

Go creative cocktail instead of plain old bubbly

Holiday drinks range from chocolate to easy and breezy

By CATHERINE SCHETTING SALFINO

Some years back, before kids, before I became afraid to fly, and before a mortgage and afore-said kids sapped all our disposable income, my husband and I used to fly to California each year for the holidays. We would visit his mother and grandmother in Palm Springs, and then all of us would travel to the coast to visit his aunt and cousins.

One year, we decided that since his cousins were small and there wasn't much room in the manse for us, we would stay at a resort in Dana Point for a couple of nights. Everything about the place was gorgeous — the ocean view, the room. And one of the best memories I have of staying there is sipping a hot cocoa laced with peppermint schnapps in front of the hotel's (truly) roaring fireplace.

I've recreated the drink at home on occasion and it takes me back. And one of the reasons I even tried the drink was the server said it was the bartender's special that evening. So I decided to ask area bartenders what they would recommend this season to those looking to imbibe.

The answers ranged from chocolatey, which always seems to go with the holiday season, to breezy, for those who shun the cold and want to recapture the warm summer months. And since champagne is practically a staple during the holidays, some of the drinks include at least a splash of it.

Michael Sherman heads up the bar at Dish, the restaurant in Passaic Park.

"The holidays are always a festive time for myself, family and friends," Sherman says. "Sharing new experiences at holiday parties and family get togethers always brings you closer to the people in your life and it also gets the party started. Later, when you're sharing memories you'll say things like, 'Hey, remember when we did that... and what was that blue thing we were drinking?' It reminds you of the good times."

Sherman says one of his favorites this holiday is the Blue Apple Martini (see recipe). It has the stylishness of a martini, the fruitiness of a tropical drink and the festiveness that automatically comes when champagne is added.

At the South Park Bar & Grill in Paramus, a new spot that opened in November and offers dining and dancing with a DJ Wednesday through Saturday, bartender Scott Davis says he enjoys serving up new and different drinks to the clientele. And he recommends people try something new during the holidays, "Because it's the right thing to do," he observes.



Martini collection by John Hardy.

Davis has a variety of cocktail ideas that range from light and juicy to serious.

"I have something called a Zoo, which is a combination of a Long Island Ice Tea and an Alabama Slammer served in a plain glass, with a chaser of Red Death (a combination of vodka, triple sec, Southern Comfort, Sloe Gin and orange and cranberry juices)," says Davis. "It's very potent but it tastes like Hawaiian Punch. And it'll punch ya."

On a calmer note, Davis also has a very glamorous martini called Hollywood Nights, which involves Parrot Bay rum or Malibu rum, Midori, and pineapple juice (see recipe).

The Restaurant in Hackensack offers fine dining as well as live entertainment — jazz on Wednesday evenings, DJ on Thursdays and Fridays, and a piano bar Wednesday through Saturday, as well as during the Sunday brunch. Paul Denobrega, one of The Restaurant's bartenders, says the holidays are a good time to try something different.

"We have all kinds of martinis — a chocolate martini, a white chocolate martini," he says. The glasses

are rimmed with chocolate powder and a Hershey's Kiss is thrown in for fun. "We also have a refreshing, tropical Cosmopolitan, which is made with Malibu rum, raspberry pucker and pineapple. It's very good."

So this holiday, these drinks are a good excuse to go out and have a little fun. But, if you don't have a designated driver, try whipping up some at home. The bartenders here submitted fabulous recipes for Lifetime's readers. And if some seem best left to the professionals, remember: you can always break out the Swiss Miss and peppermint schnapps.

From Dish:

Jingle Bells

1 shot Bailey's Irish Cream
1 shot Frangelico
1 shot espresso
Pour all ingredients into a snifter and serve warm. Garnish with a sprig of mint.

Blue Apple Martini

1 shot Sour Apple Dekuyper schnapps
1 shot citron vodka
1/8 shot melon liqueur
1/8 shot blue Curacao

A splash each of pineapple and sour mix*

Champagne

Combine all but the champagne in a shaker with ice. Strain into a martini glass and top with champagne. Garnish with a twist of lemon.

Ruskatini

3 shots Stolichnaya vanilla
1 splash of Kaluha
Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Serve in a martini and garnish with a vanilla bean stick.

From South Park Bar & Grill:

Hollywood Nights

4 ounces of Parrot Bay rum or Malibu rum
1/2 ounce Midori
2 ounces pineapple juice
Combine ingredients in shaker over ice, shake and strain into chilled martini glass. Garnish with a frill pick holding a pineapple wedge with cherry on top.

From The Restaurant:

Paulie's Delight

1 ounce Absolut Citron
1/2 ounce Apple Pucker schnapps
Splash of Midori
Splash of Blue Curacao
Splash sour mix
Champagne
Combine ingredients in a shaker, shake and strain into a cocktail glass. Top with champagne.

Elena's Raspberry Splash

2 ounces Stolichnaya
Raspberry Vodka
2 dashes of Chambord
Splash of ginger ale
Splash of fresh lime juice
Combine with ice in a shaker, shake and strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with fresh raspberry.

The Restaurant Colada "O"

1-1/2 ounce Bacardi O Rum
1/2 ounce coconut cream
1/2 ounce orange juice
Combine with ice in a shaker, and strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with an orange wedge.

*Sour Mix recipe

(There are many recipes for sour mix and this one is quite easy. While some call for adding egg whites to make drinks frothy, this one doesn't.)
1 cup sugar
2 cups water
2 cups fresh lemon juice
Combine sugar and water until all the sugar is dissolved. Add lemon juice and refrigerate.

Catherine Schetting Salfino is a freelance writer based in Bergen County.