

imbibe

Your Ultimate
**Home Bar
Guide**

Photos by STUART MULLENBERG





MAYBE you've been watching too many *Thin Man* movies. Maybe the economy has made you realize the virtues of entertaining at home. Or maybe your favorite neighborhood bar has inspired you to step up your own game. Whatever the reason, you've decided it's time to set up a home bar you can be proud of. We know this can seem like a daunting undertaking: With the seemingly infinite varieties of spirits and gear out there, it's hard to know what you actually need, and what's an unnecessary expense. That's why we've laid out everything you need to create the home bar of your dreams, whether you're just starting or you're ready to take your existing setup to the next level. We spoke with bartending pros across the country to get the most practical tips for stocking and using your home bar to best effect, and we scouted out some fun recipes you can make along the way. Before long, you'll have a bar even Nick and Nora Charles would be impressed by.

TIP: Boston shakers can make a mess until you learn how to use them, so try strating out with a three-piece cobbler shaker. There are lots of options available; try retailers like cocktailkingdom.com or kegworks.com.

TIP: Be patient. Building a spirits collection is a long-term process. Start by purchasing a new bottle once a month, or every two weeks if you're especially ambitious. And in the beginning, just make sure you have the basics covered so you can make a few of your favorite cocktails with what you have on hand.



TIP: In the beginning, make sure your glasses simply cover the basics. And don't be afraid to buy vintage or get creative with the types of glasses you use (the coupes pictured here came from a thrift store). "Unless you can afford to invest in a bunch of glassware, go with what you have on hand," says New York bartender Don Lee. "You can put an up drink in a rocks glass."

TIP: Your first cocktail book should be basic yet comprehensive, with a way to search drinks by base spirit and by name. With a range of easy and reliable classic and contemporary recipes, Dale DeGroff's *Essential Cocktail* is a great choice for every level of home bartending.

TIP: If you're limited on space or don't want to invest in an expensive bar or cabinets, a small rolling cart can be a perfect beginner's option.

TIP: Good ice is a must for every home bar, but it doesn't need to be expensive or complicated. For instance, Tovolo sells inexpensive silicon trays (pictured here) that make perfect cubes. And to make cracked ice, simply put some cubes in hand towel and break them up with a mallet or muddler. You can even break up a couple of cubes in your hand by carefully hitting them with a back of a bar spoon.

101

BEGINNING IS OFTEN THE SCARIEST PART, when it's hard to see beyond the initial expense of starting your home bar. But look at it this way: A bottle of good gin generally costs less than a round of quality Martinis for you and your friends, and lasts a lot longer. Plus, you don't have to take out a second mortgage to have a bar worth showing off; with just the dozen bottles shown here, you can make hundreds of cocktails. And understand that the bottles listed here are *suggestions*—if you don't like Campari, you don't have to stock it. Try an anisette like Herbsaint or absinthe instead. Or if you're a fan of Sidecars, stock brandy. After all, it's *your bar*.

101 BAR KIT

BOTTLES

- Bourbon
- Campari
- Cointreau (or other quality triple sec)
- Dry vermouth
- Gin
- Gold rum
- Grand Marnier
- Maraschino liqueur
- Reposado tequila
- Sweet vermouth
- White rum
- Vodka

MIXERS

- Angostura bitters
- Cola
- Fresh lemons
- Fresh limes
- Grenadine
- Orange bitters
- Peychaud's bitters
- Quality bottled fruit juices
- Seltzer or club soda
- Simple syrup
- Sugar cubes
- Tonic

GARNISHES

- Fresh citrus and other fruit
- Fresh herbs
- Olives
- Maraschino cherries

TOOLS

- Bar spoon
- Bar towels
- Bottles for storing syrup
- Channel knife and zester
- Citrus juicer
- Cobbler (three-piece) cocktail shaker
- Cocktail picks
- Corkscrew
- Fine-mesh strainer
- Ice cube molds
- Small knife
- Straws

GLASSWARE

- Cocktail
- Collins or highball
- Old Fashioned
- White wine

BOOKS

- Bartender's Bible* by Gary Regan
- Bartender's Black Book* by Stephen Kittredge Cunningham
- Home Bar Basics* by Dave Stolte
- The Essential Bartender's Guide* by Robert Hess
- The Essential Cocktail* by Dale DeGroff
- Mr. Boston: Official Bartender's Guide* by Anthony Giglio with Jim Meehan



A PERFECT 101 COCKTAIL: ROSITA

This slightly bitter cocktail shows how complex a cocktail can be, even when it's made with fairly basic ingredients.

- 1 1/2 oz. reposado tequila
- 1/2 oz. sweet vermouth
- 1/2 oz. dry vermouth
- 1/2 oz. Campari
- 1 dash Angostura bitters
- Cracked and cubed ice
- Tools: bar spoon, three-piece shaker
- Glass: Old Fashioned
- Garnish: lemon twist

Stir ingredients in shaker with ice cubes, strain into a glass filled with cracked ice and garnish.

Mr. Boston: Official Bartender's Guide

OTHER 101 COCKTAILS TO TRY

Americano, Black Rose, Bourbon Crusta, Bronx, Cuba Libre, Beachcomber, Daiquiri, Daisy, Diplomat, Gin Rickey, Jasmine, Old Fashioned, Negroni, Manhattan, Margarita, Martini, Mojito, Pegu Club, Presidente, Satan's Whiskers (seen in opening spread), Tom Collins, Vodka Collins, Ward Eight, Whiskey Sour

201

CONGRATULATIONS, you've mastered the basics. Now it's time to start exploring the world of flavors that cocktails can offer, and to learn some more advanced techniques. This is the stage when you begin trying out more unusual liqueurs and even create your own infused spirits. This also is a great time to consider hosting a cocktail party.

201 BAR KIT

Everything from 101, plus....

BOTTLES

Absinthe
Amaretto
Applejack
Apricot brandy
Averna (or other amaro)
Benedictine
Brandy
Cachaça
Cognac
Crème de cacao
Crème de menthe
Dark rum
Drambuie
Dubonnet
Green Chartreuse
Irish whiskey
Lillet
Pimm's
Rhum Agricole
Rye whiskey
St. Germain
Scotch whisky
Silver tequila
Sparkling wine

MIXERS

Fresh oranges
Ginger beer
Grapefruit bitters
Grenadine, homemade
Honey syrup
Orange flower water
Orgeat
Peach bitters

GARNISHES

Candied ginger
Cocktail onions
Homemade olives and cherries
Marmalade
Pickled vegetables

TOOLS

Blender
Boston shaker
Hawthorn strainer
Ice crusher
Jars for making infusions
Muddler
Pitcher
Small bowls for garnishes
Swizzle sticks
Vegetable/citrus peeler

GLASSWARE

Chimney
Cordial
Flute
Snifter

BOOKS

The American Cocktail
by the Editors of *Imbibe Magazine*
The Art of the Bar by
Jeff Hollinger and Rob Schwartz
The Savoy Cocktail Book
by Harry Cradock
Vintage Spirits & Forgotten Cocktails
by Ted Haigh

OTHER 201 COCKTAILS TO TRY

Amaretto Sour, Bee's Knees, Bobby Burns, Caipirinha, Champagne Cocktail, Chicago, Corpse Reviver #2, Dark and Stormy, Dubonnet Cocktail, Flamingo, French 75, Jack Rose, Japanese, Jewel, Last Word, Mai Tai, Mimosa, Monkey Gland, Morning Glory, Moscow Mule, Pimm's Cup, Prohibition, Rob Roy, Sidecar, Stinger, Tuxedo, 20th Century, Vesper



A PERFECT 201 COCKTAIL: MARKER MAN

San Francisco bartender Kevin Diedrich demonstrates how a simple infusion can add depth to a cocktail with this blueberry-flavored marvel.

2 oz. blueberry-infused bourbon (Diedrich uses Maker's Mark)
½ oz. Benedictine
½ oz. dry vermouth
2 dashes peach bitters
Ice
Tools: barspoon, mixing tin, Hawthorn strainer
Glass: cocktail
Garnish: fresh blueberries

Stir all ingredients in a mixing tin, strain into chilled glass and garnish.

To make blueberry-infused bourbon, add 3 pints of blueberries to a 750-ml. bottle of bourbon. Let sit for three weeks and then strain bourbon into a clean glass jar or bottle.

Kevin Diedrich, San Francisco

TIP: 201 is a great time to start using a two-piece Boston shaker, the preferred tool for pros. These can take some practice, and bartender Don Lee says this tip is a must: "When you shake with a Boston shaker, be sure the smaller tin is facing back and behind you. So if the worst happens and the tin comes off mid-shake, you don't wind up with ice-cold drink all over your shirt."

TIP: If you have the space and time, growing herbs that you use frequently in cocktails is a money-saver and a convenient way to guarantee that you'll always have a fresh garnish on hand.

TIP: Buy for function, not just for style. "You might think that swizzle stick with the smiley face will look great, but if it's uncomfortable to use, it isn't the right tool for the job," says Adam Lantheaume, owner of the Boston Shaker, a bar-supply store in Boston.

TIP: Ready to experiment with homemade syrups and/or infusions? Use whatever herbs, spices or fruits you have on hand. Needing to put some mint to use? Make a mint simple syrup. Have some extra blueberries on hand? Try adding them to bourbon for the Marker Man recipe on the opposite page.

TIP: Have an iPhone? There are some great apps out there for cocktail enthusiasts, including one called Cocktails Made Easy (in which all recipes are made from a stock of just 14 bottles) and one from the experts at Cocktaildb.com.

TIP: Crushed ice is essential for many cocktails, but if you don't want to buy an ice crusher, just put some cubes in a hand towel and break them up with a mallet. Many blenders, like the Vita-Mix pictured here, can also make crushed ice.



301

YOUR FRIDGE IS FULL of homemade shrubs and syrups, and your collection of spirits rivals that found in many professional bars. No doubt about it, you have earned your doctorate in home bartending. And, just as most post-docs wind up doing, you're ready to specialize. Decide what in the cocktail world fascinates you most—be it tiki drinks, Savoy classics or modern bar-chef experiments—and really delve into the complexities. Start inventing your own cocktails, syrups and infusions. And, hey, you know that spare room in the basement? Now might be a good time to convert it into a wet bar.

TIP: By 301, you're ready to collect some novelty items. Think about tiki glasses, julep cups, absinthe spoons, soda siphons—the items you've had on your wish list since you first started your home bar. And as with other gadgets in your home bar, don't feel pressured to buy new—check eBay or your local vintage shops for special deals and unique finds.

TIP: Unsure about investing in a bottle of some obscure spirit you've never tasted? Try a sample at a bar first to see if it's something you'll actually enjoy.

TIP: Homemade "shrubs" or vinegars can add a level of depth to your cocktails. (For a recipe for blood-orange gastrique, see imbibemagazine.com.)

TIP: Organization is key with any home bar, especially as your bar gets bigger. Be sure everything has a logical and orderly place and the ingredients and tools you use most frequently are easiest to access.

301 BAR KIT

Everything from 101 and 201, plus...

BOTTLES

Añejo tequila
Aperol
Aquavit
Batavia arrack
Calvados
Cherry Heering
Crème de cassis
Crème de violette
Cynar
Demerara rum
Domaine de Canton
Fernet Branca
Genever
Pear brandy
Pimento dram
Pisco
Port
Punt e Mes
Sake
Sherry
Sloe gin
Strega
Velvet falernum
Yellow Chartreuse

GARNISHES

Cinnamon sticks and other whole spices (nutmeg, anise and clove)
Edible fresh flowers
Fresh pineapple

TOOLS

Absinthe spoons
Extra shakers
Frother
Citrus press
Nutmeg grater
Julep strainer
Soda siphon
Matches or lighter

GLASSWARE

Absinthe
Cordial
Julep
Punch (with bowl)
Tiki
Toddy

BOOKS

Artisanal Cocktails by Scott Beattie
Bitters: A Spirited History of a Classic
Cure-All by Brad Thomas Parsons
The Gentleman's Companion
by Charles Baker
Imbibe! by David Wondrich
Sippin' Safari by Jeff Berry
The Drunken Botanist by Amy Stewart
The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks
by David A. Embury
The PDT Cocktail Book by Jim Meehan

MIXERS

Additional bitters
Cream of coconut
Eggs
Heavy cream
Horseradish
Shrubs (homemade vinegars)
Unusual sodas

OTHER 301 COCKTAILS TO TRY

American Beauty, Attention, Aviation, Blood and Sand, Clover Club, Hanky Panky, Kir Royale, Mayfair, Painkiller, Piña Colada, Pink Lady, Pisco Sour, Planter's Punch, Seville, Singapore Sling, Sloe Gin Fizz, Réveillon, Ramos Gin Fizz, Trident, Zombie



A PERFECT 301 COCKTAIL: PAUL'S CLUB

Bartender Don Lee was inspired to create this lovely drink after reading about homemade vinegars in Charles Baker's 1939 classic, The Gentleman's Companion. It may take a couple tries to master the absinthe float, but the reward is an ethereal halo effect on the top of the glass.


2 oz. London Dry-style gin
1 oz. Concord vinegar (see below)
¼ oz. simple syrup
Ice cubes (preferably more than one-inch square)
Tools: barspoon, mixing glass, Hawthorn strainer
Glass: cocktail or coupe

Garnish: 1/4 oz. pastis or absinthe poured over the back of a spoon to float on top of the drink


Stir ingredients, strain into chilled glass and garnish.

To make Concord vinegar, add 5 lbs. of crushed Concord grapes to 1 liter of white wine vinegar. Let sit for 1 week and strain into a clean glass bottle.


Don Lee, New York City




TIP: “Mint is so abused,” says Don Lee. “Use a flat-bottomed muddler rather than one with teeth. You want to press the mint, not break it. When you break the leaf, you release chlorophyll, which is bitter. If you have to muddle more than just mint—like, say, some fruit—put the mint under the fruit so it’s protected.”



TIP: Always use fresh citrus in your cocktails. There’s no replacement for the flavor of fresh juice in mixed drinks.



TIP: Don’t be afraid to experiment with switching out ingredients in a recipe. It will not only teach you more about what makes a good cocktail, but also could provide some delicious discoveries. “A Gin Julep is actually quite refreshing,” says Don Lee.



TIP: Once you’ve graduated to a Boston shaker, you’ll need a Hawthorne strainer and, ideally, a julep strainer (available for as little as \$3). A Hawthorne strainer is great for shaken drinks, while a julep strainer is perfect for keeping ice shards at bay in stirred cocktails.