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Holiday Drinks

FESTIVE RECIPES FROM AROUND THE WORLD





This page: The Grifter Brewing.
Opposite: The Old Fashioned
on tap at The Baxter Inn.



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

FROM
COCKTAILS
TO BEER,
SYDNEY
IS TAKING
AUSTRALIA'S
DRINKS TO
THE TOP.

STORY BY
PAUL CLARKE

PHOTOS BY
ALANA DIMOU



Clockwise from this photo: Stuart "Chewy" Morrow at The Baxter Inn; Gritter Brewing; the Not a Harvey Wallbanger at Baxter Inn; beer taps at Gritter; Gritter's Australian pale ale.



"THAT'S NOT A BAR."

The guy behind me seems convinced. We're halfway down an unpromising-looking fire-escape stairway off a loading dock courtyard in Sydney's central business district, with only an unmarked steel door below us. We've ventured down independently of one another, strangers on a shared mission for a decent drink, but like Siri's implied shrug when I seek direction specifics on my phone, we're both uncertain about this whole thing. "There's no way that's a bar," he says with finality.

I try the door, anticipating a lock's resistance, but it swings open. I hear music, and laughter, and the thunka-thunka of ice in a shaker. *Oh, yeah—it's a bar.*

In the late 20th century, Australia's culinary identity overseas was defined largely by oil cans of lager, bottles of industrial plonk, black smears of Vegemite and the promise of shrimp on the barbie. But Australia's been shaping a role for itself as a food-and-drink wonderland, and its largest city wears this new mantle quite comfortably. It's now possible to sip Sydney-brewed beer while watching surfers at Bondi Beach, and snack on red-claw yabbies while drinking Tasmanian Riesling under the soaring concrete shell of the Sydney Opera House. And perhaps befitting a city founded by a culture based on the opposite side of the planet, Sydney's bars draw freely from a global array of influences, while developing their own identity infused with the character of Australia's remote position in the South Pacific and Indian oceans.

"Sydney's bar culture has developed largely because of its geographic location," says Charlie Ainsbury. A longtime Sydney bartender, Ainsbury opened his own bar, This Must Be the Place, in the Darlinghurst neighborhood in 2015. "Australia is so far away from everything else, and that's worked to our advantage, and our disadvantage," he says.

Australia's isolation meant that products and trends often took a long time to reach the continent—"We were only made aware of 100 percent blue agave tequila in 2004 or 2005," Ainsbury says—but when visitors came calling, they found Sydney's climate and culture appealing enough to leave home behind. "Sydney first came alive from British bartenders coming over on holiday and never leaving," Ainsbury says. This pattern, which started in the late-'90s, brought bartenders (and now bar owners and consultants) including Jason Crawley, Mikey Enright, Marco Faraoni and Grant Collins to Sydney, where they pollinated the city with cocktail skills honed in London.

Naren Young, a Sydney native now splitting his time between Paris and New York City (where he's co-owner of Dante), agrees. "Australia had this nice influx of knowledge, and it developed pretty early on," Young says. The 1999 launch of *Australian Bartender* magazine helped the cocktail culture further gel and gave the nation's two largest cities an opportunity to better define themselves. "Sydney and Melbourne were both leaders—Melbourne was a bit more European and underground, with more spirit-forward

drinks, whereas Sydney has sunnier climes, which meant brighter, fresher-style drinks with a culinary sensibility," Young says.

At The Baxter Inn, the bar at the bottom of that unpromising stairway, the effects of this infusion, and how it's evolved, are on full display. Baxter Inn (headed by Stuart "Chewy" Morrow, another British-raised export) is a charmingly weathered drinking den. In addition to its mighty whisky selection (more than 1,000 at last count), the bar offers a small but formidable cocktail list. A Caribost Colada—with coconut-infused Talisker, cacao, lemon and Cherry Heering—assuages my recent worries about going astray, and a recent cocktail list featured drinks like the Melon Degeneres, with rum, coconut whey, Suze and honeydew sorbet.

Across the alley from Baxter Inn's unmarked stairway is The Barber Shop. Co-founded by expat British bartender (and former hairdresser) Mikey Enright, Barber Shop is true to its name, with a scissor trim or a hot-towel shave among the options. But the bar draws a bigger crowd, where the gin-oriented menu features drinks such as the Fleet Street, matching gin with pineapple, yellow Chartreuse and lemon. In November, Enright and his business partner, Julian Train, will add another bar to the alley, The Duke of Clarence, emphasizing a Victorian-era British pub-style experience, with English-inspired cocktails, cask ales and a spirits list drawing heavily from the British Isles.

BREWED BEGINNINGS

Sydney's origins are familiar in a schoolbook-history kind of way—of how Lieutenant (later Captain) James Cook sailed the *HMS Endeavor* into Botany Bay in 1770 and encountered the Gweagal, part of an indigenous culture with origins dating to at least the last ice age. (The relationship had a difficult start; Cook wrote in his journal of the Aborigines, "All they seem'd to want was us to be gone.") Cook wasn't the first European to come across Australia (the Dutch had mapped the western and northern coastlines more than a century before), but it was the British who soon returned, sending the First Fleet of 11 ships to Botany Bay and, later, Port Jackson (which now includes Sydney Harbour and neighboring inlets and harbors) in 1788, depositing a mix of settlers, civil servants and convicts who established a penal colony as the continent's first European settlement.

The convicts were relegated to a hilly area inauspiciously dubbed The Rocks, and before long, sailors, whalers, and the taverns and brothels they frequented, populated this seedy side of the growing town. The Rocks is now a tourist destination, with galleries and shops filling the narrow lanes, but a taste of Australia's early drinking culture can still be sampled. Three pubs in the area, each bearing a *Rule*, *Britannia*-esque name and origins dating as early as the 1820s, vie for the title of Sydney's oldest: The Hero of Waterloo, the

Fortune of War, and the Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel, the latter pouring house-brewed English-style beers including Trafalgar Pale Ale, Nelson's Blood porter and Victory Bitter.

Though Australia's hard-drinking reputation draws largely from the beer well, there are only around 400 breweries in the country, and the craft-beer movement is still in its relative infancy. Sydney's formerly industrial Marrickville neighborhood is now home to a small but growing number of breweries. These include Batch Brewing, which opened its mellow brewery and tasting room in 2013, pouring their signature American Pale Ale alongside the evocatively named "Just Beer" lager and bottling The Big Kahuna, a toasted-coconut brown ale. A neighborhood newcomer is Wildflower Brewing & Blending, which focuses on mixed-fermentation beers utilizing wild yeasts sourced from throughout New South Wales.

Willie the Boatman, which occupies a former paint factory, was founded in 2012 (the brewery's doors opened in 2015) by Nick Newey and Pat McInerney and is named for William Kerr, a 19th-century Scottish convict who rowed passengers across Cook's River for 25 years. Their beers range from milder Australian takes on American-style beers, such as a West Coast IPA, a New England IPA and Albo Corn Ale, to esoteric brews, such as Salty Melon, a gose made with rockmelon, and Black Bunny Dark Ale, made with nine different malts. Marrickville Lager is the best-selling brew, alongside other favorites, such as Todd's Trailer Ale. "Many of our beers are named after our mates," Newey says. "Todd had a trailer he let us use, so it's Todd's Trailer Ale."

Housed in a former laundromat, The Grifter Brewing was among the first breweries to raise the Marrickville flag. "Marrickville is the place to be at the moment for local beers, and we're stoked to be a part of that," says co-founder Matt King. A hop-forward pale ale is Grifter's flagship brew, but the selection ranges from the easy-drinking Serpent's Kiss watermelon pilsner to the hoppy Big Sur West Coast IPA and Demon Lungs, a wintertime smoked porter. "It's an unreal vibe at the moment [in Marrickville], a real destination for weekend travelers, and everything happening really complements each other," King says.

Craft brewing may be young in Australia, but it has an even younger sibling: craft distilling. Large liquor companies long dominated the country's spirits industry, but recent decades have seen a slow growth among independent distillers, spurred on by the global popularity of favorites like Tasmania-based Sullivan's Cove. There are now around 100 distilleries in Australia, and significant on Sydney's scene is Archie Rose Distilling. In addition to vodka and gin, Archie Rose made a limited agricole-style rum from New South Wales sugarcane, and is aging a rye whiskey that will likely debut before the end of the year, and a single-malt whiskey expected to be released in 2018. Master distiller Dave Withers says the distillery's independence has enabled it to pursue multiple projects, which allows them to "muck about with the fun stuff," he says.

Withers' idea of fun stuff includes Archie Rose x Horisumi, a collaboration gin launched with a Sydney-based tattoo artist and that features a seasonally shifting profile; and making custom-tailored gins using antipodean botanicals such as Australian river mint, Dorriggo pepperleaf and blood lime. "We really want to distill Vegemite, just to see what it does," Withers says.

GLOBAL TOUCHES

An invasion of British bartenders helped Sydney's cocktail culture develop, but other factors were also at work. The internet connected Australian bartenders with colleagues throughout the world, and a national propensity for extended travel benefited bars at home, too. "It's in every Australian's DNA to travel," Ainsbury says. "If a young bartender wanted to make a go of it in the mid-2000s, we'd send them to London, and they'd come back and tell us what they saw." Bars such as those at the Grand Pacific Blue Room or Bayswater Brasserie (where Young was once manager, and where he hired Ainsbury) put the city's cocktail culture on a course that it continues to follow.

Befitting a relatively young city in an even younger country (that's also home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, and some of the earth's oldest geology), Sydney draws influences

WHEN YOU GO

ARCHIE ROSE DISTILLERY & BAR

85 Dunning Ave,
Rosebery;
archieose.com.au

THE BARBER SHOP

89 York St., CBD;
thisisthebarbershop.com

BATCH BREWING

44 Sydenham Rd.,
Marrickville;
batchbrewingco.com.au

THE BAXTER INN

152-156 Clarence
St., basement, CBD;
thebaxterinn.com

BIG POPPA'S

96 Oxford St.,
Darlinghurst;
bigpoppa.com.au

BULLETIN PLACE

10-14 Bulletin Place, CBD;
bulletinplace.com

CONTINENTAL DELI BAR & BISTRO

210 Australia St.,
Newtown;
continentaldelicatessen.
com.au

THE GRIFTER BREWING

1/391 Enmore Rd.,
Marrickville;
thegrifter.com.au

KITTYHAWK

16 Phillip Lane, CBD;
thekittyhawk.com.au

THE LOBO PLANTATION

209 Clarence St.,
basement, CBD;
thelobo.com.au

MAYBE FRANK

417-421 Bourke St,
Surry Hills;
maybefrank.com

PS40

2/40 King St., CBD;
ps-soda.com

RESTAURANT HUBERT

15 Bligh St., basement;
restauranthubert.com

SHADY PINES SALOON

256 Crown St., Shop 4,
Darlinghurst;
shadypinessaloon.com

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

239 Oxford St.,
Darlinghurst;
tmbtp.com.au

THE WILD ROVER

75 Campbell St.,
Surry Hills;
thewildrover.com.au

WILLIE THE BOATMAN

75 Mary St., Ste. 202,
St Peters;
willietheboatman.com



The Can-hattan at Continental Deli.



Clockwise from top left: Phil Spector at Bulletin Place; the bar at Continental Deli; the cozy interior of Bulletin Place; Thor Bergquist at PS40; tinned seafood at Continental Deli.



from everywhere—from successive waves of immigrants from England, the Mediterranean, and throughout Asia, as well as from the experiences brought home from overseas. These influences play out in bars such as Shady Pines Saloon, a subterranean Darlinghurst bar styled after a desert dive in the American Southwest, replete with a taxidermy vulture, a tequila and bourbon-rich menu, and speakers blasting the mid-'70s country stylings of George Jones. Irish influences play out at The Wild Rover, a Surry Hills neighborhood bar, with a weathered copper bar top that clearly doubles as the Friday-night dancefloor, an impressive selection of Irish whiskey, and a nonchalant cocktail list with drinks such as Rye Me a River, a mix of rye whiskey, Campari, banana liqueur and sherry.

And lest Australian influences be overshadowed by global touches, many Sydney bartenders make domestic aspects a priority. “We’re taking full advantage of what we have here,” Ainsbury says. “Australia is a huge country, with a variety of climates, so we have seasonal fruit in abundance—there’s tropical fruit in the north, and in the cooler climate of the south, we make great wine.”

Bulletin Place, which opened in the city center in 2012, makes such touches part of the bar’s identity. “The cocktail offering is purely a celebration of Australia’s biodiversity,” says bar manager Paul Hammond. The bar’s menu of five drinks changes daily, and recipes reflect what’s available. “At the start of the month we’ll have a group meeting and discuss the current state of available produce, and what drinks will be seasonally appropriate,” Hammond says. During my visit on an early autumn evening, that rotating list featured the Graped Crusader, a blend of Armagnac with a sherry-like Australian fortified wine and ginger (and incorporating seasonal grapes), and Dante’s Peak, a mix of Campari, scotch whisky, cherry liqueur and fresh citrus.

Australian produce is also a premium at PS40, a city-center bar with a novel approach. By day, PS40 is a soda production and bottling facility, using domestic botanicals to make mixers such as Bush Tonic, as well as a cola flavored with wattle seeds and a smoked lemonade. In the evening, these sodas are served in suggested pairings with spirits, and bartenders (headed by owners Michael Chiem and Thor Bergquist, the latter a veteran of Experimental Cocktail Club in London and New York) deploy some of Sydney’s most advanced cocktails. A recent menu featured combos such as 3 Dots and a Dashi, a mix of Cognac flavored with dashi and pineapple skin, along with falernum, allspice liqueur, honey and lime; and Thyme to Turnip the Beet, with beet-infused gin shaken with turnip purée, sherry, thyme and egg white.

COCKTAIL CUISINE

Any city’s bars function in the shadow of local regulations, and Sydney is no exception. Ainsbury credits a regulatory change from around 2010 that made Sydney bar licenses more affordable with helping to kick-start the cocktail culture—“Suddenly, you had bar owners who were bartenders, instead of lawyers or businessmen,” he says—but the city’s enforcement of “lockout laws,” a controversial ordinance introduced in 2014 to reduce alcohol-related violence, and which require bars in certain areas to refuse entry to new customers after a certain hour (those already inside can remain until closing), is also having an effect.

For many bars, the laws inhibit late-night business and discourage a vibrant nightlife. But if there’s a silver lining, it’s that restaurant bars—which close earlier, but remain busy throughout the evening—are now a more prominent part of the city’s cocktail landscape. Restaurant Hubert, a French restaurant downtown that shares ownership with The Baxter Inn and Shady Pines Saloon, serves a classics-oriented cocktail menu as precursor to steak frites



GRAPED CRUSADER

Apera—an Australian fortified wine—is used in this cocktail, but fino sherry is a fine substitute.

1¼ oz. Armagnac
 ½ oz. dry apera (or substitute fino sherry)
 ½ oz. simple syrup (1:1)
 1 tsp. cold-pressed ginger syrup
 2 dashes orange bitters

Tools: shaker, strainer
 Glass: coupe
 Garnish: red grape

Shake all the ingredients with ice, strain into a chilled glass, then garnish.

Cold-Pressed Ginger Syrup: Using a grater or microplane, grate 1 large piece of fresh ginger and press through cheesecloth or a fine-mesh strainer, collecting the juice (alternatively, juice the ginger using an electric juicer). Measure the amount of juice and add an equal amount of sugar, whisking until the sugar dissolves. Keep the remainder refrigerated for up to 3 days.

Phil Spector
Bulletin Place



TWILL SERVE

Mint, spice and the richness of cacao mingle in this unique blend of flavors.

1½ oz. white rum
1 oz. fresh lime juice
¾ oz. white crème de cacao
½ oz. peppercorn syrup
5-6 fresh mint leaves

Tools: barspoon
Glass: julep
Garnish: mint sprig, half-slice of lime

Combine all the ingredients with crushed ice in a julep cup and stir to combine and chill. Fill the cup with additional crushed ice, then garnish.

Peppercorn syrup: Combine 2 cups of sugar with 2 cups of water in a saucepan over medium heat and stir until the sugar dissolves. Once cooled, add this to a blender with ¼ cup of black peppercorns and blend well. Fine strain into a bottle and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

Mary White
Lobo Plantation

and a formidable wine list; and Big Poppa's, a Biggie Smalls-tribute restaurant in Darlington, focuses on Italian fare and drinks like My Tarragona Don't, a combination of gin, Lillet, curaçao, lemon and tarragon.

Continental Deli Bar & Bistro, in Newtown, was established by a quartet that includes two chefs and a bartender. By day, it functions as a specialty deli, selling charcuterie, cheeses and tinned seafood, but at night it transforms into a buzzing bistro where dishes such as octopus with 'nduja or steak tartare with crisp gaufrette potatoes are prefaced by casual classics like a Kalimotxo or a Negroni Sbagliato. Intent on serving house-tinned morsels, the owners purchased a vintage canning machine, and finding themselves with an excess of empty cans, put the device to use behind the bar: gin and vermouth are canned and served as a Mar-tinny; rye whiskey, sweet vermouth, and bitters find their way into a Can-hattan; and the Cosmopoli-tin features vodka, cranberry and orange liqueur.

In Surry Hills, Maybe Frank features serious pizzas and pasta, and the Italian-born team—owners Stefano Catino and Vince Lombardo, and bar manager Andrea Gualdi, an alumnus of The Artesian in London—pursue unabashed fun, via a cocktail menu presented color wheel-style and designed like a pizza (a separate menu of Italian classics such as the Negroni and the Milano-Torino is posted on the wall), and an atmosphere infused with Rat Pack music and well-mannered mayhem.

Maybe Frank's vermouth-and-amari focus also exemplifies the maturation of Sydney's bar culture, with such focused and specialized approaches appealing to an increasingly educated drinking clientele. It's a pattern mirrored at bars such as Earl's Juke Joint, a New Orleans-style Newtown bar with Art Deco lamps, lace curtains and a taste for American whiskey; Tokyo Bird, a Surry Hills spot focusing on yakitori, Japanese whiskey and saké; and Kittyhawk, a downtown bar with a big nod to the World War II era, playing 1940s music to accompany drinks from its blueprint-style menu such as the Kingston Rock, with Jamaican rum, jerked rockmelon, falernum and lemon.

When it finally came time to open his own bar with partner Luke Ashton in Darlington in 2015, Charlie Ainsbury went in a somewhat different direction. "We wanted to do something a bit left-of-center," Ainsbury says. When they queried what that might be, the surprising answer they settled on was the spritz. "With the three ingredients of an Aperol Spritz, you have a formula that hasn't been played around with—a bitter element, an acidic element and a sweet element—and within that, you've got the DNA for a balanced cocktail," he says. "And it fits with Sydney's climate—it's warm much of the year—so having a lower-alcohol spritz seemed really risky, but it works together with all of those elements."

The spritzes at This Must Be the Place all veer in a similar direction, but the drink's simple formula offers room for discovery. The Belafonte softens gin with sherry and prosecco, the Flamingo bounces rum against white Shiraz, cassia and pineapple, and the Lotus balances Aperol's bitterness with the brightness of passion fruit and peaches.

Of course, any drinking culture based in the South Pacific needs a suitably tropical bar. The Lobo Plantation, which opened in 2013, scratches Sydney's itch for exotic drinks. The rum-centric bar eschews tiki's trappings, instead tracing its design to Julio Lobo, a 1950s Cuban sugar baron. And while the menu skews tropical, it stops a grass skirt away from full-blown tiki: the Nightmarcher matches tequila and Cognac with chocolate and chili, the Twill Serve mixes peppercorn and cacao with lime, mint and rum, and the White Negroni Daiquiri is a spectacular mashup of two beloved standards.

Between an ever-evolving cocktail culture and a slow-growing surge in craft beer and spirits, Sydney's star is taking on a steadier shine. "There's been a big boom, and the scene is really blossoming," Ainsbury says. "We're all wondering what's happening next." ■



Clockwise from this photo: Mary White torching a garnish at Lobo Plantation; steak tartare and seafood with a Can-hattan and Mar-tinny at Continental Deli; canned cocktails at Continental Deli; Charlie Ainsbury at This Must Be the Place; Harry Saunders at The Lobo Plantation; the Belafonte cocktail at This Must Be the Place; a menu of Old Fashioned variations at Bulletin Place.

