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It's an Old Fashioned World – but new fans are everywhere

BY SUE STRACHAN | STAFF WRITER JUL 16, 2019 - 6:30 AM

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Two different types of Old Fashioned cocktails -- Cure (left) and Clancy's (right)

Photo by Sue Stachan | Staff photos

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In the opening scene of the 1963 movie, “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World,” Jim Backus (best known as Thurston Howell III in “Gilligan’s Island”) requests an Old Fashioned while flying a small plane. He declares it too sweet and decides to make his own, handing over the controls to another character, who demands, “What if something happens?” To which Backus retorts, “What can happen to an Old Fashioned?”

A lot can happen.

Depending on who the bartender is, an Old Fashioned can be garnished with an orange peel, lemon peel (or both), a bright red maraschino cherry or the fancier, darker Luxardo maraschino cherry, considered the original maraschino cherry. The base of the drink can be whiskey, bourbon or rye. And what kind of bitters is the bartender using?

Those who order an Old Fashioned on a regular basis know where to go for their preferred concoction. But it can be confusing to the drinker who sips one occasionally or to the person trying the cocktail for the first time.



Old Fashioned at Clancy's.

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A bartender at the Pendennis Club in Louisville, Kentucky, is credited with inventing the bourbon-based cocktail called the Old Fashioned in 1880. The drink was created in honor of distillery owner Col. James E. Pepper, who brought it to the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, further popularizing it.

While a lemon peel was sometimes added as a garnish in the drink's early years, it wasn't until the 1930s that an orange peel or maraschino cherry was added. The practice of muddling the orange, cherry and other fruit with sugar and bitters at the bottom started around then, too.

Cocktails remained popular until the late 1960s and '70s, when they fell out of favor. It wasn't until the late '90s and early 2000s, that a renaissance of cocktail culture began. Help came from the TV show "Mad Men" (2007-2015), with the Old Fashioned often being character

Don Draper's drink of choice. In a Season 3 episode, Draper makes an Old Fashioned with club soda.

Not adding club soda or maraschino cherries is Cure bar manager Ryan Gannon. The Cure Old Fashioned is rooted in the simplicity of its origins, but with a modern-day addition. The Cure Old Fashioned is made with bourbon, bitters and simple syrup, and garnished with a fresh orange peel that Gannon gets a small spritz out of. The key to the drink is the 2-by-2-inch square, crystal-clear ice cube frozen for the restaurant by Melt New Orleans, a company that makes custom-cut ice cubes and other ice products. Gannon says that not only is the cube aesthetically pleasing, it keeps the drink mixed longer. The final product is subtle and summery, with the flavor of the bourbon as the highlight.



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What might be considered the flip side of the Cure Old Fashioned is the one made at Clancy's by bartender Garth Swanson, who

Cure uses custom ice cubes made by Melt New Orleans. The bar uses it in a number of cocktails, including the Old Fashioned shown here.

Photo by Sue Stachan | Staff photo

muddles Luxardo cherries, oranges, two types of bitters (Peychaud's and

Angostura) and simple syrup, adding a lot of rye whiskey because, he said, "It's not as sweet." The finished product is a rich, wintry cocktail, which still tastes refreshing in the summer.

Of course, you can try to make your own at home, experimenting to see which version you prefer.

Old Fashioned

Recipe from Ryan Gannon of Cure

Serves 1

2 oz Buffalo Trace bourbon

1 teaspoon of 2:1 Demerara syrup (2 parts Demerara sugar/1 part water)

14 to 20 drops Angostura bitters

7 to 10 drops Gaz Regan orange bitters

Orange peel, expressed over the drink

Build the drink in the glass, then add ice. (Or build it in a mixing glass, and pour over ice.)

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