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*It's time to get*

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YOUR GUIDE TO **&** BOOZE-FREE  
MERRY, BRIGHT HOLIDAYS

*What to  
Drink*  
WHEN YOU'RE  
NOT DRINKING

# What to Drink When You're Not Drinking

A growing number of restaurants are catering to people who don't drink alcohol, crafting custom—and safe—beverages that are as sophisticated as they are refreshing. And you don't have to say “virgin.” *by Jack Duszynski*

**W**ater, tonic and Diet Coke: After a while, the beverage options for nondrinkers start to feel a bit, well, limited. It's unfortunate. You want complex, you want refreshing, you want varied. You just don't want the alcohol.

Well, here's good news: Bartenders and mixologists have begun to recognize the needs of the growing number of people who don't drink alcohol, and they are crafting interesting nonalcoholic beverages to quench their thirst.

One of the early innovators in modern cocktails, Jackson Cannon—now of Eastern Standard and The Hawthorne in Boston—opted to include a nonalcoholic drink on his first cocktail menu, at the Lizard Lounge in Cambridge, Mass. back in 1998.

“The idea that you could have a named drink and have sort of a ‘cocktail’ experience without alcohol, from my very early days was very important to me,” Cannon says.





“I’m not trying to take the alcohol out of cocktails. I’m crafting something that should stand on its own.”

Now, both Eastern Standard and The Hawthorne feature a number of nonalcoholic drinks made at the bar with the same dedication to craft as any of their cocktails.

“I think the best thing I ever came up with was the Sophisticated Lady,” Cannon says of one of his mocktails, as they’re called on the menu at Eastern Standard. He starts by muddling three cucumber slices in a glass with a pinch of salt.

“The salt is what really makes the whole thing work,” he says.

To that he adds two ounces cranberry juice (not cranberry cocktail), and one ounce each of fresh lime juice and simple syrup. Then the drink is shaken and strained into a stemmed cocktail glass.

“You get this play with some cranberry and cucumber with some salt, vaguely almost like a watermelon kind of thing,” Cannon says.

“I’ve said it before, and it’s not hyperbole: It might be the best drink I’ve ever created, and there’s no booze in it.”

Booze or no, nondrinkers should be careful. This might be close enough for some people to cause problems.

“I don’t want a martini glass in my hand,” says Michael Giammanco, a recovering addict and counselor at Hazelden in Chicago. “For me, it almost puts me back to that point where I start to think that I can drink like a normal person. I know one thing, and I learned this early in recovery: I cannot drink like a normal person. Ain’t gonna happen.”

But, Giammanco says, that’s his rule. Others may feel differently.

“Do I have an opinion on what others should do? I think it’s a case-by-case basis,” he says. Really, it comes down to what kind

of experience you’re trying to have. If you’re doing it to have that drink in your hand, you might want to stick to something simpler.

Eric Davis of Chicago’s Nightwood echoes Cannon’s comments about the experience. “There are lots of reasons people choose not to drink alcohol,” recovery included, says Davis. “But they still want the experience of drinking something more interesting than soda or juice.”

The Nightwood experience changes nightly. The menu is written daily by hand, to reflect the ever-changing seasonal fare.

While accompanying beverages change almost as frequently, Davis always includes a couple of drinks on the cocktail menu labeled (N/A).

“We always offer our Tamarind Rickey (tamarind syrup, lime juice and soda) and one seasonally rotating selection,” he says.

Earlier this summer, that seasonal selection was the easy-to-make Rhubarb Crush. Start with a tall glass full of ice, add two ounces rhubarb syrup, half an ounce each orange and lemon juices (fresh if possible), and top with soda. At Nightwood, it’s garnished with mint and lemon peel.

“Crush is an old term for sodas containing crushed fruit juices,” Davis says. He admits he’s not a fan of the word mocktail.

“It reminds me of ‘appletini,’ makes me not want to drink it.”

In fact, nobody really seems to like the word. “It doesn’t appeal to me to go to a nice restaurant and order a mocktail,” says Giammanco.

Cannon agrees. Though it’s on the menu at Eastern Standard, he says, “I’ve grown a little tired of it over the years, so haven’t used it much in other places.”



Still, the best way to find these drinks, whatever they're called, is to Google 'mocktail,' along with whatever city you're in.

"I prefer using real or historical terms for the drinks," says Davis. He goes back to the Rickey, which historically refers to a drink with lime juice and soda.

Kevin Burke of Colt & Gray in Denver puts it perfectly: "I'm not trying to take the alcohol out of cocktails. I'm crafting something that should stand on its own." He prefers the term—which you can find on Cold & Gray's menu—Dry Soda.

"It was actually a fairly organic process," he says of developing his dry sodas. "We found that there were many ingredients, especially for the cocktail program, that we had to craft in-house."

He's also of the mind that good, thoughtful food and beverage pairings should not be a luxury of those who imbibe. "It breaks my heart a little bit for somebody to have a \$40 steak that was raised and crafted with care, and the only option is diet cola to wash it down with."

Much of what the restaurant offers comes from simple touches of sophistication on classic ideas: Cinnamon and Grapefruit soda, for example, or Lavender Limeade. For the latter, they make a lavender honey syrup by steeping a teaspoon of dried lavender in a cup of hot water for 20 minutes, straining, and adding one cup of honey. To make the limeade, they take a tall glass with ice, add an ounce each of lime juice and the aforementioned syrup, and top with soda.

The most refreshing thing to hear from each of these establish-

ments is their openness with nondrinkers.

"I think that people ordering our nonalcoholic beverages or just not drinking is so common (especially during the week) that it doesn't even register anymore," Davis says.

Cannon rattles off a list of reasons for not drinking: "One is recovery, [but other reasons could be] someone has a devout objection to things that are distilled, alcohol allergy, and pregnancy or post-pregnancy."

The list goes on.

Like anything recovery related, these drinks can stir up some complicated issues. Giammanco boils it down to this: "If people can stay sober and be emotionally stable and working the program, then that's cool. Why not have a fancy looking drink? If you're not drinking, that's the main thing."

*Jack Duszynski lives and works in Chicago, where he studied creative writing at Columbia College. When he's not writing or eating, you can usually find him hiding out at the movies.*

## SAFE AND SOPHISTICATED DRINKS

### Sophisticated Lady

**Mixologist:** Jackson Cannon, The Hawthorne and Eastern Standard, Boston

**How to make it:** Muddle three cucumber slices in a glass with a pinch of salt. Add two ounces cranberry juice and one ounce each of fresh lime juice and simple syrup. Shake and strain.

### Rhubarb Crush

**Mixologist:** Eric Davis, Nightwood, Chicago

**How to make it:** Start with a tall glass full of ice, add two ounces rhubarb syrup, half an ounce each orange and lemon juices (fresh if possible), and top with soda. At Nightwood, it's garnished with mint and lemon peel.

### Orange Blossom Special

**Mixologist:** Timothy Haught (himself a nondrinker, or as he puts it, 'straight-edge'), Sauced, Atlanta

**How to make it:** Combine one ounce each fresh-squeezed orange juice and sparkling water. Muddle in two orange slices and four fresh mint leaves (or basil, if you prefer). Add ¾ oz honey syrup (equal parts honey and hot water), and shake gently, as not to stir out the bubbles.

