

Released April 29, 2022. Questions or feedback? Email [mayo@joshbarro.com](mailto:mayo@joshbarro.com)  
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Josh 0:06

This is Josh Barro and this is very serious podcast we're going to do something a little different this week a little bit less serious. If you're a subscriber to the very serious newsletter and you should be, you can sign up at [Joshbarro.com](http://Joshbarro.com). You know that I cover a variety of more and less serious topics. We talk about politics and the economy. And we also talk about food and entertaining and other cultural matters. And my guest today also has a split of more and less recreational interests. Peter Suderman is the features editor for Reason magazine, but he's not here today to talk about the government. He's here to talk about cocktails, which he writes about in his substack newsletter Cocktails With Suderman. It's a great read if you're a big cocktail fan, or if you're just someone who likes to drink and wants to get a little bit more into cocktails. Hi, Peter, thank you so much for being here with me today.

Peter 0:55

Thanks for having me.

Josh 0:56

So what qualifies you to write a cocktail newsletter? How did you develop expertise in this area?

Peter 1:00

Well, I have made an awful lot of cocktails. I collect cocktail recipe books at this point. In some ways, I have no qualifications at the same time, right? ...I don't have a certification. I've actually never worked behind a bar, even though I've worked at a restaurant that has a bar, but not for decades at this point. At the same time, I think there's a long history of knowledgeable amateurs writing well about cocktails. And I would point specifically to David Embury, whose 1948 cocktail manual "The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks" is a mainstay of my cocktail writing, somebody has influenced the way I think about it a lot. And he wasn't a bartender, he wasn't somebody who made drinks by trade. He was a lawyer, and so he brought a lawyer's approach to thinking about cocktails, in a way. So he collected recipes and then what he did was he categorized and organized them and created one of the first systems for thinking about the categorization of cocktails. He was also focused on writing for people who primarily wanted to make cocktails at home and so he's always offering little tips that are aimed at people who do this out of their own home bars, their own collections, who are doing this for themselves and their friends. And I think I've always appreciated that because a lot of cocktail books are written by people who are professional bartenders, and there's a lot of useful information and great recipes in those books, but they come at cocktails from a perspective that I think is not always approachable to people who are doing this stuff at home, because they have access to 500-bottle backbars, because they have a kitchen that is just devoted to making highly specific cocktail ingredients all day long before the bar opens. But when you're doing this at home — you know, for a lot of people, a \$30- or \$40-bottle of whiskey is a splurge, it's something that they have to think about a little bit — and so what I wanted wanted to do was to try to write something that was very specifically geared at the home bartender who has to think about price, who has to think about time, who

has to think about complexity, and you know, preparation issues and who also is someone who probably just doesn't have access to several hundred bottles of liquor at their house. Now I do... I have a weird, like, I've built a home bar. But I'm always trying to write for somebody who doesn't and try to help them think about both purchasing decisions and also how to maximize their time investment. Then I also wanted to help people think about forms and structures and cocktail systems — again, in the Embury mould — because I remember the first time I opened some of these elaborate cocktail menus, the Death & Co book (the first one in particular), I didn't know very much. I really knew almost nothing about cocktails at that point, except that I liked some of the things that I'd had in good bars. And I had no idea what half of the ingredients were that they were referring to. It just felt so foreign to me.

Josh 4:00

So I want to talk about a couple of those logistics issues that you got into there in terms of things that you get in a commercial bar that might seem daunting in your home. Now one of those is about ingredients and pricing and also sort of quantities. We're going to talk a little later today about the aviation cocktail, which is a cocktail that contains crème de violette, which is not an ingredient you're going to use pretty much in anything else. And you only need a quarter of a fluid ounce of it for each cocktail that you're making. So 750-milliliter bottle of crème de violette is enough to make 100 aviations.

Peter 4:33

That's correct.

Josh 4:34

You have to consider, you know, even though that's not a terribly expensive ingredient, you know, it's gonna take me years to use this entire bottle if I'm ever going to use it. So what are the ingredients that are worth purchasing? What are the things that actually have a wide variety of uses or that I really care about? Whereas in a restaurant, you'll just have enough scale that if you're going to put it in something on the menu, then it sort of doesn't matter what quantities it comes in, so we'll talk about that a little bit, but I also want to talk about some of that complication stuff because I think something that a lot of people find daunting about cocktails at home is that they seem really complicated. And often in your newsletter, where you're taking a cocktail and you're making it better, you're also making it more complicated. You know, not a lot of people have, you know, a little bottle with an eyedropper for saline solution.

Peter 5:17

So salt and saline in cocktails is a great example — people don't think of salt as a common cocktail ingredient. And yet, when you go to bars that take this stuff seriously, saline and salt increasingly features in cocktails because it has the same effect that it has on food. We like food that is salty better than food that doesn't have any salt in it. Salt is a flavor enhancer. It does that for chocolate chip cookies, it does it for steak. And it also has the same effect for cocktails. It lifts, brightens and combines flavors so that you can taste what's in the drink a little bit better. And the thing about salt is, sure, it takes a little bit of effort to make saline solution, you've got to heat water and salt on the stove and then you've got to find some sort of something to store it in.

Again, I like these little dropper bottles, but everyone has salt, everyone has water, everyone has access to a stove, it's incredibly inexpensive. And there's little dropper bottles, they are \$2 including shipping on Amazon, everyone who has the internet, which is how you get access to my newsletter has Amazon and probably you have \$2. And so to me, that's the kind of thing that you can do. And you can learn to use salt in cocktails, learn when it's appropriate. It's mostly appropriate in sours that you want to lift, or in bitter drinks where you want to cut the bitter just a little bit because salt has a mitigating effect on bitter ingredients. So try putting a little bit of salt in your negroni. It's a whole new experience. And the thing is, even if you don't want to make saline solution and keep it in a dropper bottle, you can just drop a pinch of salt in your cocktail and stir it in or shake it in when you're making the drink. It's so easy and people don't think to do this stuff. And it's something that you can do to make your drinks taste a little bit better and to elevate them a little bit and to make your drink — your homemade drink — come closer to the sort of high-end bar drink that you really want.

Josh 7:17

So that's an example of balance where, you know, you say the drink is more balanced if you have that salt. It balances out the sweetness, balances out the bitterness, that sort of thing. How should people think about the concept of balance, because I think you know, a lot of people get cocktails, and they have a sense that this is off in some way. And they might have something more specific: it's too sweet, or that sort of thing. But a lot of this is about like measurable chemistry stuff, right? In terms of what makes a cocktail imbalanced or out of balance? How do you think about what it means to be in balance and how to diagnose the manner in which a cocktail is not in balance?

Peter 7:50

So balance is a word that gets used in cocktail circles quite a bit, and I think it is often misused — not always, but often misused. ...when people say 'this cocktail is balanced' in many cases, what they actually mean is 'this tastes good to me.' Now a well balanced cocktail is should taste good. But cocktails, there's a sort of an underlying theory to virtually all cocktails — and certainly nearly every drink that I write about in my newsletter — and that's that cocktails are about taking a spirit (that's whiskey, or gin or rum or mezcal) and balancing that spirit between two other flavors. In most cases, that's going to be sweet and sour, or sweet and bitter. And so an old fashioned is a cocktail where whiskey is the base and it is balanced between sweet, typically in the form of sugar syrup or a sugar cube or sometimes just sugar added directly, and then bitter, which comes from bitters, typically aromatic bitters from Angostura are the most common, but there are many, many, many, many different kinds of bitters that you can use there.

I have a question about the old fashioned.

Sure!

Josh 8:53

Because I don't tend to care for old fashioned. And so if you think about like, you know, an old fashioned is supposed to be balanced between sweet and bitter, and a negroni is also supposed

to be balanced between sweet and bitter, but the negroni is much more toward bitter than any old fashioned I've ever had. You get the flavor of the Angostura bitters, but I always find the old fashioned is like really sweetness-forward over the bitterness and...am I just having bad old fashioned? Are they being made incorrectly with either too much sugar or too little bitters? Because I always find the bitters, like, really feel like a supporting player there, whereas with a negroni or a drink like that, it really feels like the interplay between sort of two equal powers of sweet and bitter.

Peter 9:41

Yeah, so a negroni is going to be a more bitter drink. It is most commonly made as a three equal-parts drink with sweet vermouth, Campari and dry gin. And so you have the sweet vermouth acting as the sweetener and then the Campari acting as the bitter agent, and the Campari takes up a third of the drink. And it is also a fairly bitter flavor, right? Sort of bitter orange and some other aspects to it. And that bitterness is going to be stronger, but it's also being balanced by a full ounce of sweetness there. Now, in an old fashioned, you can put ten or twenty drops of bitters in there, if you want. I don't recommend it: Most recipes call for two to four dashes of bitters, although again, it depends just a little bit. And then, this is one of the things that cocktail folks who know, like, the last 20 years of cocktail history have talked about a lot, and that's that for a very long time, most old fashioned in the 1980s and 1990s were made with way too much sugar — half an ounce, even an ounce of simple syrup or rich simple syrup! — and these drinks would just be kind of disgustingly sweet.

Josh 10:51

Our producer, Sara Fay, is grimacing as you say the phrase, "an ounce of simple syrup."

Peter 10:56

It's way too much! It's undrinkable, in my opinion. And sometimes they would cut that, you know, with club soda, which has now been mostly taken out of old fashioned. And we've gone back to the pre-Prohibition standard, which is just whiskey, sugar (usually in the form of syrup) and bitters. And that sugar — there really shouldn't be all that much of it, a teaspoon or a teaspoon and a half. I use a rich Demerara syrup, so that's two parts Demerara sugar to one part water. And then I typically heat a little bit of gum arabic into mine, this is somewhat more complicated...

Josh 11:32

Yeah, I don't think most people have gum arabic on their home.

Peter 11:34

Again, you can buy a bag of it on Amazon for like \$10. And what does that do? Gum arabic is a thickener that changes the mouthfeel of the syrup. And what you're doing is, you're changing the mouthfeel of the syrup, which then goes into cocktail, and you're changing the viscosity of the drink. ...Bartenders sometimes refer to sugar syrup as "fat." It's a little bit sort of counterintuitive. But what does it do? It makes it feel like there's a little bit of fat in the drink, right? It gives it that sort of almost gelatinous texture to it. But it's very subtle, and it's something I think, you know, a lot of home bartenders don't necessarily think about. They think that the cocktails are

ingredients and flavors. Totally true. Correct. But cocktails are also about texture. And if you think about a lot of great drinks that you've had at a bar, the appeal is not just that they have been balanced well in terms of their flavor, they've got a great interesting texture to them, whether that's a slightly silky, fat old fashioned; whether that's a really eggy, you know, sort of foamy sour; whether that's an espresso martini, which is a drink that's quite popular these days, and it's the rare shaken drink that doesn't use juice, but you shake it because it's got coffee...it's espresso or cold brew concentrate, but some sort of coffee... and what does that do? The oils and the coffee, you get this crema on top of the drink, just like if you made an espresso in a good espresso machine, right? You're looking for that top layer of crema, you're now putting that into a cocktail and it just creates this wonderful sort of physical sensation when you consume it, in addition to the fact that the drink is pretty good too.

So to go back to what you were saying about how much syrup to put in an Old Fashioned, it's, you know, you say a teaspoon, a teaspoon and a half, that's a sixth of a fluid ounce to a quarter of a fluid ounce... it's really not very much. And this is, what? Like, you have two ounces of whiskey...

The standard is two ounces.

Josh 13:34

Right, so just a little bit of syrup in there. But so that gets to a broader point here, which is that you have to measure these things...

Peter 13:41

Yeah.

Josh 13:41

...That if you're trying to achieve that balance and get the right amounts of things, you actually have to know how much of what you're putting in the cocktail. And so I think, you know, a lot of people at home, they're like, 'oh, that seems like a pain' or 'I don't have the right kind of jigger' or that sort of thing. But like, if you want, I mean, you can drink something and be happy because you put it into a glass, but if you want your cocktails to be correct and to taste the same every time, and to taste with the right flavors in balance, you really do need to measure all of the ingredients as you go in.

Peter 14:07

Yes, that's correct. But again, this is an easy thing to do. It takes about 15 seconds extra as you're making your drink, and a small measuring tool of some sort, a jigger or even... OXO makes these great little tiny measuring cups that have like the angled spout on them and they're two ounces, but they have everything labeled, you know, quarter ounce, half an ounce, and you can measure absolutely anything you need out of that except a teaspoon and so then you have a teaspoon measure. And that's really it. You can do almost everything with \$25 worth of tools.

Josh 15:45

So we talked about balance for bitter cocktails. What about balance for sours: margaritas, daiquiris and then there's endless variations, but it's drinks that contain citrus juice, sweetener, and some sort of spirit. How do you keep those in balance?

Peter 16:19

Again, it's the amount of sugar syrup relative to the amounts of citrus juice. It's a pleasant interplay between the two and the daiquiri is the most famous core drink here. I mean, you might have had a daiquiri that's like red and filled with ice and lord knows what's in it...maybe not even actual rum, right? But, like, a true daiquiri is just three ingredients: it is rum, it is fresh squeezed lime juice, and it is some sort of sugar, typically a simple syrup or rich simple syrup. That's it. Now I put salt in mine, I also add a dash of absinthe, which lifts it, but you don't need that stuff to make a great daiquiri. You just need rum, lime juice, and sugar.

Josh 17:04

When you say "lifts," what does it mean to "lift" a drink?

Peter 17:06

The best way I can explain this is: have you ever had potatoes without salt? I mean, really, without any salt on them. Think about what a potato without that tastes like, before you've put butter on it, before you put salt. You've heated it, so it's edible but it's just bland. ...It's not all that pleasant. But you can make a potato great by adding butter, right? So fat and thickness and salt. Salt gives it life and character and flavor. And salt does the same thing even when there are quite elaborate flavors involved, as there are in cocktails. It takes those flavors and it brightens them. Think of it a little bit like music. So we've all heard badly recorded music and effectively recorded music. Sound and tastes — the way we perceive them are highly related. And this is why we talk about cocktails having "notes" — it's because each one of those flavor notes in there is a little bit like a notes in a chord in a piece of music. And you can have a piece of music that is just not very well recorded, or maybe it's a great piece of music but if somebody then changes it a little bit in the mastering, you know, sort of goes back and uses good microphones, and suddenly what you hear... the piece of a piece of music might be the same, right? It's the same symphony, it's the same pop song. But now you can hear every little note in it precisely. Those notes seem to have some character and depth to them, they come across more clearly and more pleasantly. And that is what salt used well does in cocktails. It pushes those flavors out to you in a way that makes you perceive them more clearly and more distinctly.

Josh 18:44

It's interesting when you say "bright" there because I feel like when when we talk about food, often when we say "bright," what we mean is acidic. And so with those potatoes, you want to add fat and salt, you probably also want to add acidity, I mean, ketchup, vinegar, lemon juice, these are all vehicles for adding acid to potatoes, which — I don't want to do a podcast about potatoes — but just to emphasize that developing a cocktail, it's a recipe that is very similar to developing a recipe for food.

Peter 19:09

Yeah!

Josh 19:09

These same balancing concerns that you have in a cocktail, you have in making a dish. And I think that people are to some extent more familiar with that with food. That, you know, it's missing... this is so fatty, we need to acid in here to cut it.

Peter 19:22

I think that's right, and you can take ideas from food and convert them into cocktail ideas. So last year for St. Patrick's Day, I made an Irish soda bread old fashioned and the idea was to take the idea of Irish soda bread, which is something that my wife makes every year for for St. Patrick's Day...

Josh 19:44

Peter is Mr. Megan McArdle, by the way, for listeners who are not aware.

Peter 19:47

So my wife is Megan McArdle. She's a baker. She thinks that she is a much better cook than I am. And she thinks about flavors, I think, probably better than me. Certainly she has spent a lot more of her life thinking about flavors than I have. When we got married — she's written about this — I was like a sort of picky eater who didn't participate in like high-end food situations...I didn't understand them, didn't appreciate good food. That's totally changed, in part, because Megan has helped me think through a bunch of this stuff. But she will come to me with flavor combinations sometimes... You hear bars talk about, 'oh, we've got like a real collaboration between, you know, our kitchen and our bar program.' And you're like, 'what are they talking about?' No, it's actually a real thing. People who think about cooking have ideas that are interesting that you can then incorporate into cocktails, and in some cases, vice versa. And so something that I've tried to do is sort of learn from the person in my house who knows a huge amount about cooking and baking, and take some of those ideas and move them into liquid form.

Josh 20:48

Let's talk about some specific cocktails, because I think that will actually help us sort of illuminate some of these balance ideas and how to improve a drink that you might already like. You've wrote recently about aviations and so first of all, can you describe for people what is an aviation?

Peter 21:01

An aviation is a gin sour with crème de violette, which is a flower liqueur.

Josh 21:08

So classically, the standard aviation is two ounces of gin, three quarters of an ounce of lemon juice, half an ounce of maraschino liqueur, which is a quite sweet and also quite high-in-alcohol cherry liqueur. And then you have a tiny bit, you have a quarter of an ounce of the crème de

violette, which is also sweet. So when you say the balance in a sour drink, you have a sweetener, and you have a citrus juice... the sweetener is often a syrup, but it can also be a liqueur that has both alcohol and sugar in it. And that's the case in the aviation: all of the sweetness comes from these liqueurs.

Peter 21:44

Right, in some ways similar to both a sidecar and a margarita, both of which use some sort of orange liquor as a big part of the sweetener. And so typically, what you would do is, you would balance that lemon juice with the maraschino liqueur and the crème de violette. But here's the thing: If you make it that way — and I think people should try, if they have the ingredients, they should try making it that way — [but] what you will find is that those two sweet liqueurs don't quite balance out the lemon juice. To go back to the musical analogy here, it's like the speakers just aren't big enough, it's like there's not a subwoofer, it's like there's no tuba part. It's just not quite all there.

Josh 22:27

But before we get into your adjustments, I want to talk about the standard because I made quite a few of these last summer on the standard recipe, and I was happy with them. Although now I feel a little bit inadequate, because clearly I've been doing something wrong. But so you have two main complaints about the aviation as you would find it in the cocktail book, which are roughly that I think you're saying it's a little too tart, that it needs a little more sweetness than it has and that it also needs more body — that it doesn't feel thick enough.

Peter 22:53

Yeah.

Josh 22:53

And so the context in which I've been making these is, you know, most of the summer I'm out on Fire Island. It's warm out there, and to have a sour drink that is a little bit on the tart side and a little bit on the light side I think feels context appropriate for, like, you know, maybe you've been out at the beach, and now you're about to have dinner... It feels like for high summer, it feels like it doesn't necessarily need to be thicker or sweeter than that. But I can imagine other contexts in which, you know, I would want the balance to be shifted a little bit differently. Am I wrong about that? Am I just making an excuse for my, like watery cocktail?

Peter 23:27

So you're not wrong, because no one is ever wrong about the things that they like. So if you prefer an aviation the standard way without any additions to it, then that's the way that you should make it, but I want something a little bit different from that drink. And what I want is not to change the fundamental idea of it. What I want is to bulk it up just a little bit to add just a little bit of balancing sweetness, and then also to add a little bit of salt to bring out those flavors and help them harmonize a little bit more. And so I do that using honey. And it's not just straight honey, it's a three-to-one honey syrup. So I've mixed it down with a little bit of water, and that makes it just a little bit easier to pour into the shaker and to manage in a cocktail context. And the honey:



I wanted to add because this is a spring-y drink, right? And it plays really nicely with the crème de violette, because the crème de violette is a flower liqueur, right? So we've talked a lot about taste and texture, but think about smell too and smell is a big part of cocktails. It sort of frames the drink, right? It is the first thing you get before you sip. And so if you think about smells that go together, honey and flowers, right? These things are natural complements.

The other thing that we should note about aviations is that they're purple.

Peter 23:38

Yes.

Josh 23:39

That's sort of the key defining visual characteristic of an aviation. You serve it straight up, you pour it into a Nick and Nora glass or a —

Peter 23:56

A martini glass, a coupe, a Nick and Nora — that's one of these things that looks like a tiny wineglass. I like very small glasses. A lot of martini glasses are like 12 ounces. And I'm always like...

Josh 25:02

it's insane!

Peter 25:02

Yes. It's just, it's just crazy. And this is I think one of the things that is salutary about craft cocktails is: when you're measuring things, you know how much you're drinking. You're no longer drinking that 11-ounce martini. That's too much. It's too much.

Josh 25:16

Yeah. So I mean, my Nick and Nora glasses are five and a half ounces, I believe. And so if you're making a martini, and you use the — you're probably going to disagree with this ratio, but if I'm using like two and a half ounces of gin and three quarters of an ounce of vermouth, that's three and a quarter ounces of spirits, you get...

Peter 25:32

That's a 10:3 martini. I just published a 10:3 martini recipe a couple of weeks ago. And the trick with that one was no bitters. It was the no bitters martini, and the trick with that one was just to add salt. That was it.

Josh 25:41

And so when I pour that into the Nick and Nora glass, it fills it almost to the top. So first of all, it looks correct visually. I mean, one problem with the huge martini glasses, if you make an actual properly sized martini, they look really dinky in the glass because they fill up barely any of it. But with the Nick and Nora, you get this nice visual appeal. And because it's shaped more like a

wineglass with walls that sort of slope almost vertical by the top, you don't have the problem you have with martini glasses where if you tilt them even a little bit and they're full, you end up spilling beverage all over your hands. So I really like the Nick and Nora glasses for that reason. But so going back to the aviation, part of what I like about this and why I was making so many of them last summer is it was kind of a good gimmick. People would come over for dinner, and you know, they when they arrived, we're gonna have wine with dinner, but I am able to greet people with this unusual purple cocktail that then tastes normal. I mean, you know, it tastes like it has the floral note that comes from the crème de violette. But it's a sour drink, and so people like margaritas... if they like daiquiris then this is something that is in that family that they're likely to like, but that is unusual. And so this for this reason, I think the aviation became trendy about 15 years ago. But then now a lot of bartenders have grown to hate them?

So I don't know if I would say that bartenders have grown to hate the drink, but it's definitely considered sort of passé right? Like, this drink is over. Then in addition, I think some bartenders had the same feeling that I have, which is this cocktail is not a bad idea. It just needs someone to take this idea and try to work on the execution a little bit and make it a little bit better. And so part of what I did was restructure it so that it looks a little bit like the way I structured a sidecar, which is a lemon sour, but it's got a liqueur as the sweetener and again, the sidecar is a very difficult drink to get right. There's a whole great piece published on Punch magazine ([punchdrink.com](http://punchdrink.com)) a couple of years ago where the writer went searching for a great Sidecar and kept thinking, 'man, these sidecars ...they're not terrible, exactly. They sort of tastes like a sidecar should taste but none of them are very satisfying and none of them really work right' until eventually they found somebody who put a little bit of extra syrup in the drink.

Josh

Let's explain what a sidecar is, and so because I was looking for a new gimmick for this summer, and I was like, 'oh, well, I'll do sidecars because they're kind of similar to the aviation.' A sidecar is a brandy sour: so you use cognac typically, or you could do some other kinds of brandy, you use lemon juice, and you use an orange liqueur to sweeten it. And so like with the aviation, all the sweetening comes from liqueur. There's traditionally no syrup added to it. And so I made those, and they were really harsh and unpleasant. It felt way out of balance, like much, much more tart than the aviations come out. And then the other thing was the way the brandy punched through was really harsh, I found, much more so than the way that the gin would speak in the aviation. So I made it and I was like, 'this is terrible,' and my guests liked them even less than I did. And so what do I need to do to fix the sidecar so that it will be better?

Peter 28:47

The main thing you need to do is add some sugar syrup. I add demerara gum syrup here — you can make it without the gum arabic, just two parts demerara sugar, one part water in a blender, pour it into something that you want to store it in, and then let it cool and put it in your cocktail. So that's the Demerara syrup, and you add that and that is in place of the sugar rim that you often see on a sidecar. And then another thing that we do — or that I do — is I increase the amount of orange liqueur to a full ounce so that there's more orange liqueur in the drink than there is lemon juice. And so in many sours the amount of sweetener and the amount of lemon

juice or lime juice is the same and it's often three quarters of an ounce for each or a single ounce of it for each but here what I'm doing is, I'm taking the orange liqueur and I'm bumping it up to one ounce while leaving the lemon juice at three quarters and so that again pushes this in a little sweeter, a little more mellow direction. And now this drink has been pushed in a notably sweeter direction. I use Grand Marnier there instead, and Grand Marnier sort of has a cognac base. It kind of makes sense in this context because it's a cognac drink. And then if I'm feeling ambitious, I split the cognac portion between two different cognacs. This is not necessary for most people. And then the final thing that I do is typically you would make this as a drink that's two ounces of spirit at the base with three quarters of an ounce of lemon and three quarters of an ounce of sweetener. And I pulled that spirit base down to just an ounce and a half.

Josh 30:24

Okay.

Peter 30:25

And this might seem like a tiny change. But this is the thing that people need to think about most with their cocktails: tiny changes in the ratios, in the balance, in the volumes that you were putting in these drinks... none of these drinks were very big. I mean, a giant tiki drink might approach five or six ounces. For most of these cocktails, you're looking at a two-to-four ounce drink. And so changes on the realm of a quarter ounce or a half ounce, or even a teaspoon can make a huge difference in the balance. And the way the flavors interact with each other, instead of the flavors sort of fighting against each other and being kind of obnoxious... actually, this version of the sidecar I think actually takes the underlying idea of the sidecar and says 'what's good about this, what's interesting about this set of ingredients, and how can I combine them in a little bit of a different way without like, without departing from the fundamental idea of what a Sidecar is and what it should be?' because to me, every drink that has, that has been around for decades, every drink that has some history to it, even if you don't like the standard version, that drink has a good idea. It obviously has a good idea buried in there somewhere. Otherwise, people wouldn't still be making it 100 years later.

Josh 31:55

I want to talk a little bit about parties. So you know, when I'm making cocktails or providing cocktails for a number of people, it's usually two contexts: one is people are coming over for a dinner party, I might make one round of cocktails when they arrive or my husband will make them (my husband makes a good martini or good Manhattan), and often the guests can be trusted to make a second round for themselves and even one for me, if they want. Most people can take direction to make those cocktails that are just stirred spirits. It's not that many ingredients, they don't need to shake anything. In fact, you have to tell them that they are not supposed to shake the the martini or the Manhattan. And so that scales just fine, even if I'm busy cooking. The other thing is, you know, when people are over often during the day — maybe we're outside, it's the summer — people want sour drinks, that's sort of the the logical thing to serve. But then everybody wants one. I can make three sour drinks at a time in my Boston shaker, maybe four, if I'm really stretching them out. Often what I do in the summer is I'll put them over ice and then I will add club soda on top of it, it makes sort of a better cooler drink

for having outside by the pool than if you're just having a daiquiri or some actually fairly strong, sour drink one at a time. But that still means that I have to go through the process for every four of them that I want to serve. And sometimes people want more than one. So what's your approach to batching if you have a lot of people in your home and you're trying to make these fairly complex drinks for a number of them? I mean, obviously, you can hire a bartender. That's a significant outlay. But if you're not going to do that, if you're making the drinks yourself, how do you approach a crowd?

Peter 33:30

That's a good question. So I really like to make drinks for other people. I think cocktails are most fun when you can make them and serve them to your friends. And I like to learn my friends' tastes. I learn about my friends by learning what drinks they like. And so I have people over and sometimes it's, you know, six or eight folks. But last December, I had probably 40 or 50 people in my basement where I was making drinks for every single person. I don't recommend that for most people. I don't think that is the correct approach. I think for most people, the correct approach is to have some things that are batched and then a small number of drinks, typically no more than four but possibly just one or two, that you can make bespoke for people on an individual basis.

Josh 34:20

Four is a lot! Four is even a lot for a bartender, I think, at a party.

Peter 34:24

It just sort of depends on how ambitious you want to be. I would say for batching, I typically do not batch drinks with juice. It's possible, but the thing about a shaken juicy cocktail is that you get this great texture to it.

Josh 34:38

Just to lay that out, what you're supposed to stir and what you're supposed to shake: It's basically that shaking combines ingredients that might otherwise separate? Is that a good way to describe it? Like, syrups are fairly heavy and spirits are pretty light...

Peter 34:48

So I actually wouldn't put it that way. Both of those things chill and dilute a cocktail because you're doing this over ice in both cases. The difference is the texture. When you shake a cocktail, you're aerating it. That's why you get those bubbles. Whereas, if you're stirring it, there's no aeration that's happening. And so a stirred drink is going to feel a little bit thicker and heavier, a shaken drink is going to feel a little bit lighter in character and texture. So that's the main difference — it's aeration versus not aeration. And so in virtually all cases, any drink that has lemon, lime or grapefruit juice is going to be shaken. And any drink that is made entirely of spirits and sweeteners and doesn't have juice in it is going to be stirred. There are some exceptions to this. We don't need to get into them right now. So I always put up beer, and I also almost always put out lemonade, because people want a non-alcoholic option in many cases, and I make lemonade for my parties. And then I put out, in many cases, batched drinks that

would normally have been stirred, but I dilute them in the batch. So you take care of the dilution...

Josh 35:55

So that's like: if you have a bottle full of martini, you have gin and vermouth and bitters in there. But if you're stirring martinis to order, you're melting all of this ice into the martini. So you're adding, I guess, water to dilute it. And then how do you keep it cold?

Peter 36:09

I mean, I just put it in a cooler full of ice. But then the other thing that I do is if it's a stirred drink that would go over ice, typically a large two-by-two inch kind of rock cube, I just put out a cooler full of those cubes. And I say: pour your drink over this cube. And that's all that anyone has to do. Sometimes I'll put out like an orange peel, right? If it's like a batched old fashioned, all you got to do is pour two ounces of this over a piece of ice. The drinks...like, they're not quite as good this way. Like you lose some sort of precision in doing this. On the other hand, it means that you're not constantly having to do this stuff and and making people wait.

Josh 36:50

So we're taping this in late April. How do you decide what you want to drink when? I mean, I know you've written about seasonality how different kinds of cocktails are better for different times of year. What are you drinking right now? What's your late April beverage?

Peter 37:08

Things in the gin sour category, I think, are ideal for this time of year. The way that I think about it is: I drink stirred whiskey drinks starting late in the fall and through the winter. And then I start drinking stirred gin drinks when it starts to warm up just a little but hasn't gotten there. And so, like, in March I'm going to be drinking negronis and martinis. Somewhere in the summer, I know that I'm going to get to daiquiris and tiki drinks and margaritas. But I need something in between. And that's something in between that takes me from the martini to the daiquiri to the mai tai is a gin sour of some sort. And so whether that's a bee's knees (which is just a gin sour using all honey), whether that is a gimlet (which is just a basic gin sour), whether it's an aviation or something like that... so I might also still be drinking some martinis. And this week's newsletter is going to be about fruited martinis. It's about the banana martini.

Josh 38:12

Oh, wow. A classic!

Peter 38:13

Right? But so the banana martini, if you make it right, it's not just a specific drink. It's a way of thinking about how to add fruit liqueurs to a martini format.

Josh 38:23

Wait, so is a banana martini... is that a martini in the real sense? Because this is I mean, Matt Yglesias has a bit about how Cobb salad doesn't mean anything anymore — on a restaurant

menu, you can call any salad with a lot of stuff in it a Cobb salad. And so similarly, it seems like any cocktail that you serve in a martini glass a lot of places will call a martini, even when it has a bunch of sweet or sour ingredients that are like, you know, really far off from a traditional martini. So is this a banana martini? Are you adding citrus juice to balance out the sweetness of the banana liqueur? What's in a banana martini?

Peter 38:57

So the banana martini that I make is definitely a martini. It is effectively a 2:1 martini except that I've taken out a small amount of the dry vermouth and replaced it with a small amount of Giffard Banane du Bresil banana liqueur, which is a high quality banana liqueur that shows up a surprising amount in high-end cocktail bar menus. And if you want to think about the base drink for this, in some ways it's a martini, but in some ways, it's a Tuxedo No. 2, and a Tuxedo No. 2 is a martini, except it's got Luxardo Maraschino liqueur substituted for just a little bit of the dry vermouth. Plus, it also has a spray of absinthe, but we don't do that with a banana martini. And what it does is it sweetens it up and adds one extra flavor to the martini format. Now, this is not a drink that like I took from somewhere else. You will find terrible bars with x-tini menus, a legacy of bad 90s cocktail culture and many of those drinks have absolutely nothing to do with the martini. It's just that the martini at the time was so popular that everything that was a cocktail got rebranded a martini because people didn't know what an old fashioned was. So what I wanted to do was make a real banana martini. And I was inspired, in part by one of the last times I went to Death and Co, my favorite bar in New York City before the pandemic. The bartender there, we got to talking and she was just like, 'here's something I've been working on, it's an appletini.' Now, the appletini is like, famous as a crappy Ruby Tuesday-level drink, but she had taken the idea of the appletini, apple and martini, and made something just exquisitely wonderful. And I have no idea what was in it. Like I didn't get the recipe, but I tasted it, I still can remember this genuinely incredible appletini. And it was wow. It was a moment where I was like, 'oh, there's always a good idea, even in the dumbest drink, even in the stupidest bar drink.' And you can take that and you can make something that's genuinely good with it if you understand the basic properties of these ingredients, the basic structures that good classic cocktails work from, and you don't approach these things just dismissively. If a bunch of people like something, why not figure out how to make a version of it that you like and that you think is better?

Josh

Thank you so much, Peter, this is great.

Peter

Thank you for having me.

Josh 41:28

That was Peter Suderman. His newsletter is called Cocktails With Suderman, you can find that at [cocktailswithsuderman.substack.com](https://cocktailswithsuderman.substack.com). I really recommend the newsletter. I'm a paying subscriber to it, it really helps me up my cocktail game. And it's also just a fun read. We all have a lot of heavy stuff to read these days. And it's nice to have something that's a little lighter, a little more fun, not something that people are gonna get into bitter arguments about. And that

helps you be a little bit of a better entertainer. So I'd encourage you to check that out. Of course, also check out my newsletter that's at [Joshbarro.com](http://Joshbarro.com). If you're not already a subscriber to that it really is an excellent complement to this podcast, really provides some supplemental material and a place to talk about what's in the podcast. Part of what I've really enjoyed over the last few months having gone independent with this podcast and with the newsletter is the community that we've formed and all of the feedback that I hear from readers and from listeners. And so you can also of course, email me at [Josh@Joshbarro.com](mailto:Josh@Joshbarro.com) If you have questions or comments about anything in this podcast or if there are thoughts about things you would like to hear about in the future, so please, I would encourage you to do that.

Very Serious is created by me, Josh Barro and by Sara Fay. Jennifer Swiatek mixed this episode. Our music is by Joshua Moshier. I'm Josh Barro. This is Very Serious, and I'll be back next week.