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## Dining

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### Belly Up to the Dairy Bar

The newly popular style of milk punch doesn't look milky.

By ROBERT SIMONSON

Who says bartenders aren't looking out for our health? Lately, a fair number seem dead earnest in making sure that patrons get their daily allowance of calcium.

Milk punch, a sweet, cold, elegant blend of dairy and liquor that dates back centuries, has become a hot item on bar menus across the nation. A California milk punch, which typically calls for rum, spices and a rumlike spirit called Batavia arrack, holds down a place at the Coachman, a fledgling San Francisco restaurant where most of the cocktail selections hail from the 19th century, and at Underdog, a new subterranean tavern under the Growler in Lower Manhattan.

Punch House, which opened in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago last year, ladles out an ancient brandy-based formula known as Mary Rockett's Milk Punch. Eastern Standard, a Boston bar, changes its milk punch recipe every few months, and the New York restaurant Betony offers a different milk punch even more often. Play, the new cocktail bar associated with the Museum of Sex, in Midtown, has a Korovazon Milk Punch made with pisco.

These drinks are not creamy, like the brandy or bourbon milk punches common in New Orleans; they are clarified elixirs. Cold ingredients are combined with hot milk so that the milk curdles; the blend is filtered repeatedly until the liquid becomes clear. This can take hours. Then, typically, the punch rests for a day or so until served. If you don't have the time, you don't have this punch.

But bartenders are taking the time, often in response to popular demand. "There's almost a cult following," said Naomi Levy, the assistant bar manager at Eastern Standard. "I have regulars who request I let them know when the next milk punch will be."

Still, introducing the drink to the uninitiated can be a hard sell, said William Duncan, the beverage director of Punch House. "The idea of mixing dairy and alcohol is just a little off-putting to most folks," he said. Once a customer signs on, however, "the clarified milk leads to an 'aha' moment, like, 'There's milk in there?'" said Derek Brown, the bar manager at Underdog (and no relation to the Derek Brown who owns the well-known bar Passenger in Washington, D.C.).

Michael Simonetti, a regular at Betony, had that very experience when he ordered his first punch. "I was shocked by it, how clear it was," he said. The taste was even more revelatory. "It has a smooth, weird silkiness to it," he said.

Eamon Rockey, an owner of Betony, first



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Naomi Levy, at Eastern Standard in Boston, filters a milk punch mixture. Above, the drink.

encountered milk punch at Bar Pleiades on the Upper East Side in 2009 and quickly adopted it, offering it during his stints at Eleven Madison Park, Atera and Aska. At his new perch, he has turned it into a religion; diners go to Betony for milk punch the way they go to "21" for Southsides.

In a typical milk punch, the ingredients are combined beforehand. But Mr. Rockey creates a milk punch "base," then lets the drinker choose a spirit to marry it with. "I wanted to have there be a guest-specific evolution," he said. "It's antithetical to what the drink classically is."

But it's a heresy that works. Mr. Simonetti started ordering milk punch after

#### BOURBON MILK PUNCH

ADAPTED FROM FRENCH 75 BAR,  
NEW ORLEANS  
TIME: 5 MINUTES  
YIELD: 1 DRINK

- 1 1/4 ounces bourbon
- 1/2 ounce dark rum
- 2 ounces milk (use cream or half-and-half for a richer drink)
- 1/8 ounce vanilla extract
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup (see note)
- Dash of grated nutmeg

In a mixing glass three-quarters filled with ice, pour the bourbon, rum, milk or cream, vanilla and simple syrup. Shake vigorously until chilled, about 30 seconds. Strain into a rocks glass. Dust with nutmeg.

Note: To make simple syrup, warm 1 cup water and 1 cup sugar in a saucepan over low heat until sugar dissolves. Cool to room temperature before using. (There will be extra syrup; refrigerate if not using immediately.)

he read on the menu that he could pick his own poison.

Making milk punch is "not not hard," as Mr. Rockey put it. So the arduous process is perhaps best left to the professionals. Home bartenders can start with something frothier and much easier to make: a traditional bourbon milk punch.