



I want Other in California Go

*other*

*California*

Home > USA > California

# A Romp Through The Cocktail Renaissance With Paul Clarke

Other

California



Nancy Garcia  
December 11, 2015

Though San Francisco is deservedly at the forefront of the cocktail revolution, deciphering a list of obscure ingredients can make even the most adventurous of us

fall back to ordering our 'usual' drink. Here to guide us through modern cocktail culture is Paul Clarke, author of the [\*The Cocktail Chronicles\*](#) (and the [blog](#) of the same name) and Executive Editor of [\*Imbibe Magazine\*](#).





Author Paul Clarke mixes another perfect drink | © Photography by Ari Shapiro

Paul Clarke is bit of a renaissance man, and his book is an engaging guide to the world of mixology, with over two hundred recipes, both classic and delightfully obscure. The Culture Trip's Nancy Garcia chatted with Paul Clarke at [Comstock Saloon](#), a tasty stop on his whirlwind West Coast book tour.

NG: Since you started your blog, *The Cocktail Chronicles*, in 2005, cocktail culture has experienced a 'renaissance,' as you say in your book. Things like molecular mixology seem so far out, or at least out of reach for us to make at home. Is the 'craft-cocktail' movement out of control?

PC: I think creativity in the craft-cocktail movement is spinning in every direction. Much of this innovation is absolutely wonderful to behold, but we need to make sure we keep everything in perspective. Molecular mixology and technique-driven bars can drive the cocktail conversation forward, but that conversation will still always be rooted in simple, approachable drinks.

NG: That's so true – your book is a fascinating romp through cocktails traditional and new, yet it never loses the connection with its audience. Indeed, you teach us how to have fun and mix our own drinks. Is that why *The Cocktail Chronicles*, is 'mixology for the masses'?

PC: I'm a cocktail populist – the Bernie Sanders of booze. We need to keep cocktails accessible to all – they need to be delicious and approachable and interesting without

shouting for our attention. The only way the cocktail renaissance will continue is if we continue to bring new drinkers to the bar with tasty, understandable drinks — if we lose that first-time audience, we've lost the war, and it'll be one long, slow slide back into the bibulous backwater.

NG: Having had the good fortune to taste some of your wonderful concoctions at Comstock Saloon – is it fair to say that ‘delicious’ is something you also strive for in a cocktail?

PC: Deliciousness in a cocktail is key — if a drink doesn't taste good, why bother? Cocktails can have fascinating histories and require impressive feats to prepare, but ultimately it's all for naught if the drink is unsatisfying.

NG: You're based in Seattle, and you write about East and West Coast establishments and mixologists. Do you think there's a difference between West Coast and East Coast cocktail culture?

PC: Early in the cocktail renaissance, there may have been discernible differences between East and West Coast approaches — one was more classic-driven and history-oriented, the other was more ingredient-driven and contemporary. Those differences don't really exist anymore — you find well-honed classics in Los Angeles and Seattle, and market-fresh drinks in Washington, D.C., and Boston.

# THE COCKTAIL CHRONICLES

NAVIGATING THE COCKTAIL RENAISSANCE  
WITH JIGGER, SHAKER & GLASS



Foreword by Jim Meehan

PAUL CLARKE

NG: In your opinion, what makes a great bar?

PC: A bar can have impressive drinks and a million-dollar décor, but if it's simply no fun being there, it's not a great bar. Bars are not essential to our lives — they're not places where we live and raise families, and (unless you're a bartender) they're not places where you spend your workday. We go to bars by choice, because they add value to our lives — if you as the guest feel that a bar is adding that value to your life (by whatever metric you choose — it serves great cocktails or has a lot of familiar faces or plays great music or has a pool table in the back), then it's a great bar.

NG: What are some of your favorite spots to sip a cocktail in San Francisco?

PC: I can't visit San Francisco without winding up at [Smuggler's Cove](#) at some point — it's quite simply one of the world's great bars. [Bar Agricole](#) hits a perfect balance in many ways, and the cocktails are superb, and it is such an essential feature on the bar landscape. I also love visiting [ABV](#) when I'm in town; a beer and a bourbon at [Elixir](#) is a great way to cap an evening; and when I'm feeling the need to get a little nerdy, I'll head for [The Interval at Long Now](#) for some of the most serious (yet fun and refreshing) cocktails in the city.

NG: What's your favorite cocktail? (And can we have the recipe?)

PC: I have so many! One that's now pretty familiar but was completely unheard of 10 years ago is the Boulevardier, and I return to that drink with some regularity, both because it's delicious and also because it's so damn easy to make. Take one ounce each of bourbon, sweet vermouth, and Campari, and build in a rocks glass with a big chunk of ice. Give it a stir, add an orange twist (or a slice of orange, if that's more your style), and go at it.

NG: What do we need to know to order a cocktail and sound like we know what we're doing?

PC: Overly ambitious cocktail menus don't make it easy, but unless they're crazy-busy, bartenders are usually willing to help out. It's best to either start with something

on the menu – that way you’re not throwing the staff a curve ball – or pick a ubiquitous classic that every cocktail bar should know how to make, like an Old Fashioned or a Manhattan or a Daiquiri.



*Beautiful illustrations by Andrew Vastagh in The Cocktail Chronicles*

NG: What advice can you give to the novice cocktail maker, trying this at home?

PC: Rule No. 1: Relax! It’s just a drink. Treat mixing a drink the same way you would baking a cake or preparing a soup – read through the ingredients and instructions before you get started, make sure you have everything on hand, then take your time walking through. Pay attention to details – make sure you’re using the correct ingredients and not skipping steps, and it’s uber-important to measure your ingredients – but once you’ve got the hang of it, don’t feel constrained by the details. It’s your drink – make it the way you like.

NG: In your book, you describe ‘the great violet drought in ‘06,’ which affected the production of Crème de Violette. As you say – the cocktail renaissance has brought

many once forgotten spirits back. What do you think is (are) the most elusive or hard to find ingredients or spirits? Is there anything you'd give your right arm to taste or have?

PC: It used to be that I had a long list of ingredients I'd drive myself crazy searching for. That time is past — thanks to cocktail-savvy importers and distillers, most of the ingredients that had disappeared are now freely available. It'd still be great to have honest-to-god Amer Picon in the local liquor store, but there are substitutes now, so I'm not losing any sleep over it.

NG: I just have to know — what does Paul Clarke's liquor cabinet look like? How many bottles do you have?

PC: My liquor cabinet is sheer chaos — I stopped counting at 300 bottles, and I'm trying to winnow that down into some sort of manageable size. But one of the things I enjoy about having amassed such a collection is the things I misplace and then find again years later — bottles of defunct brands of Japanese bitters, for example, or a bottle of a once-obscure liqueur from Jamaica or France that's now widely available. I like those little time-travel moments in my liquor cabinet.

NG: Are you doing any events in San Francisco soon?

PC: Yes! I'll be presenting a seminar at The Interval at Long Now, out in Fort Mason on October 20, with cocktails to accompany the talk. I'll also be at [Omnivore Books](#) on October 21, talking about the book and serving drinks.

*By Nancy Garcia*

## Read More Articles...

About California

About Other

## You Might Also Like...