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: 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: 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 barspoon.

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.

AROMATIC BEANS: Angelica, clove, cinnamon stick, cardamom

101 BAR KIT

BOTTLES
Bourbon
Campari
Contreau (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
Dry limes
Grenadine
Orange bitters
Psychod’s bitters
Quality bottled fruit juices
Seltzer or club soda
Simple syrup
Sugar cubes
Tonic

GLASSWARE
Cocktail
Collins or highball
Old Fashioned
White wine

BOOKS
Bartender’s Bible by Gary Regan
Bartender’s Black Book by Stephen K 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

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

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 ½ oz. reposado tequila
1/3 oz. sweet vermouth
1/3 oz. dry vermouth
1/3 oz. Campari
1 dash Angostura bitters
Cracked and cubed ice
Tools: barspoon, 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

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.
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...

OTHER 201 COCKTAILS TO TRY
Amaretto Sour, Bee’s Knees, Bobby Burns, 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

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 Craddock

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)
⅓ oz. Benedictine
⅓ 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: 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 Lantheaune, owner of the Boston Shaker, a bar-supply store in Boston.

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.

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: 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 Dan 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: 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.

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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.

301 BAR KIT

**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

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

**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
- The Fine Art of Mixing Drinks by David A. Embury
- The PDT Cocktail Book by Jim Meehan
- Sippin’ Safari by Jeff Berry
- The Drunken Botanist by Amy Stewart
- Imbibe!

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.

**INGREDIENTS**
- 2 oz. London Dry-style gin
- 1 oz. Concord vinegar (see below)
- 1/4 oz. simple syrup
- Ice cubes (preferably more than one-inch square)

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

**INSTRUCTIONS**
1. Stir ingredients, strain into chilled glass and garnish.
2. 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
“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.”

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

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.

Once you’ve graduated to a Boston shaker, you’ll need a Hawthorn strainer and, ideally, a julep strainer (available for as little as $5). A Hawthorn strainer is great for shaken drinks, while a julep strainer is perfect for keeping ice shards at bay in stirred cocktails.