

Shaken, not stirred

The legendary Dukes' martinis are as ice cold and lethal as their most famous aficionado, finds Flora Watkins

OUTSIDE on St James's, old clubland may be overshadowed by the chromium and plate glass of 21st-century London, but, downstairs, the bar of Dukes Hotel is reassuringly timeless.

The drinks are as strong and the suits as sharp as when Ian Fleming drank here in the 1940s and, at 5pm on a wet winter's afternoon, a heartening percentage of the clientele is drinking the cocktail that's become synonymous with his alter ego.

'In Fleming's day, cocktails were only drunk by the elite,' says Dukes' head bartender, Alessandro Palazzi. The rules around them, like so much of society in that era, were prescriptive and when Fleming put a vodka martini in James Bond's hand, he was making a statement about his character.

'Martinis were always stirred in a mixing glass; you would never shake one—it was taboo,' continues Mr Palazzi. Only cocktails containing juice or cream, such as Whisky Sours and Brandy Alexanders, were shaken. 'However, Bond breaks the rules,' he explains. 'Vodka, too, wasn't really known in this country. Fleming drank it when he was a journalist [for Reuters] in Moscow, in 1933.'

The first martini that Bond orders, in his first outing, *Casino Royale* (1953), is actually a hybrid of vodka and gin. 'Three measures of Gordon's, one of vodka, a half measure of Kina Lillet,' shaken until very cold, with a 'large, thin slice of lemon peel,' to be precise. This, discloses Mr Palazzi—who is something of an expert on Fleming—is the author's way of indicating to eagle-eyed readers that Vesper Lynd is a double agent.

Dry martinis, gin and tonic, Scotch, Champagne, Mouton Rothschild—in copious, *Mad Men*-esque quantities—are enjoyed throughout the books, although it's not until *Dr No* (1958) that Bond utters the immortal line 'Shaken and not stirred, please' (shortened to 'Shaken, not stirred' by Sean Connery in the film, the first in the franchise, in 1962).

Shaking a martini cools it down, but it must be done quickly, stresses Mr Palazzi, or else the drink will be diluted by melting ice. 'The martini is one of the most simple cocktails you can make,' he says, 'but there are certain rules.'

Today, Mr Palazzi's method—which has had him flown around the world, giving seminars and judging competitions—dispenses with both mixing glass and cocktail shaker. His secret is to freeze both the glass and the bottle of vodka beforehand.



He wheels a trolley bearing the elements to my table. There's a little jug of vermouth, made especially for him by a distiller in Highgate (*see box*), some Amalfi lemons and a bottle of Potocki vodka. Doubtless, Bond would approve: 'I would prefer Russian or Polish vodka,' as he tells *Dr No*.

'People ask "do you shake or stir?"; I say I do both,' chuckles Mr Palazzi, swirling a measure of vermouth around the icy glass, before shaking it out onto the carpet.

The amount of vermouth in a martini has dropped sharply since the drink was invented in New York, in the early 20th century. For Noël Coward, the perfect martini consisted of waving a glass of gin 'in the general direction of Italy'.

To this memory, let's call it, of vermouth, Mr Palazzi adds 125ml of vodka (that's five whole shots), then squeezes a generous slice of lemon peel, so that the oil floats on the top.

'Take your time,' he says, pushing the glass towards me. 'A martini is to sip—it's not a shot. As you drink, the flavour changes,' he adds.

It's the most pure, clean and exquisite hit of alcohol. As I sip, the flavour does indeed change, the citrus notes expanding, but never overwhelming the crisp nuttiness of the vodka.

'If we see someone drink quickly, we ring the alarm bell,' divulges Mr Palazzi, who limits martinis to two per person. Feeling decidedly mellow—and only a fraction of the way down my drink—frankly, I'm impressed that anyone can manage a second. As Dorothy Parker put it: 'I like

to have a martini/Two at the very most/After three I'm under the table/After four I'm under the host.'

Then, there's the cost. At £20.50, Dukes' martinis are expensive, even by central London prices. However, for the discerning, they're the perfect aperitif—ideally, before dinner at Wiltons or Le Caprice. As 007 himself stipulated: 'I never have more than one drink before dinner. But I do like that one to be large and very strong and very cold and very well-made.'

Make your own Dukes' classic vodka martini

Ingredients

Five measures of frozen premium vodka
A few drops of vermouth.
Try Sacred English Dry Vermouth, developed in conjunction with Alessandro Palazzi (£29.95, 020-7263 8293; www.sacredgin.com)
Large strip of peel from an unwaxed lemon
Small frozen martini glass (125ml)



Method

Pour a measure of vermouth into the glass. Swirl and discard. Add the vodka. Squeeze a generous piece of lemon peel, to release the oil, then place the peel in the glass. Sip and savour.