Cocktails | Mixology | Spirits | Jerry Thomas

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## Book Review: The Art of the Bar

While killing some time, I decided to peruse the islands of a big book store. I usually check out the magazine rack for any new drink magazines or cooking journals. Then I wander around the store and avoid the Starbucks, I'm not a fan of their coffee. Then I take a walk down the Food & Drink isle and look over the bartending, wine and cocktail books. Usually there isn't much that makes we want to shell out $25, but this time something caught my eye. The book is called “The Art of the Bar” which kind of rang a bell with me. I opened the book, out of curiosity, and it was alluringly colourful with well written sections. The best part is that the writing is done by bartenders, from a bartenders perspective.

The book is written by Jeff Hollinger and Rob Schwartz, Jeff being the manager of Absinthe Brasserie & Bar in San Francisco. Between them they have 16 years of bartending experience. That's a good indicator that this book will be from the viewpoint of experience and not just another cocktail book rip off.

The book starts off with the following: “Mysterious, Sophisticated, Flirtatious . . . The cocktail is all of these things, a simple mix of ingredients that is greater than the sum of its parts.” I agree with this statement, and it is true that a good cocktail is a synergistic combination of ingredients. The target for this book is the home cocktail enthusiast, and the introduction passes on the message that quality is a key aspect of being a good bartender. Which I again agree.

As you read through The Art of the Bar, there is a little dash of history, a shot of passion and pint of knowledge. The book starts with an introduction to some of the classic cocktails, such as the Martinez, Martini and the Old Fashioned. The recipes are pretty true to the classic formulas, which is great to see. Then they move onto early century drinks like the Sidecar and Margarita. Again, the recipes are true to the classic formula with the Margarita being the 3:2:1 ratio.

There is a good section on Bitters and they even include a recipe for Dr. Schwartz’s Cherry Vanilla Bitters. The recipe looks quite useful, and different compared to other bitter recipes floating around. The authors then go on to discuss what it is like to be a bartender, discuss the types of drinks, take a look at ice, whether to stir or shake and berate the ubiquitous bar blender. They also discuss bar tools and proper glassware along with garnishes. They even include a recipe for brandied cherries to get away from the fluorescent maraschino cherry. This is all genuinely great info that is sometimes skipped in less cocktail books.

Towards the end of the book they start to discuss more cocktails and ingredients. They offer recipes for ginger syrup, lavender honey syrup and balsamic syrup. Again, this book tries to stimulate people to use their imagination (syrups) when creating cocktails, but the Art of the Bar also preaches balance and control. The book also frequently provides the wisdom of an experienced bartender when working with the cocktail and creating new drink. The Art of the Bar finishes with a few digestifs and a couple helpful tips for hangovers. A nice touch I think.

The Art of the Bar is detailed enough to communicate the message, but not so elaborate to lose the average home bartender. You also don't need to read it from cover to cover since warmer of the book is a basics information module. The tone of the book is very easy to read and the enthusiasm for the cocktails shines through in the type. Throughout the book there are recipes for classic cocktails and new creations, which all seem to well thought out cocktails. If I were to write a book, this is the type of book I would write. This book is a definite buy for any aspiring cocktail enthusiast.

### The Art of the Bar: Cocktails Inspired by the Classics

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