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CC

IN GOOD SPIRITS

A licence to chill

How James Bond ruined the martini, but redeemed himself with the Vesper



JOANNE SASVARI
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Blame Bond. Throughout 12 novels, two short story collections and, with the Nov. 9 release of *Skyfall*, 23 movies, many an evil mastermind has tried to rid the world of super-spy James Bond. And when you consider what Agent 007 has done to the martini, they've got a point.

As any good bartender knows, all-spirits drinks — like the martini — should be stirred with ice to add chill and dilution in a controlled manner.

But ever since Sean Connery as Bond was served his vodka martini “shaken, not stirred” in 1962’s *Dr. No*, the general public has assumed that’s the proper way to make it. And so, instead, of enjoying a crystal clear, delicately aromatic cocktail, they’re bashing it up, watering it down, filling it with ice chips and replacing the distinctive botanical bite of gin with flavourless vodka. (In fact, the slightly slushy vodka drink Bond is ordering is actually called a Bradford, which doesn’t sound nearly as suave as the martini.)

“I heard a story lately that the whole idea of shaking it was to separate the poison, and that makes sense,” says Josh Pape, co-owner and bartender at Wildebeest (120 West Hastings St., wildebeest.ca).

According to that theory, shaking the drink would force a poison, such as the digitalis that almost kills Bond in *Casino Royale*, to sink to the bottom or rise to the top of the drink.

A much better theory is that it’s just as well to avoid the whole martini mess and enjoy the real James Bond cocktail, the Vesper, instead.

“It’s pretty good,” says Pape. “It’s clean ... And it is elegant, there’s no question about that. You look good holding it wearing a tux.”

“I love it!” says Evelyn Chick, bartender at Blue Water Café + Chick Bar

(1095 Hamilton St., www.bluewater-cafe.net). “Just the fact that it was a James Bond drink. And he created it on the spot and named it for his leading lady. And it’s really a fantastic drink.”

Bond invented the Vesper in Ian Fleming’s 1953 novel, *Casino Royale*, naming it for the book’s female lead, Vesper Lynd. Here’s how the exchange with the bartender goes:

“A dry martini,” (Bond) said. “One. In a deep champagne goblet.”

“Oui, monsieur.”

“Just a moment. Three measures of Gordon’s, one of vodka, half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well until it’s ice-cold, then add a large thin slice of lemon peel. Got it?”

“Certainly, monsieur.” The barman seemed pleased with the idea.

Unfortunately, today’s Vesper isn’t quite the same drink it once was. Since 1953, both Gordon’s gin and Kina Lillet have been reformulated; the gin has less alcohol, and the aperitif, which has been renamed Lillet Blanc, no longer has the same bitter herbal bite.

Perhaps that’s why so many bartenders have created their own variations on the Vesper, adding bitters or quinine powder, substituting absinthe or Campari for the Lillet, or swapping the proportions of the ingredients.

Chick, for instance, has made several different versions, using ingredients such as lemon-infused vodka, vanilla or grapefruit bitters and Pineau de Charentes.

“I’m actually aging a Vesper in an oak barrel at Blue Water,” she says. “The smoothness of (oak-aged gin), you feel like you’re drinking a micro-mini scotch.”

And Pape has created a twist on the Vesper using peppery nasturtium-infused gin, grappa instead of vodka and martini Bianco instead of Lillet.

“I think there’s just a little more spice,” he says. “The other is a just a very neutral drink. This has just a bit more kick to it.”

WILDEBEEST VESPER



Co-owner and bartender Josh Pape created this variation on the classic Vesper martini for Wildebeest restaurant. He notes that the nasturtiums add a peppery, floral note to what can otherwise be “a pretty boring drink.”

45 mL nasturtium-infused gin (see note)
15 mL grappa, preferably Nonino
10 mL Martini Bianco

Place all ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice and shake well. Strain into a chilled champagne coupe (or martini glass) and garnish with a fresh nasturtium blossom. Serves 1.

Note: To make nasturtium-infused gin, pour an entire bottle of gin (preferably Beefeater) into a glass pitcher and stir in 150 g of fresh nasturtium leaves. (Be sure to use nasturtiums that haven’t been sprayed with any chemicals.) Allow leaves to steep for four to six hours, then strain out. Pour gin back into the bottle and store in a cool, dark place.

Josh Pape presents his version of the James Bond cocktail known as the Vesper. STEVE BOSCHMAN



THIS WEEK

STAGE The Number 14

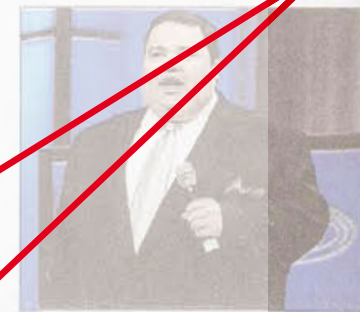
After 20 years touring more than 10 countries, the bus still hasn’t run out of gas. Axis Theatre Company’s hit comedy captures the strange circus of a Hasting Street bus ride through a series of sketches that bring to life a wide range of characters.

Opens tonight, runs to Nov. 18 |
Waterfront Theatre
Tickets \$29-\$42 at axis theatre.com

Gold Mountain

Combining rich storytelling and visual wizardry, David Yip’s intimate, yet epic *Gold Mountain* is a highly personal piece that weaves together a son’s story about his British mother and Chinese father.

Opens tonight, runs to Nov. 4 |
The Cultch
Tickets from \$25 at tickets.thecultch.com



John Pinette

The John Candy-shaped comedian riffs on stories about food and drink: supermarket loyalty cards, buffet etiquette, rib festivals, KFC and other snacks, on his Still Hungry Tour. Pinette spends much of his time performing in Las Vegas, which explains why his delivery is so polished and his material leans to the fun-for-the-whole-family side.

Oct. 26, 7 p.m. | Centre for Performing Art
Tickets \$45.50/\$39.50 at ticketmaster.ca

TODAY

Mayer Hawthorne

The new school soul sensation delivers tunes from his major-label debut *How Do You Do*.

Commodore Ballroom, 8 p.m. | Tickets \$25 at livenation.com

Men Without Hats

You can dance if you want to as the Montreal new wave band performs ’80s hits.

The Venue, doors 8 p.m. | Tickets \$17 at northernrock.com

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INSIDE | D3

Lessons learned

Vancouver bluesman Jim Byrnes talks about striving to find the right balance in day-to-day life.



WEDNESDAY

Stylemaster

The Sun’s men’s fashion columnist JJ Lee gives a primer on the quintessential James Bond style.



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