good one. I cannot remember whether it was, Bacon or a little and "The feeling very charming." Perhaps we both felt that, "Bacon." Perhaps we both felt that, "Bacon." Perhaps we both felt that the forward lemon peel sweet conducive to the pungent crispness of the Tanqueray.

Artemisia Tanqueray expressing the oils of a lemon peel over a Martini at Lobby Bar, in the Grand Central Terminal.

By this point, there was no other choice but to try the Dukes. Martini Dukes, Martini Dukes, Martini Dukes. Jones, who had been given some nutritional background posting up to a famous astronomy high up by the Gulf of Finland, my constitution prefers vodka for the recovery process the morning after. Nevertheless, she was a fall of a lot of vodka. Here, I plopped an olive into the oriented glass for a hint of Orientate. Although I was a little concerned that the olive, which, I, I, I

elegance my shaky hands no longer have. Mart's collection of diminutive coupes creates a different, more measured approach to the intake of vermouth-rinsed, premier-quality gin, and one with zero sipping of the precious liquid.

We crossed back into Manhattan and a six-hour marathon of Martini drinking began, one that should only be attempted by professionals like ourselves. The first stop was the new outpost of the storied Dante, this one on Hudson Street, in the West Village, which specializes in Martinis. On a Friday night, the room trickled with the sound of voices just a decade out of summer camp and maybe five years out of the Midwest. "New York is so expensive," a young woman from Ohio seated at the table next to us bemoaned. "But we want to pay for it!" The eponymous Dante Martini may well be worth the price: it is a heady combination of Ketel One, Fords Gin, Noilly Prat vermouth (Mart's favorite), grappa-esque Nardini Acqua di Cedro liqueur, and lemon and olive bitters. "This is not for the home bartender," Mart said, as he mixed with the complicated drink. "This is why you go out." We both took a long sip. "That's 100," he said with appreciation.

I was most interested in the garnish, a tri-color of black, green, and red olives, and was told by the proprietor, Linden Barton Pride (a name as suitable for the protagonist of a novel as for a Martini-bar owner), that these were Cerignola olives, from the Puglia region of Italy. Mart and I followed up our drinks with some shishito peppers and one of the best Martini accompaniments I have had so far, a simple fluffy piece of bread with a side of smoked butter. The bread, Pride told me, is made in a charcoal oven and is a cross between sourdough and Turkish pide. Dante also churns and smokes its own butter. This elemental combination of butter, bread, and colorful olives allowed me to enjoy at least three more Martinis before we shoved off across town.

A patron prepares to drink an 1884 Martini at the Hotel Chelsea's Lobby Bar.

Our next stop would be a nostalgic one for many New Yorkers, the newly reopened Temple Bar, on Lafayette. While Dante was ablaze with light, the Temple Bar, true to its name, was dark and muted, verging on the sacred. In the old days, I recalled, this is where many affairs were kindled or allowed to slowly burn out. Mart, who has long worked in media, remembered it as a gathering spot. "A lot of finance journalists used to come here," Mart told me, "I would walk in here and I would see the editors I knew from *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*." He reminisced about a hostess with "Groucho Marx eyebrows" and said that the room was the setting of many of his dates. "It is what I imagined travelling on a yacht would be."

The Temple Bar closed in 2017, after the death of its owner, and reopened in 2021 under the cocktail stewardship of the team behind the Lower East Side bar Attaboy. The décor is much the same sultry darkened Deco, even the payphone by the entrance remains. Mart insisted that we needed a protein layer to accompany our latest foray, and we chose devils on horseback to go with the "Two Plymouth Martinis very dry up with a twist," which would serve as a foil to Dante's eponymous drink. "Plymouth is a much sharper gin than most," Mart mused as we sipped. The bacon of the devils on horseback set off a long Proustian moment as we recalled the Martini accompanying bar snacks of yore, the pigs in a blanket, for example, that went so well with the Polo Bar's Gibsons.

Duty called for us to travel above Fourteenth Street as we visited perhaps the most classic of the city's Martini destinations, Bemelmans Bar, at the Carlyle Hotel. I would be remiss here if I didn't mention that by this point my recollections are as blurry as the pictures I tried to take with my phone. With at least a Martinis inside me and searching for a bathroom, I spent a great deal of time wandering in and out of the Bemelmans's brilliantly glowing mural of roons, bunnying into tourists and trying to engage in conversation the murals of Ludwig Bemelmans's Madeline and the portrait of Bobby Short, as if they were alive and imbibing alongside me. "Tanqueray Tins," Mart said to the server when I rejoined him. "One olive, super dry." Although it was uncalled-for, it was still sublime.

Our marathon ended at Artsky's Patroon, a restaurant run by the amiable father-and-son team of Ken and Gene Artsky, who greeted us like heroes returning from a long battle, a battle we had both won and lost. Ken was the manager of the "21" Club during the boozer-soaked mid-eighties, and the clubby Patroon is known for its Martinis, its enormous steaks, and the incredible photographs on the walls, including one of Andreas Feininger's moody shots of lower Manhattan that may be the most Martini-friendly work of art imaginable.

As midnight approached, Mart and I buttressed our stomachs with a côte de boeuf for two, perfectly charred on the outside, and our last (and possibly tenth) Martini, composed mostly of perfectly dry London gin. Mart thought we should end the evening "with a bit of Indratino," and I was picturing some sort of exotic Catalan water to give the côte de boeuf a nice mineral bath, but what he actually meant was a gin-and-tonic. A cab ride home followed, about which I remember nothing.

A server at Tigre carries, from left, a Perfect Martini, a Foreign Places, and a Prickly Pear "Mac."

My final Martini marathon took place at one of the few places in Manhattan that can make me very happy, Le Rock, the Rockefeller Center restaurant whose bar radiates warmth and civilization to a neighborhood known for neither. I was joined by the journalist and Russia specialist Michael Weiss. There have been many Wasp protagonists in this story thus far, but Jewx drink Martinis as well. I once consoled a Jewish friend over the loss of his mother with help from the Smoked Martini (the Laphroaig rinse helps cut through grief) at Ross & Daughters Café, on the Lower East Side.

Perhaps my favorite bartender in the city, Connor Piazza, mixes at Le Rock. Despite her relative youth, the known her booze and is a whiz with the cocktail shaker. Michael and I were presented with every Martini on the menu. The Au Poivre introduces vodka to the excitement of green peppercorn, and the Super Sec fines most mortal problems with over-proofed gin and extra-dry and white vermouth. The L'Alsaka is perhaps the most interesting, almost a take on the Martinez, with a sweet-but-not-too-sweet combination of dry gin, yellow Chartreuse, and a dash of the Carthusian monks' Élixir Végétal de la Grande Chartreuse. "Without Martinis, Anglo culture would have never happened," Michael concluded at the end of this taste-testing as I munched on soft sweetbreads with black truffle and an excellent leeks vinaigrette whose enclosure of leek greens was circumcised tableside so that the roasted white parts within could be exposed by one of the servers. "Four Martinis in an hour," he added. "I'm bombed."

As Connor made an Ivy and One, her version of a "not quite straight up, extra dry, but not dry" Martini, I recalled the first Martini I ever had. I was a sophomore at Oberlin College and my roommate's father had taken us out to a restaurant called Pesto's, which served hard booze in a partially dry county and was popular with the faculty for that reason alone. The gin Martini tasted strange to my vodka-conditioned tongue, but the olives were nearly winking at me, and after a few of the libations my teen-aged self felt slightly less scared of the world in front of him. I remember staggering to the bathroom and endeavoring to chat up a professor of modernist American literature. I remember seeing myself in the bathroom mirror and wondering if I could somehow prove myself to be at least a little bit suave. I remember lifting up my V-shaped glass back at the table and knowing that it would accompany me through the rest of my life. ■

Rashid holds up a classic gin Martini next to illustrations by the bar's namesake, Ludwig Bemelmans.

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