

TASTE

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1992

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

Warm mixed drinks perfect for wintertime

Anytime of the year is a good time for a well mixed drink, but wintertime is particularly good for a well mixed hot drink. Now we're not talking hot Ovaltine here folks. Let's refer to these concoctions as pre-ski drinks that are sure to warm the heart as well as the soul.

Of course, these drinks are not limited to the likes of Jean-Claude Killy and Suzie Chaffee, (Olympic skiers) Let it be known that these drinks were enjoyed by the sedentary couch potato as well as the winter sportsman in our family.

A close relative, who acknowledges the fact that she was not born with a spatula and whisk in her hand, found these recipes delectable easy to prepare. (This was after reminding her that if one can manage day after day to blend satisfactory amounts of cream and sugar into their morning coffee, one can manage these recipes!)

Measure carefully

When preparing warm potables, be sure to measure all ingredients carefully. Try not to imitate those free pouring bartenders who trust the lick of a wrist and the tip in their pocket.

The subtle blend of flavors that make a warm mixed drink memorable results from a precise combination of ingredients. Use standard measures like teaspoons and jiggers, ounces, cups or liters.

When multiplying quantities for party drinking, try and be as mathematically accurate as possible.

Use fresh ingredients

For the best in concoctions, use the very freshest of ingredients. A fresh squeezed orange will have triple the flect and taste from a quart of re-concentrated flavored water that was sitting in your freezer for one month.

The surviving half jug of wine left over from the holidays will not not have the flavor and kick of a just opened bottle.

Unless a recipe advises to the contrary, don't slice fruit until just before serving. Oxidation will detract from the taste you so painstakingly tried to achieve.

You don't have to use premium wines and liquors because blending overpowers the abilities that give premium brands their characteristic qualities. On the other hand, cheap substitutes will come off tasting too art or anise so it's best to use a "middle of the road" bottle for making the best.

Serve the drink in a suitable glass, cup or mug and be sure that it is sparkling clean, free from any soap or dishwasher residue. A preheated cup is a real treat.

If you have a microwave and icrowaveable cups, wrap them in a damp bath towel and place in a microwave on high power for 1 minute. Watch out, the towel will be hot! There's little argument that a hot sangria just doesn't make it in a plastic Care Bears' mug.

Heating ingredients

Heat your ingredients very carefully. Slow heating will give your flavors time to marry, but boiling will drive away the flavor and will leave a "urnt" aftertaste.

Boiling also causes the alcohol to evaporate; the result being a unchless punch! Ah, W.C. Fields would have been proud!

For large parties, crock pots wrapped in tree boughs and kept at low heat will keep enough warm oddsies at just the perfect temperature for a crowd while a good insulated thermos will keep the mixture sizzling for a romantic etc...etc.

An insulated coffee arafe or thermos will retain the heat even longer if first rinsed with boiling water.

The hostess at Vic Tanny's in Plymouth shared her favorite recipe for authentic Tom and Jerry's Cocktail on a recent visit and it was a sure hit at a recent James Gang party.

Darcy is the early morning reeter, and when I mentioned that I was putting together this column, she volunteered to share this old-time favorite.

Prepared with a blend of brandy whiskey and boiling water, the secret is in the batter that tops off steaming mugs.

Festive garnishes

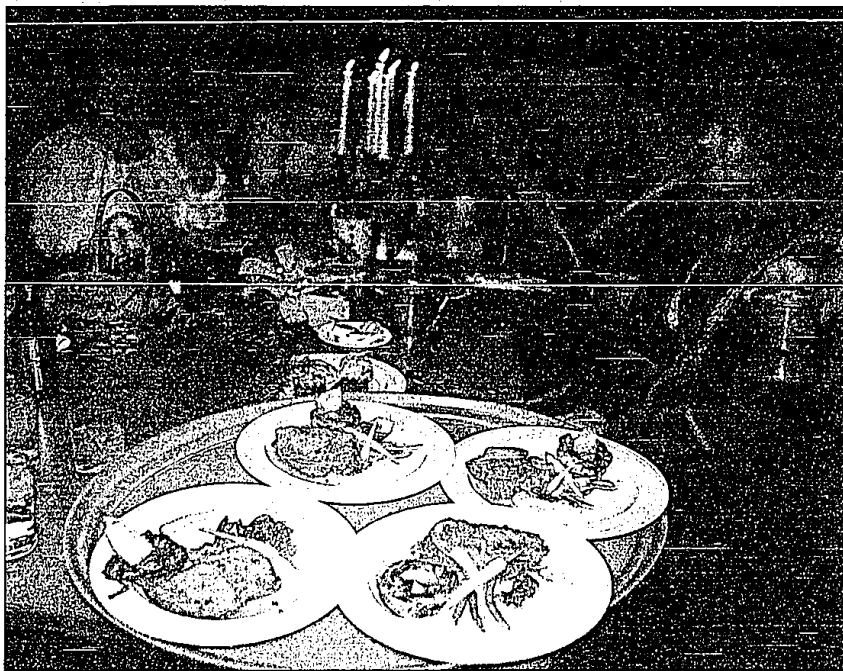
As with just about all the warm cocktails mentioned in the recipes, a cinnamon stick or candy cane inserted just makes for a festive warm holiday cocktail that simply can't be beat.

Another great addition to warm drinks is a sprinkling of cinnamon or a teaspoon of finely chopped chocolate.

These toppings are better left to warm cocktails created with liquor as the sweetness can flect the taste of warm wine drinks.

A word to the wise, after mibbing, stay off the roads and slopes. Drinking and driving don't mix. See Jones-family tested recipes inside.

Festive celebration



STAFF PHOTOS BY ANN HEALEY

Wassail feast: Dressed in Elizabethan period costumes, guests await the next course, Medallions of Beef Tenderloin served with a medley of braised, julienne winter vegetables at a wassail feast at Oakland Community College

EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY AT WASSAIL FEAST



Hail the holiday season English style with a wassail feast. It is traditionally held during Twelfthtide, the period between Christmas and the Epiphany, Jan. 6. There's still time to plan a feast fit for a king.



Plum pudding: Susan Weishaar, second year culinary arts student at Oakland Community College with the plum pudding served at the wassail feast.

BY GERR RINSCHLER
SPECIAL WRITER

At Christmas time in Elizabethan England, wassail cups were raised in unison to return the toast, "Wassail — drink hail." The cups were filled with "lamb's wool," a mixture of spiced ale and roasted apples.

After a succession of toasts, one of the elaborate feasts of that era might have included oyster stew, stuffed pike, cinnamon cabbage, mince pies and plum pudding. At the center of the long banquet table would sit, the prized, roasted boar's head surrounded with garlands of laurel.

During the past 10 years there has been a renewed interest in the customs of merry old England, and traditional wassail feasts. The annual wassail feast at Oakland Community College, Ore-

hard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills, has become such a popular event over the past six years that tickets sold out in early September.

Every fall the culinary students in the hospitality department, under the guidance of instructor Darlene Levinson, plan the menu.

OCC wassail

The dinner which is served family-style is designed and prepared by the students. Professional chef — instructor Dan Rowson worked with the students to help them perfect their kitchen skills and techniques.

This year the feast began with a marinated beet salad decorated with hand-carved rutabaga roses, a barley salad and plate of garlic spiced cheese. After toasting with a warm cup of wassail, a chestnut woodland soup was served garnished with creme fraiche and a thin potato ravioli.

In between courses, minstrel singers, mimers, magicians and the Renaissance Voices of Oakland Community College performed. Then came the third course. Tender filets of chicken stuffed with fruits and nuts accompanied by a decorative poached pear.

After a few more toasts, the entire arrived. Medallions of beef tenderloin cooked to perfection were plated along with a potato tartlet filled with sauteed mushrooms and onions artistically arranged beside a medley of braised, julienne winter vegetables.

Baskets of traditional grain

breads and fruited scones were refilled throughout the evening which ended with a flaming plum pudding.

It's no wonder that many of the same guests return every year. Tony and Anna Marie Galat of Farmington have made this holiday dinner a not to be missed event. This year they brought along the members of their gourmet club.

"The food is wonderful and the entertainment is fabulous," said Tony Galat.

Caterer Mark Stein of the Mark of Excellence in Southfield has been preparing wassail feasts for eight years. He began working with Diane Blake at the Detroit Institute of Arts at their ever famous wassail feasts. This year he designed the menu and catered, "An Evening in England," sponsored by the City of Southfield on December 10.

Traditional foods

"For this event, I chose a very traditional approach to the Elizabethan holiday dinner. As always the vegetables are cut by hand, as there was no uniformity in that era," said Stein.

"The seasoning was robust but it was necessary then to cover up the meat which in those days was not tasty."

His menu for the evening began with a mutton barley soup, beef-leek pie, roast leg of chicken, garlic mashed potatoes and a glorious figgy pudding for desert.

See WASSAIL, 2B

Cognac especially enjoyable during the holidays

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

The holiday season — its glittering ornaments and lights, a cozy fireplace, family, friends and in the evening, while enjoying it all, a taste of fine cognac.

Wine enthusiasts have been smitten by the taste of premium spirits, cognac in particular. If you've not yet become a fan, we're certain you've heard of the "big four" — Courvoisier, Hennessy, Martell and Remy Martin. These houses blanket the world with their product. It can be purchased everywhere. It's good, quite good, but it's only part of the cognac story.

In the Charente region of western France, the cradle of cognac, rests the peaceful town of Jarnac

on the banks of the Charente river. Here, life follows the river's nonchalant pace and the rhythm of the vines producing the fruit converted to cognac in the town's cellars.

One dedicated French family has been living in Jarnac and producing cognac before the French Revolution. Cognac A. de Fussigny results from the cognac passion of two people, Alain-Louis and Anne-Marie Royer.

If you know prominent wine industry names such as Italy's Angelo Gaja, Burgundy's house of Faiveley, Champagne Pol Roger, the Rhone firm of Jaboulet and the Trinch family from Alsace, you should now include the Royer's and their company A. de Fussigny. The world's best importers and marketers of fine wine and spirits carry these products in their portfolio.

About one-third of the de Fussigny cognacs are sold in North America. Another third is exported to

See COGNAC, 2B



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Fine cognac: Years of barrel aging makes Cognac A. de Fussigny a rich cognac, robust in character yet full of finesse.