

2019 ICA CATIE AWARDS SUBMISSION

# Innovative Mixology



Leather-aged Vieux Carré Cocktail

## Innovative Mixology



### Synopsis

We started with a blend of carefully selected cognac, vermouth, and whiskey then infused our blend with essences of fruit, bark, roots and herbs. This custom blend was then aged in a traditional Spanish goat leather botarrón (wine skin), imbuing it with ethereal and classic “leathery” notes.

A custom blended and aged cocktail for aficionados.

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## Innovative Mixology



### Concept of the beverage (including how it relates to or impacts the event)

This cocktail was designed especially for an over the top VIP dinner event. This specialty cocktail would be one of 4 drinks served during the cocktail hour. It needed to impress and set the stage for the rest of the evening. Our objectives were:

- it had to be based upon and feature the fabulous High West Rendezvous Rye.
- it had to create an ambiance of classic luxury.
- yet, it had to be a unique and innovative preparation and presentation that the guests hadn't experienced before.
- although certainly not only for men, it nonetheless had to be a masculine drink.

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## Innovative Mixology



### Originality of the beverage

Like so many of our favorite craft cocktails, we started with a classic. And then we made it our own.

### Start with the perfect ingredients

First we hand selected the perfect ingredients. We sampled many variations with different cognacs and vermouths (it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it). We were looking for the perfect balance quality and taste (this was of course, our top priority), prestige and brand recognition (we only considered top shelf products for our well-traveled VIP guests), and high value proposition (we didn't want to waste effort and money sourcing a rare cognac who's nuances would be wasted when mixed). We landed on the Hennessy Black and the Carpano Antica Formula.

Whiskey was easy to select. The High West was a given. Not only is it unique to our market, it's world class to boot.

## Leather-aged Vieux Carré Cocktail

## Innovative Mixology



### Originality of the beverage (cont'd)

#### Infusing Alternatives

To be sure, we're purists at heart. For us, the definition of a cocktail is simple, but also strict. You must have spirit, sugar, and bitters. It can be fun to stray beyond the definition, but the definition must remain.

That said, within the scope of the strict cocktail definition, we wanted to explore alternatives to sweetening and bittering the cocktail beyond simple syrup and mass bottled tinctures.

We found that by infusing the whiskey with fresh sweet cherries, and the cognac with bark(s), root(s), and green(s), we could achieve the sweet and bitter layers, imbue more unique character, and have a captivating story to tell about the drink.

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## Innovative Mixology



### Originality of the beverage (cont'd)

#### Getting into Leather

Finally, and perhaps most notably, we aged the complete cocktail in a traditional Spanish goat leather botarrón (wine skin). Like all aged cocktails, this provided a wonderful balance of married complexity as well as perfectly mellow smooth drinkability. It's the best of both worlds. Yet the leather did even more - it added it's own flavor impact beyond typical barrel aging.

Connoisseurs of wine, whiskey, coffee, chocolate, etc. employ an array of adjectives to describe how these consumables engage the palate. Leather is not an uncommon adjective in these circles. In general however, such adjectives are employed because they are the best we have. One of the many things I love about this cocktail is when we describe it as "leathery", it's quite literal!

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## Innovative Mixology



### Uniqueness of service style and presentation

In the glass, the presentation is traditional. On the rocks in a tumbler with cherry and lemon peel. Although traditional, small touches exude elegance. Heavy, cut crystal glassware, a jumbo ice sphere, and fresh Bing cherries (never maraschino!) make a world of difference.

Before the glass, however, is where the presentation and service really shine. There's always a custom bar menu indicating the drink is leather-aged. Moreover, we always decant direct from the wine skin on top of the bar.

Guests love this. When they see the botarrón, they immediately inquire, "What's that?"



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## Innovative Mixology



### Uniqueness of service style and presentation (cont'd)

And once they're curious, they're hooked. We're able to tell the story while we pour the drink. "We hand selected the whiskey, cognac, and vermouth for the perfect Vieux Carré. We infused the whiskey with cherries for sweetness and the cognac with aromatics for a bitter layer. We aged the entire concoction in this leather wine skin for 4 weeks. The result is well, sublime. The best Vieux Carré we've ever tasted."

Guests are fascinated. Rather than start guzzling to get the effect while they return to mingling, they slow down. They sip, focused on the flavors. They continue to sample. They note on the opening, the body, the finish. They ask follow up questions. They ask if they can handle the wineskin. They ask where they can buy one. When guests consider the food and drink this intently, we know we've succeeded!

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## Innovative Mixology



### Production of beverage at the event

One of the reasons this cocktail is so perfect for large special events is that it's relatively easy to execute during service. The cocktail is already mixed. It simply a matter of pouring and garnishing. Typically drinks this detailed take a lot of time. This cocktail is a wonderful juxtaposition of intricacy and smooth delivery. Perfect for a caterer serving a large group out of a field kitchen or mobile facility where logistics can make or break you.

At this event, our bar station was set up in a mini-camper.



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# Innovative Mixology



## Challenges or obstacles and how they were overcome

This cocktail presented two challenges that stood out from any others: the infusion levels and the aging time.

### Infusing

The appropriate levels of fruit and aromatics necessary and how long to infuse them, ( in order to avoid adding sugars and bitters to the drink) took some dialing in. With practice we found that we could gauge the amounts and the timing pretty close. However, we also decided that best practice was to infuse with a heavy ratio of aromatics, and then trim back on the time or dilute with more spirit after if necessary.

### Aging

Aging in the leather required a similar approach. We introduced the cocktail to the botarrón and then sampled every couple of days. As the cocktail approached the desired aging level, we would either leave it in the wineskin or decant it until the event, depending on how far away we were. Again, we found it better to age earlier than we anticipated was necessary. Since we could slow the process if we needed to, but can't do much to speed it up, this gave us some flexibility.

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## Recipe: Leather-aged Vieux Carré

### Ingredients

750 ml High West Rendezvous Rye  
 750 ml Hennessy Black Cognac  
 750 ml Carpano Antica Formula Sweet Vermouth  
 12-24 fresh Bing Cherries

2 tbs lavender flowers and greens  
 1 tbs dandelion root  
 1 tbs cherry bark

Other aromatics as desired

### Infuse / Sweeten / Bitter

Add the cherries to the rye in a glass jar. Set aside in dark room, at room temperature, for 3-4 weeks.

Add the root, bark, flowers, and greens to the cognac in a glass jar. Set aside in a dark room, at room temperature for 3-4 weeks.

### Blend

Strain the rye and cognac with a fine steel mesh sieve. Mix both spirits together with the sweet vermouth. Sample and adjust the strength, sweetness, and bitterness as desired.

### Age

Pour the mixed cocktail into a Spanish Leather Botarrón. Allow to marry and age for 3-4 weeks. Sample along the way and adjust as needed. In general, avoid adding ingredients direct to the wineskin. Instead, decant the cocktail back into a mixing vessel, adjust, mix well, strain if necessary, and return to the wineskin.



I find the cocktail is best at the 4-8 week window. This is of course simply a matter of preference. But eventually, it can get too leathery. However, in the wineskin, this cocktail is wonderful as a “living drink”. When the skin gets low and/or too aged, simply top it back off with a younger mix of ingredients. This can keep you perpetually in service, as well as allow you to experiment with different aging times and different ratios to find your favorite sweet spot. If it ever sits too long without emptying, simply decant some of the cocktail into bottles where it will cease to infuse with the leather, but will hold wonderfully for use for up to 6 months.

### Serve

Serve 2.5 ounces of the cocktail (direct from the spout of the botarrón is coolest), on the rocks (or a large ice sphere if available). Garnish with lemon peel, fresh cherry, lavender sprig, or your other favorite garnish.

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