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## Despite changing fashion, people still drink classics

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There's more to enjoying a good cocktail than sipping a glass of alcohol.

Experts at the 2013 Tales of the Cocktail in New Orleans stressed that flavor, extracts, color, aging and garnishing all contribute to a memorable cocktail. The distinctive touches of masterful distillers and mixologists can lend additional flavor to a classic.

And, when it comes to cocktails, these experts know the classics never die. Even with technological advances in production and changing tastes, people are still drinking martinis, margaritas, Manhattans and Sazeracs.

In a program, *Modifiers: Eternal Life for Cocktails*, panelists discussed how these classics, while alive and ticking, have been altered slightly over the years. Their base spirits (the alcohol on which a drink is built) are modified with, for example, vermouth or liqueurs.

“A good modifier can be sweet, sour or bitter and should be just enough to maintain a presence,” said beverage consultant Philip Duff.

Alexandre Gabriel, president and owner of Cognac Ferrand, said, “Modifiers bring the aromatics” to both food and cocktails. For example, curaçao, an orange-flavored liqueur, is used in the classic duck l'orange and in chocolate mousse crepes. “Liqueurs were used a lot in food in the 18th and early 19th centuries,” he said.

Modifiers in cocktails decrease a drink's alcohol percentage, change its color and change its mouth feel.

“Color is as important as the flavor,” said Erik Lorincz, with Duff adding that, “Blue curaçao is 25 percent of all European sales.”

Presentation, they said, is important. A good cocktail has to be pleasing to the eye. A sprig of mint, a curl of lemon or a skewer of berries can enhance the appeal of any drink.

A cocktail, said Joaquin Simó, should be a special accent to your dining. “If you're counting calories, you shouldn't be drinking,” said the award-winning mixologist and author.

In another program, mixologists focused on what makes a “perfect” cocktail. Many variables are involved. Using the martini as an example, Time Magazine science writer Jeffrey Kluger said, “The perfect martini is your martini.”

Shaken or stirred? There's really no difference, said panelists. Shaking and stirring achieve the same temperature and dilution of ice. Only the time changes.

"It's almost impossible to over shake or over stir a cocktail, assuming low temperature is the goal," said panelist Tristan Stephenson. "Temperature of cocktails makes a huge difference in how you perceive a drink's flavor."

## Garnishing?

Garnishes can make a huge difference in a drink or a dish," Stephenson said. "They have the ability to overpower."

Martinis are often garnished with aromatic citrus twists, onions or olives. The onion is the most dangerous because of its acidity, he said. However, if you're not careful, the oil from an olive can also ruin the taste of a drink. He also recommended using small twists because the oil on a citrus peel is hard to control.

## Whiskey revolution

"Americans have not seen the changes in whiskey distilling that we are seeing now," said Paul Clarke, moderator of the American Whiskey's Evolving Identity program.

Barley, corn, rye, wheat and temperature controlled warehouses come into play.

There also is more experimenting with different woods for the barrels and aging.

In the 1950s distilling was centered in a small area of Kentucky and Tennessee, but now whiskey distillers can be found across the country, panelists said.

A lot of people moved into whiskey distilling after making craft beers.

At the same time, others are looking to the traditions of the past.

"There's a need and a desire to protect that heritage," said Wes Henderson, chief operating officer of Louisville Distilling Co., which makes Angel's Envy, a small-batch Kentucky bourbon. "Consumers have become very savvy; they want to know the truth behind the brand."

Chip Tate, of Balcones Distillery in Waco, Texas, started his whiskey as a fermented sauce. He used mission figs, Texas wildflower honey and sugar mixed with water, which he fermented and distilled.

From that he moved into making whiskey. He said the distiller must deliver what he has told the consumer he is going to produce. "When you put it in a glass, it has to be good."