

Liquid lunch

The answers are get fresh or grow your own. Lucy Britner asks the questions...

Super-chef Marco Pierre White has temporarily hung up his whites to fly the flag for bartenders, saying: "Chefs have had the spotlight for ages – it's about time for something different."

The shaggy-haired kitchen king was helping Diageo to judge its World Class bartender competition – and it turns out both he and Tanqueray brand ambassador Angus Winchester get fresh when it comes to cocktail ingredients.

Winchester says: "I can't stress the importance of fresh ingredients enough. Even citrus fruits should be prepared à la minute. You can do with a Mexican Elbow." (If you're not down with the lingo, a Mexican Elbow is a juice squeezer.)

Smirnoff brand ambassador Kenji Jesse says using fresh ingredients is also an important way of paying respect to the distiller. "Using fresh fruit and fruit juice will make such a big difference," he says. "For example, pressed cloudy apple juice compared to sweetened boxed apple juice will allow distillers' handiwork to shine through."

Jesse is with Winchester when it comes to using a Mexican Elbow. He adds: "Don't take shortcuts – taste-test freshly squeezed lemon juice to bottled lemon juice or bottled sweet and sour mix."

But if you can't get fresh, there are still some great products on the market, say the innovators at Funkin and Eager Drinks.

Ed Rigg, managing director at Eager, says: "Fruit juices are a really important part of a cocktail when they are required. Good quality juices enhance the drinking experience and also help to bring out the flavours in the alcohol – why use premium spirits and kill the taste with sugary, concentrated fruit juices?"

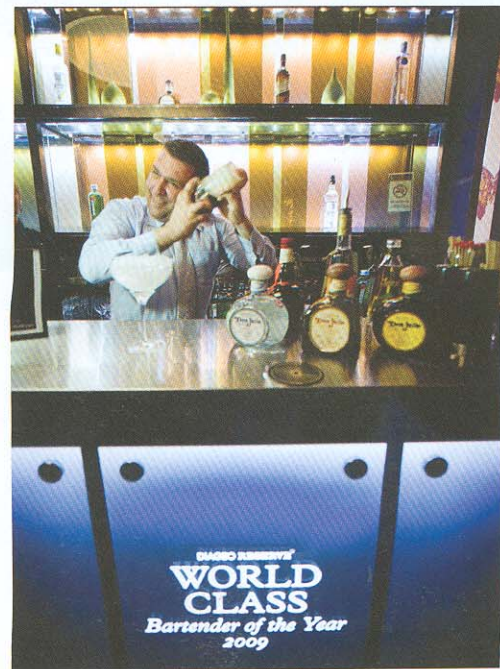
Funkin founder Alex Carlton adds: "The on-trade has been hit hard by consumer efforts to cut back on spending so bartenders are facing a huge challenge this year.

"Funkin can help bars to offer a broad range of consistently fabulous tasting drinks while reducing the need to keep plentiful supplies of fresh fruit."

Funkin mixes and purées last for 12 months and can be used for up to eight days after opening. The "10 second" Funkin cocktail range includes Appletini, Passion Fruit Margarita, Raspberry Mojito, Piña Colada, Bramble and Cosmopolitan.

Fruit? Done. On to sugar and bitters

The best cocktails work because the balance between sweet and sour is to the drinker's taste. Many cocktails operate on this basic principle – the Sour, the Collins, the Caipiroska – and Marco Pierre White says he thinks good mixologists are like sauce chefs.



"They are able to multi-task and they really understand the importance of seasoning."

On bitters, Winchester says there's more to consider than just Angostura, adding that bartenders can make the mistake of thinking using bitters makes them better mixologists.

He says: "There are lots of bitters out there – celery bitters, peach bitters, aged bitters, orange bitters... Pick one that suits the flavour profile of the cocktail."

Alexander Hauck, from The Bitter Truth in Germany, says a skillful bartender keeps the different flavours of cocktail ingredients in mind and knows how to combine them.

He says: "Almost every cocktail in the 19th and early 20th centuries contained bitters because they added complexity and depth to the cocktail. Many modern drinks are based on these old ones. So you can take one of these ancient recipes containing bitters and modify it by replacing an ingredient with another one."

According to Hauck, almost all bitters – such as aromatic, lemon and orange – go well with such clear liquors as vodka, gin, blanco tequila and light rum and the majority of aged spirits such as whisky, old rum and brandy.

He adds: "You have to be careful with



Top right: Diageo World Class bartender of the year Aristotelis Papadopoulos from Banquet in Thessaloniki, Greece
Left: Judge Gary Regan looks for perfection



Left: World Class judges Marco Pierre White, Salvatore Calabrese, Simon Difford, Dale DeGroff, Peter Dorelli, Gary Regan and Hidetsugu Ueno with winner Papadopoulos

exceptional flavours like celery bitters, because it probably won't work with an aged spirit."

He likens bitters to using salt and pepper. "Like salt and pepper for your soup you should season your cocktail with the quantity of bitters you like. There are many cocktails that don't ask for bitters but are enhanced by using them – lemon or grapefruit bitters in a Cosmopolitan, for example."

To complete the bitter-sweet symphony, you could try making your own sugar syrup – often called "simple syrup" in cocktail recipes. Just take two parts sugar and dissolve in one part boiling water. Cool and bottle.

Of course, you can be adventurous by adding other sweet ingredients – raspberries, vanilla, strawberries etc – and you don't have to stick to white sugar.

What's in?

Stirring – martini pitchers and mixing glasses
 Measuring – better for taste and profit margins
 Swizzle sticks – old kitsch
 Herbs – grow your own
 Asian ingredients including shiso, or perilla – a Japanese mint
 Yuzu – a Japanese citrus fruit

What's out?

Free pouring – can be bad for taste and profit margins
 Flairing – like free pouring, the result is not always as good as the show
 Shaking – give your arms a rest and stir it up
 White sugar – be more adventurous
 Juices from concentrate – if you want something that tastes like an apple, used pressed apple
 Taking too long – it's an art, granted. But people won't wait forever

To make vanilla syrup, pour the hot sugar solution over two split vanilla pods and leave for 8-10 hours before bottling.

Winchester says: "There's more to life than white sugar. Fashionable sugars include agave – the sugar is fructose rather than glucose so it's slightly better for you."

Cold as Ice

Kenji Jesse says ice must be solid and dry. This will ensure you get a drink that is the perfect temperature without over-dilution. To achieve this, remove ice from the ice machine or the freezer at the last possible minute. If you have to serve ice from a bucket and not an insulated speed rail, don't use the runny stuff at the bottom.

Some bartenders take ice very seriously – there are Japanese bartenders who can sculpt a perfect ball to fit into a whisky glass. Winchester says: "This is fantastic but it's a cultural thing that has its place. If I was being served, I would think a hand-carved ice ball was marvellous – but if I was in the queue, I wouldn't be a fan."

So what have we learned? There's more to bartending than owning a bottle of bitters. It's about time it was taken more seriously by a mixologist's closest relative – the chef.

The great man himself, Marco Pierre White, concludes: "The biggest lesson I learned from judging World Class is that a lot of great restaurants don't have great bartenders. The emphasis in restaurants is much more about the food, wine and service.

"Perhaps that's why there was no one from France in the competition.

"It's time liquid chefs took the spotlight." D



Design for life



Joe McCanta, Saf Restaurant, Shoreditch

McCanta won a Grey Goose competition to have his bar design built.

He designed a greenhouse with an open side and a bar in an effort to fulfil his dream of growing all his own cocktail ingredients in the garden.

He says: "A local expert – Erica Paige – helped us grow all the plants. They have been here for a month, now. The design is exactly how I imaged – like being in your back garden with a greenhouse full of plants.

"If chefs can do it, why can't bartenders?"

In the garden are raspberries, strawberries, tarragon, lime, shiso, chocolate mint, lavender, purple basil, kumquats, passion fruit and much more.

The resulting cocktails:

Martini Botanique

50ml Grey Goose La Poire
 3 fresh-picked raspberries
 1 fresh-picked violet, de-stemmed
 6 fresh-picked tarragon leaves
 Juice of quarter of fresh-picked lime
 20ml simple syrup
 Half fresh-picked shiso leaf
 25ml bosc pear juice

Le Jardin Secret

25ml Grey Goose Le Citron
 15ml elderflower liqueur
 6 garden-picked French lavender leaves
 5ml crème de violette
 3 garden-picked basil leaves
 Top with Crémant de Bourgogne

McCanta admits you have to be careful not to over-do it: "There's so much growing that it's tempting to load ingredients into cocktails, but the key is to ensure the flavour balance is right."