

A COLLECTION OF BAR SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Here is a small collection of tips and techniques that we have picked up through bartending with some great creative people. The list is by no means exhaustive and I hope that you will find many more of your own.

Refreezing Ice

Ice is the most important ingredient in your cocktails and often your bar cannot supply ice of high enough quality to make perfect cocktails. One solution is to buy a chest freezer and refreeze your ice straight from the machine. This is then store at c -18degrees and removed for service. Colder, better drinks.

Stirring

When stirring a drink make sure that your hands have as little contact with the glass as possible. Try and only touch it on the punt at the bottom of the glass. Invest in a thick walled stirring vessel or even better a wide mouthed unbreakable Thermos flask

Double Stir

When building more than one stirred cocktail we have to be able to aim for simultaneous delivery. This requires a technique to stir many glasses at once, as we can't even make two identical stirred drinks in the same glass. Take the bowls of two barspoons and grip firmly together. Place the two drinks that need to be stirred next to each other and adjust the angle of the two spoons so the touch the same place on each glass. Slowly begin to stir, following the outside of the glass. As long as the two spoons stay in the same place relative to the glasses they will both spin freely. With practice this can be increased to three spoons and then to both hands

Shaking

Try and develop a way of shaking with both hands separately. This will allow you to make more cocktails. If in doubt about safety, obtain some mini (Toby) shakers of about 12 Oz. These can then be securely grasped with one hand with no chance of spillage. When using multiple shakers doing the same cocktail put a portion from each shaker in each glass ensuring consistency across the round.

Shaking Cream

The best tool for whipping cream for Irish coffees etc, is obviously a whisk but they are often unavailable in a bar and work best with large amounts of cream. To replicate their effect for small quantities remove the spring from a clean hawthorn strainer and place with the cream in your shaker. Shake briskly for a minute and you will have perfectly whipped cream. This technique can be used to create egg white foams also. Just remember that foams require all tools to be absolutely dry.

Building

When using syrups and liqueurs in simple built drinks remember that to avoid having to stir them as a separate process add the sweet, thick ingredients last so then mix themselves. When in doubt agitate with the straws.

Straining

There are numerous tools and methods of straining but the most important is proficient use of your hawthorn strainer. The variability of flow allows a large variety in texture of drinks produced.

Double Strain

A slick method of pouring two drinks from the same shaker, which requires confidence for it to work, go on, use the force. Place the rims of the two glasses together and close the gate on the hawthorn strainer. Push the strainer right back onto the rim of the Boston to create a central reservation. Then with a brisk initial motion start to pour, the liquid will quickly resolve itself into two streams. It is advisable to stop just before the end to stop dribbles and to correct any inconsistencies in washline.

Fine Straining

When using a fine strainer to remove excess fruit pulp always use a sieve with a relatively wide mesh as you remove the air as you do this as well. Try holding the fine strainer handle along the side of the Boston. This allows you to have another hand free to agitate the pulp in the sieve and allows you to get the drink finished quicker.

Opening Champagne no.1

Take a bottle of champagne and remove the foil. Place the thumb of your non-dominant hand in the punt of the bottle and hold upright. Grasp the loop of the cage and gently allow the bottle to spin on the thumb, with the correct wrist motion the bottle will spin and undo the cage. They are always twisted three times so three rotations of the bottle will always open it. This looks very stylish when performed correctly and when done smoothly causes no excitation of the champagne

Opening Champagne no.2

CAUTION: ALWAYS PROCEED WITH CARE AND USE ADEQUATE PROTECTION. THIS IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS

Take a bottle of champagne and remove all the foil. Locate the seam of the bottle and run the blade of the sword gently along this to encourage a slight excitation of the champagne. Remove the cage and wrap the bottle in 2 napkins. Take the sword and run the blade FLAT down the neck of the bottle. Very little force is required. Make sure that you are pointing away from every one. The cork and the top section of the neck (just to where the cage is tightened to will fly off. With practice this can be performed with much smaller objects but the sword always looks best.

Carving Citrus Twists

Creative citrus garnishes are a cheap and effective way to add interest and perceived value to a cocktail. They look hard to make but are surprisingly easy. The only requirement is to have a good knife. If you use a plain bladed knife make sure it is super sharp, if serrated use one with fine close-set teeth. Take time to remove a large section of zest to allow space to work and remove pith carefully to depth of 1mm. Any thinner and the twist will break and add very little oil. Draw your shape or word on paper to see the line to follow and then with the knife carefully gripped as a pen follow the original pattern on the twist. Hearts, Flowers, Stars and initials are all easy. Go be creative.

Spiral Twists

When making spiral twists make as long a length as possible. Coil it in one go around a stirrer. This can then be kept and the garnish used in sections for multiple drinks. Generally it is better to use spiral twists purely for visual effect, any zest required should come from a standard twist that is then discarded.

Bartender's brunch

When you're too busy to stop or too poor to buy lunch, take tomato juice and spices used in a Bloody Mary, mix with a hefty slug of half'n'half and heat with the cappuccino wand. A healthy spicy tomato soup awaits. Vodka is an optional extra.

Aerating Martinis

Originally a technique from Spain this is a method of chilling and aerating a martini with a little showmanship. Fill two Boston cans full of ice and add the ingredients for a martini, though it tends to look more impressive with two drinks in. Then, with a hawthorn on each shaker, pour the liquid from one vessel to the other, moving the hawthorn on the receiving vessel out of the path of the stream. Start with the vessels close together and gradually increase the distance between, always looking at the bottom one to enable a clean catch. Repeat 10 times and check dilution.

Flaming Spirits

The basic techniques of producing a blue blazer allow you to effectively produce flaming signature cocktail displays. The Flaming Caipiroska pyramid is a good example but the technique can be used to improve Volcano Bowls and Zombies and also desserts and other flambéed. The key is to heat the spirit before attempting to light it. This can be easily done over a water bath or hob. When heated the spirit will ignite easily. The vessels used should have a good pouring spout and also keep the hands well away from the liquid. When in doubt working with fire always have fire-fighting equipment to hand. We recommend champagne. When pouring, use the same technique as the aerated drinks above and follow the receiving vessel with your eye. If spillage occurs, don't panic alcohol burns at low temperatures and will not cause immediate burning.

Tea Syrups

Making tea syrups is both easy and cost effective. A range of flavours and more importantly levels of tannin can add huge amounts of complexity. The brewing of the tea is the most important stage in producing an effective product, the only way to discern the length of brew time required to obtain the desired effect. We tend to use about double the regular amount of loose tea to allow for a concentrated flavour and tend to only leave very light teas to fully brew. Experimentation is cheap here so blending of teas can easily be practised. The resultant syrup works best if used fresh and not reheated to make the syrup. If the containers are suitably clean the syrups will last for about a week but always check before use.

Pre Mix

Speed is always of the essence in bar service, therefore any time that time savings can be made without compromising quality we should applaud and use them. From making a five white spirit mix for your ice teas, that will keep indefinitely to imitating your own solera blending with a never-ending Zombie rum mix, ideas that save four bottles of lifting. Remember also that if you need to produce large numbers of one drink to make them in batches allows you to get absolute consistency and recipe accuracy.

Double Stir

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Opening a Coconut

Working in a Tiki bar means that the occasional coconut needs opening. If the machete brings out the shivers coconuts can be opened easily using a serrated table knife and ice scoop. The first task is to score the required opening heavily into the coconut with the knife. It doesn't need to be too deep but a continuous circle. Then place the blade of an ice scoop on the scoreline and tap gently. Rotate around the circle and the coconut will soon begin to split. The circle can then be levered out to leave a hinged lid. Easy, neat and safe.

Building a Round

Cocktails for the solitary drinker are easy to serve, plenty of time for guest interaction and manufacture according to the specs of the drink. Mostly drinkers are convivial creatures and will order cocktails either in groups or as part of a

mixed round. Producing drinks in the correct order will allow you to make rounds more quickly and efficiently and also improve the quality of the drinks.

1. Frailty. The first consideration in the manufacturing order of various drinks is their frailty- how long they will last in a completed state. This defines the final completion order for the round. Frailty is based on various factors, Straight up drinks will warm up faster than iced ones, and they will also lose their effervescence and 'life' very quickly. Crushed ice melts faster than cubed ice, beer and sodas go flat at various speeds, and many cocktails will have a combination of factors that influence the various positions of its production.
2. Temperature. Hugely important for the quality of all drinks is that they be served at the correct temperature. Wines and beers have differing service temperatures depending on colour or style but by in large cocktails and mixed drinks have only one rule- the colder the better.
3. Timing. Often the customer's most important priority, we must concentrate on production speed. Rushing rarely improves the time taken or the quality of the drinks so focus on efficiency, use two hands not just on each drink but also across drinks, try to use each bottle required only once and remember the value of prep.

There is a formula to create the perfectly put together round of drinks, but it must be remembered that individuality of skill allows for small alterations in this order. Work from the above base principles and rounds and combinations that are previously unseen can be produced correctly.

The Building Order

1. Glassware- Check availability and cleanliness of all the required glassware. If no chilled glasses are available start to chill required glasses with ice and water. Remember not to forget any required ice buckets.
2. Prepare any garnish items required for the whole round. Mostly these will be pre prepped and easily available but twists and specialist garnish that takes time to prepare should be completed now to save time at more critical stages
3. Muddle any required ingredients. In most cases any extra time that the fruits have to mangle in their juice will improve the flavour of the drink.
4. Build any stirred drinks immediately and leave them iced in the Boston glass. Stirring a drink takes a long time, especially as part of a round. If you allow the ice to do the work for the majority of round building time, you can finish the drink with just a quick stir later on
5. Pour Red wine. Red wine will generally open up when served into the glass, serve it early and will only improve
6. Pour White wine (if it has come straight from the fridge). Most wine will benefit from being a few degrees above fridge temperature; so serving in glass now is sensible. If however, the wine is at correct temperature pour it alongside the champagne later on.

7. Build all shaken cocktails without ice. Use as many Bostons as are required, and arrange them in a logical order for completion.
8. Build all spirit and mixers without ice (remember only with still mixers, fizz comes later). Vodka and cranberry with no ice will not change at all during the process so can theoretically be made anywhere up to this point. From now on time is KEY.
9. Open Beer that is to be served in bottles. When simply uncapping a bottle of beer very little change to the beer, the temperature will go up though so remember to try to complete from here quickly.
10. Ice up any cubed ice drinks and garnish. Now comes the completion stage, start with the least frail drink and complete. E.g. vodka and cranberry
11. Shake any down cocktails add ice and garnish. Drinks served over cubed ice will stay cold and as they have already been shaken will not dilute to quickly. Make sure the service ice is dry and sufficient in the glass
12. Add carbonated mixers, top any spritzed cocktails. As soon as the fizz is released it starts to degrade, remember particularly for any pre-opened bottled mixers
13. Pour Champagne, Draught beer. Newly opened champagne in a clean glass will hold its fizz for a while and quality champagne can be served a few degrees above fridge temperature but open champagne should be poured carefully now to preserve bubbles. Draught beer can lose its' head quickly so these should be done as late as possible
14. Add crushed ice to any requiring cocktails. Crushed ice will melt very quickly due to its' high surface area so should be added very near round completion
15. Shake and strain any straight up cocktails, garnish. The life given to the cocktail which relies both on incorporated air and minute ice fragments will disappear in less than a minute so these drinks need to be made very nearly last.
16. Strain stirred straight up cocktails and garnish. As these drinks are the most spirituous they need to be drunk immediately upon service, they degrade by the second and will be virtually undrinkable in only a few minutes.

This list looks complex but is based on common sense. If you understand the basic requirements of each drink the various stages should become obvious. The only point here not raised is the one of payment. Never let the transaction interfere with the first vital sip of the martini.

Spirit Tasting

The most difficult skill in technical bartending is certainly training the senses of smell and taste to become tools; we have an amazing olfactory system capable of distinguishing ingredients as diffuse as 5ppm (parts per million). But where do you start? Everyone has the ability to connect sensations with remembered

things, times and places. That is why when you first smell a spirit or wine you may find the things in your head are not necessarily just about food. The first thing you need to do is interrogate your palette trying to discern the different elements that make up the taste profile. These will, in the beginning have little outside reference; they are your thoughts after all. The next step is to start to build taste profiles more in terms of the whole spirit, this is needed to truly grade and identify compared spirits. This is all really hard and can take a lifetime to answer. The longest journey starts with a first step though and in this case there are handy guidelines set forth by the pioneers before you.

Tasting

1. The first taste is with the eye, firstly at the bottle if you can. This will give you a reference to its ABV and how that influences the spirit. It will also give you a ballpark of tastes to work with.
2. Now to the spirit, again use your eyes. Firstly is the spirit transparent and free of foreign bodies. These generally will mean that the spirit might be corrupted and tasting worthless. Next to the colour. There is a huge range of specified colours used in tasting but you can make up your own. The colour can tell you a lot in certain spirits, giving clue about aging or additives. It is most useful when comparing similar products
3. Swirl the spirit. Look how the liquid returns to the level leaving characteristic trails or legs (tears). These can give a good idea of the relative viscosities of liquids. In spirits this will give us an idea of sugar level and ABV. Long legs mean high sugar, high alcohol
4. Swirl again to release the aroma. This requires a tasting or wine glass to ensure the aroma is contained. Here is the first major mistake, Do NOT stick your nose in and sniff! The alcohol will completely desensitize your nose for about 10mins. Gently approach the glass until the first aromas are apparent, retreat and then gently proceed to slowly get closer. It is often said that if you breath through your mouth close to the glass the aroma will travel up the back of the nose and indeed this does work.
5. Assess the aroma, light and fruity, zesty or more complex? Are there any obviously analogous flavours that you can identify, is it the dominating flavour or it more balanced.
6. Now for the taste. Be careful here also, there is no need to take in much spirit, we don't want to desensitise the mouth either. Generally the best way is to place a small amount on the tongue and let it heat up and evaporate as it moves around the mouth. Remember you have taste buds all around your tongue so make sure the spirit passes around the mouth.
7. To assess the taste it is easiest to split it into sections, Initial, mid palate, mouthfeel. These can show how the spirit develops after you get the primary taste. Remember smell is just able to access the airborne component of the drink and these most volatile flavours are often the

- lighter notes while the deeper undertones will arrive when the spirit has warmed up in the mouth,
8. Taste again. The first taste will be diluted with your saliva, the second will bring a much stonger image of the flavours and a easier to interpret finish
 9. As with everything in cocktails and life, balance is key, the spirit should have a round and full profile with discernable character. The mouthfeel is also important, does the spirit fill the mouth or taste a bit thin and watery. Even when tasting vodkas mouthfeel is probably the biggest clue as to what is going on.
 10. Then to the finish. This is not just the burn when the spirit passes down your throat. You don't even have to swallow. Finish is more about the lasting impression you are getting from your senses. Is the finish pleasant or harsh? How long is it, some cognacs will have finishes lasting tens of minutes
 11. The reassess. If you are tasting comparatively then you should always go back to anything you are unsure with as you will set boundaries and comparisons with the other examples, e.g. this brandy has hints of apple, as does this but more prominent pear. Without a check back qualifications like this cannot be achieved

The process is always a learning one. The best way is to design a system to record your tasting notes in a permanent manner, in a style that is consistent across all the tastings you do. Buy a notebook and take it to every tasting internal or outside of work. You will find that you will quickly build quite a reference guide and also a vocabulary of taste to build upon. It is also good to rate a product. This makes you draw all the above aspects of the tasting together to form a general opinion of the product.

The Back Bar plotter

When analysing a large group of similar products it is often useful to record your assessments visually. This can take the form of spider diagrams used by scotch manufacturers but we think the idea that Dave Broom use where the various spirits are plotted on a graph with similar axes. This method allows immediate characterisation of products into various styles. Once the spirits have been plotted it is a lot easier to perform direct individual comparisons and also to see at a glance if the selection has balance and covers all required styles. This is very useful for assessing the back bar when sourcing new products.

Thermodynamics in Drinks

The law of conservation of energy states 'Energy can be neither created nor destroyed, only converted into other forms.' The science of this conversion, or basically the movement of energy, is thermodynamics.

Since the basic laws of thermodynamics have been expounded specific situations do occur when mass is converted into energy in various nuclear

reactions, but in everyday life the basics hold true and often in relating that to everyday situations thinking like a 17th century scientist can help.

So why is thermodynamics important in drinks? Beyond the composition of a pleasing mix of flavours the production of a great cocktail relies on two physical processes, diluting and chilling. These functions are both performed by one substance, ice and it is through the thorough understanding of ice that the ability to really understand what is in effect two thirds of the drink.

We as bartenders need to understand the movement of heat energy between a warm liquid and ice, and the interaction with the environment of the drink during manufacture. We need to be able to make improvements to our methods and equipment to try and obtain an optimum drink in often challenging conditions.

THE BARTENDERS FIRST LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS

“ IN A CLOSED SYSTEM TEMPERATURE EQUILIBRIUM IS REACHED AS A DIRECT FUNCTION OF THE SPECIFIC HEAT CAPACITIES OF THE INGREDIENTS”

This statement deals with two important concepts. The first is the understanding the boundaries of your system, although the area of the system that interests you is the part in the mixing glass the whole of the room contribute to the equilibrium of the system. That is why drinks proceed to melt long after the equilibrium between water and ice should have been reached. The room is constantly supplying energy to upset this equilibrium. We have always naturally tried to avoid this by using chilled glasses and lots of ice, but when making a drink what can we do to limit this effect?

The second is the concept of equilibrium. Energy, which in this case can be thought of as the speed of movement of the molecules in the system can only flow from a hotter body to a colder one, in effect things never get colder they only get less hot. This flow of energy will continue to flow until the temperatures of all components are in equilibrium. This means that the eventual temperature of a drink will be determined by the equilibrium point in the flow of energy.

The interesting, and amazing part happens due to the differences in the materials of a drink. The specific heat capacity of a substance is the amount of energy required to raise 1kg of the substance by 1degree. In effect it tells us how tightly the molecules are bound together.

Water has a specific heat capacity of 1400 Joules per Kilogram Kelvin
Ethanol has a specific heat capacity of 960 JKgK⁻¹

This difference allows us to make drinks significantly colder than the ice and liquor that we started with, as long as we make sure that our equilibrium point

isn't affected by the atmosphere. With insulation and a bit of innovation, all your drinks will come out colder and better.