



MONTHLY JOURNAL

SEPTEMBER 2012

Barrel Aged Cocktails

Maxtoberfest

Max Wine Festival

CT Brewer's Tap Take Over



Black Swan
Cooperage

M Toast H Cha

Barrel # 1634

Fill Volume 6.0

Proof 114

Fill Date 4/28

Patent Pending



TRUMBULL



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Max Single Cask Cocktails Are Aged to Perfection

Cask-aged cocktails, or what are sometimes referred to as barrel-aged cocktails, are becoming more and more part of an enlightened cocktail program at many bars and restaurants across the country; a trend begun several years ago in the Pacific Northwest. The study and perfection of aging techniques has quietly become a skill in the arsenal of many craft-bartenders. The point of barrel aging your cocktail is to make use of the effects of time and oxygen, as well as the flavor of the wood, on a mixed cocktail.

At the Max Restaurant Group we pre-make a batch of a particular cocktail and let it rest in oak casks until we feel that it is ready to be served; sometimes a few weeks, sometimes many months. This is a practice the French call *élevé sous bois*, when aging wine or rum in casks. The wine, rum, or in this case the cocktail, is literally raised or elevated to a higher level by spending time in wood. The impact on ingredients combined for an extended period of time, instead of the usual few moments prior to consumption for a typical drink, is dramatic.

By using a wood cask as an aging vessel it is possible to allow oxygen to slowly integrate into the beverage, helping to bring the ingredients together at the molecular level, and add layers of aromas and flavors. This is the exact same process that happens when aging wine in barrel. Oxygen is allowed to slowly permeate into the wine through imperfections in the cask. This tiny amount of oxygen will work its magic by combining with tannins and other molecules in the liquid thus changing them. Combine this effect with the slow pull of color and wood flavors from the barrel and you end up with the complexity of aromas, flavors and color that is impossible to achieve in fresh-made cocktails.

By giving the oxygen and wood time to have their way with the cocktail, the result is a dramatically different drink than when it first went into the wood. The cocktail will now be smoother, more mellow, rich with layers of complexity. Personal choice dictates whether the result is better, but we certainly feel the result is worth the trouble, commitment to time and expense of this aspect of our craft program.

The thought and process of aging spirits in wood is not a new concept by any stretch. In fact, many top quality spirits spend a good amount of time in wood casks: Scotch, Bourbon, Cognac, Rum, Tequila, etc. are all celebrated when



Cask-aged "Albino" Manhattan. This started out with white whisky and was nearly clear, after 4 months in barrel it has a lovely deep amber hue, smooth texture and mellow, complex flavors. Max Fish, Glastonbury

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laid to rest for many years in cask. All we are doing is taking the concept one step further by doing the cocktail mixing before going to the cask.

It should be noted that the recipes we are using for cask aging do not involve any cocktails that have fresh ingredients such as fruit juices that could spoil. We are using only full spirit recipes that are impervious to degradation or spoilage. If a particular drink calls for a fresh ingredient, then that will be added after aging, just prior to service. Most of our recipes are specifically selected for their ability to fully take advantage of the cask aging process, often using white or clear spirits that will benefit and reflect the most wood impact.

These drinks become more than just a simple drink to be shaken with ice and served. Almost always, we recommend that the cocktail be served “neat” so that the impact of cask aging can be most appreciated. The drink-set also often calls for a side of ice for the guest to use at will. The experience is fully appreciated by experiencing what the undiluted drink can taste like then seeing the difference once water has been added – water being a key ingredient to almost every cocktail.

At Max Restaurant Group, we have committed a number of casks to aging a variety of cocktails. The base spirits being currently used include: White Whiskey, Bourbon, Gin, Vermouth, Benedictine, Tequila, Rum, and Chartreuse. Drinks including classics and modern recipes vary, as well. White Manhattan, Negroni, Caprice Classic, The Last Word, Improved Tequila Cocktail, the Sailor Over a Barrel cocktail and the ever popular Red State / Blue State Manhattans.

We started putting cocktails in for aging last Spring and some of these have already been pulled from the barrels and listed on our menus, with those used barrels being put into use for a second round of cocktails. Max Fish in Glastonbury was the first location that experimented with the process. We made a White Manhattan using Tuthilltown White Corn Whiskey (New York State) as the base with an elegant French (dry) vermouth as the compliment. This was followed by a Negroni, one of the more popular styles to go to barrel aging. A Negroni is a classic Italian cocktail blending Gin, Italian (sweet) Vermouth and Campari. By aging it in wood the bitter, tart and herbal components have time to meld and smooth together make for an outstanding combination of deep, almost sweet herbal flavors mingled with the subtle wood and vanilla notes.

Other cocktails that have been well received by our guests include the Improved Tequila Cocktail at Max’s Oyster Bar. “Improved” by the extended aging in cask. A delicious combination of salty tequila with Blood orange liqueur and some *xocolate* mole bitters for added depth and in-



Oak barrels, 5-liters or smaller are best for aging - sometimes

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tensity. Hard to describe, this cocktail has so many nuances it is simply delicious. Again, this is nearly impossible to create for a fresh-made cocktail, but not so for a cask-aged version.

Coming to Max Downtown for the run-up to election day is the Red-Sate / Blue-State Manhattans - each aged in their own barrels using Red State and Blue State Bourbon, produced by Heaven Hill Distilleries in Kentucky. We are not saying which is better, we will leave it up to you to place your vote. The recipes are the same though, it is really is personal preference or the way you lean that will make the difference. We will let you know on election day which was the more popular.

Two of the more exciting Single Cask Cocktails that we are currently aging might be the Caprice Classic at Trumbull Kitchen and the Last Word Cocktail at Max Burger in Longmeadow. A Caprice is a beautiful drink that comes to us from by-gone days. It is a blend of gin (we used the Death's Door craft gin from Wisconsin) with Benedictine (a fabulous, ancient French liqueur) mixed with some French vermouth and bitters. I doubt this will need a long aging process and should be on the list at TK by mid-September. The Last Word cocktail is another modern adaptation of a classic that was made popular again a few years back in the classic cocktail renaissance that began in the Pacific Northwest. Using Gin (it just seems to work really well with wood aging), we mix it with Chartreuse and Luxardo Maraschino Liqueur. When ready we will give it a hit of fresh lime juice to brighten up the flavors; result will be a complex, smooth but tasty drink that makes a statement and looks cool, too (it's bright green from the Chartreuse).

Our future plans with the Single Cask Cocktail program is to keep experimenting and adapting our own recipes and combinations. Each location will often have at least one Cask-Aged Cocktail on the menu offering, plus we are starting to experiment and age our own spirits to use for a variety of cocktail recipes. We feel that this a great addition to our craft-style of bartending and even though there is an additional cost of time and resources to invest, we feel that the results are definitely worth the effort. Come in and enjoy one of the complex drinks, we think you will agree.

If you are interested in learning more about the affects of cask aging spirits and cocktails, join us on September 25th at Max's Tavern in Springfield for a fabulous dinner hosted by Gable Erenzo of Tuthilltown Spirits. We will be discussing and sampling the affects of barrel aged spirits as well as our own Cask-aged cocktails with a full menu. See below for details.



Cask-Aged Cocktail: first get a cask, then mix your cocktail, patiently wait for it to improve, serve and enjoy.

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WINE APPRECIATION: TASTING BY COLOR

It is interesting to note that the color of wine can give any number of clues as to the style and taste of a wine, but that color is often the most unreliable aspect of a wine to judge what it will actually taste like. As a professional taster I have learned to understand what color can indicate, but I have also learned to wait until I smell and taste the wine before making my full assessment. I often find that tasters will look at the color of wine and make judgments before having actually put their nose in the glass or the wine in their mouths, often mis-judging what they are about to experience to the point of even adversely affecting their assessment. I find this to be especially true when looking at lighter colored wines such as Pinot Noir and Rose.

I have tasted with hundreds of people at all levels of wine knowledge, and it is surprising how misunderstood this aspect of tasting and assessing wine is, even among wine industry pros. This is why I teach my students and staff to look, smell, sip, then evaluate a wine, as each step will give you a more complete evaluation of the wine, building info as you go.

Even though color is an unreliable indicator of style you can guess, probably correctly, that a deeply colored wine will be more flavorful and probably have a bigger impact on your palate. But, does it tell you anything about the tannin level or acidity that a wine might have? Not unless you are fairly advanced in understanding the nuances and differences between an intensely purple colored wine with a slight watery rim and a vividly violet colored wine with full pigmentation to the rim. Are you able to tell if it is a dry or sweet wine? Again, not really. This why it is important to get all the info and add all the pieces together to understand a wine. Granted, this is not always necessary or desirable, but if you are having wine with food then it is probably a good idea to know a bit about how the wine tastes to properly pair with a dish.

Going back to Pinot Noir, for instance, I have often opened bottles from Burgundy, arguably the most important region in the world for Pinot Noir production, with the bouquet just be “pouring” from the bottle. But, when actually poured into a glass, the wine appears surprisingly light in appearance. Smelling and then tasting the wine shows the power and strength, often in silky elegance with good Burgundy, that Pinot Noir can have. Unfortunately, we let the appearance confuse our other senses into believing that something must be inferior if it is not dark or even opaque.

Rose might be an more extreme example as it is already fighting stereo-types of “pink wine” and suffering from an inferiority complex of simple, pink and sweet is never as good. Those in the know, know that good rose can be one of the most pleasurable wine drinking experiences, especially if well paired with a dish suited to the wine. Rose can run from very pale salmon or even orange-tinged colored wines to full garnet-nearly-red colored wine. It is absolutely necessary to smell and taste these wines to fully appreciate them and understand their style.



Washington State Rose

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Color - A Good, But Not Absolute, Judge of Wine Style

Here are a few tips that I teach professionals and enthusiasts alike to better understand how to use color for proper assessment:

- First, proper glassware and lighting conditions are best for getting a proper view. Clear, smooth glass are best, no cut or colored glasses, please. Natural or at least a well lit environment is key to getting the best look at a wine's color. Having a white background is great as well; use a white napkin or white sheet of paper if handy.
- Without filling the glass too much, an ounce or two will do, tilt the glass away from you to about a 45° angle. This will give you the best view for checking the color and the depth pigmentation,
- With red wines, more purple colors will be an indicator of a warmer climate and often a lower acid wine, while redder colors can indicate a cooler growing region with higher acidity levels in the wine.
- Note the rim of the wine. Does the color pigmentation extend all the way to the edge or is there a fade of color? A slight watery rim will usually indicate that the wine has been aged, most likely in wood. As wine ages, pigmentation degrades thus making it easier to see through at the thinner edges.
- Reds wine loses color over time as pigments degrade, but white wines often pick up color as they age. This is due to the fact that wine oxidizes over time and make the pigments turn colors like yellow, orange or even brown. In red wines it is less noticeable, but in whites there is less pigmentation to mask the affect. This could give you a clue to how the wine has been stored and even a clue to the quality level. Higher quality wines, when stored properly, tend to age slower than lower quality wines, and the color change is slower.
- With a little experience you can begin to recognize the color clues of one varietal verses another. Is that wine just too purple to be Cab, or is it too garnet red color to be a zinfandel? You may even get good enough to begin to see the regional color differences of the same varietal, but this is an advanced technique and you really need to use the smell and taste to confirm any thoughts.
- Don't get overly caught up in analyzing a wine. Remember - wine is to be enjoyed, preferably with something good to eat.

Color is important, especially among consumers, but keep in mind that it only one of the three major criteria for judging a wine. To get the complete picture you must also smell and taste the wine. Get all the clues and then make your final assessment.



California Pinot Noir



California Zinfandel

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MAXTOBERFEST: 2 events, 2 states, 2 great causes

Join the Max Restaurant Group as we present two opportunities to celebrate the season with these great events. MAXTOBERFEST will include dozens of locally produced beers to sample along with local food vendors and Max chef's serving our own twist on the traditional Oktoberfest celebration. If you like Craft Beer, mouth watering food and good times then this is your event.

MASSACHUSETTS

2nd Annual Tasting

Max's Tavern at The Basketball Hall of Fame,

Springfield

Thursday October 5th

6-10pm, \$45pp

(must be 21 to enter)

A portion of ticket proceeds will benefit the

Special Olympics

CONNECTICUT

1st Annual Tasting

Under the Tent at Rosedale Farm,

Simsbury

Sunday October 7th

12:30-5pm, \$45pp

(must be 21 to enter)

A portion of ticket proceeds will benefit the

Rosedale Farm Crush Cancer



These events will sell out, space is very limited. Purchase your tickets today to ensure a great time!



MAX

CATERING

Max Catering, an extension of the award winning Max Restaurant Group, opened its doors in 2001 and immediately set a new standard for the catered event. A Priori concepts about what constitutes a catering service were shattered as a new and exciting cuisine oriented food delivery service burst upon the Greater Hartford area.

It wasn't a surprise to those who had become accustomed to our critically acclaimed Max Restaurants.

Distinctive and attentive service became the norm as Max Catering achieved a new, higher standard for the catered function. Consistency and dependability are guaranteed hallmarks of the Max Restaurant Group and Max Catering fulfills these expectations.

As caterers and event designers, Max Catering is leading the way with Farm to Table cuisine concepts that make the most of the bounty of local ingredients while minimizing the stress on our environment.

Weddings, Mitzvahs & Other Celebrations – It's your special day, your guests, and your party! Max's Catering designs and executes all events with the same dedication and the same attention to detail. On any given day our servers could be wearing white gloves, polishing and arranging eight pieces of silver on each place setting for an upscale wedding, and the next we will be helping to rebound basketballs for a sports-themed Bar Mitzvah.

Business Gatherings – Your business matters to us. Whether you are celebrating a success, entertaining a business partner or refueling your team, Max's will do our utmost and make every effort to make your business gathering a success, and to make your guests feel special.

TO BOOK AN EVENT WITH MAX CATERING, PLEASE CONTACT AMY BOMBARD - 413-746-3003

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DIRECTOR'S PICKS for SEPTEMBER by Brian Mitchell, MRG Beverage Director

Max Oyster Bar and **Max Fish** will be running two great additions to their menus in September. These wine are perfect for late summer drinking as the warm days start to slowly turn to cool evenings - seafood is the cuisine of choice for many this time of year as it can be light and delicious. I tend to look for whites with slightly lower acids but more flavor, and reds that are balanced and smooth to complement the season.

VALUE WHITE WINE

Blanco Nieva Sauvignon Blanc 2010 (Rueda, Spain) - when we tasted this wine it was apparent that the texture and balance of this wine was different from Sauvignon from other locations. Most people are familiar with New Zealand and Loire Valley SB, but Spain has the ability to make interesting whites with elegant fruit and crisp acidity, quite versatile. \$11 | 42



PREMIUM RED WINE

Domaine Eden Pinot Noir 2009 (Santa Cruz Mountains, CA) One of my favorite producers for Pinot and Chardonnay, this pick is a lovely example of what cool-climate California Pinot Noir can taste like, balanced, elegant and full of deep red-berry fruit. A great food wine - I would suggest having this with a fuller style seafood dish such as salmon or tuna. \$69

Max Downtown will be featuring two great wine this month, and the selection of these wines came from two different thoughts. With the *VALUE WINE*, it was about finding a new region but with familiar varietals. In the *PREMIUM WINE* it was more about a great opportunity to explore one of the classic wine regions with a wine that most would not automatically think of in a steakhouse, yet it works wonderfully with our cuisine. Both are sensational and will be featured through the month.

VALUE RED WINE

Wölffer Estate Red Letter Red Blend, 2010 (Long Island, New York) A blend of 70% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Petite Verdot, all from Long Island. This is one of the leading estates in its region, which just happens to be right across the Sound and about as local as you can get. A delicious, medium-full style, that pays excellent homage to Bordeaux style blends. Juicy red fruits and a medium-long finish that is soft and supple. \$13 | 48

PREMIUM RED WINE

Ascheri Barolo, 2007 (Piemonte, Italy) We were stunned by how good this wine is, especially when we saw the price. The family Achery has been making wine in the Langhe for generations and this vintage is a real standout, especially for their Barolo. The depth of fruit, mixed with earthy notes and a firm but balanced structure is just delightful. Perfect Max Downtown steaks. We are very excited about this wine and actually consider it a value, even at this price. \$20 | 76



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MANY WAYS TO FIND MAX ONLINE

Stay up to date with all the news and events happening at your favorite Max Restaurant, plus get great information and tips from our blog. We are online as a group or individually. Find us at the following sites:

MAX BLOG

By Brian Mitchell, additional material from Max Managers & Chefs
www.maxrestaurantgroup.com/blog

TWITTER

All locations are on Twitter - updated regularly by our staff

@TrumbullKitchen, @MaxDowntown, @MaxBurgerCT, @MaxFishCT, @MaxAmoreCT,
@MaxAMiaCT, @MaxsOysterBar, @MaxTavern

FACEBOOK

Follow all of our updates and get event info anytime

www.facebook.com/mrgct

MAX-ONLINE

Make a reservation, buy a gift card, check our menus

www.MaxRestaurantGroup.com

YOUTUBE

Max Restaurant Group - great video library of anything Max

Max Restaurant Group Channel

SAVE THE DATES...

Max Wine Festival

OCTOBER 28-Novemeber 11

Two full weeks of wine specials, tasting events and wine focused dinners

Full details coming online, but highlights include:

Max Wine Festival Grand Tasting

at City Place, Hartford

Saturday, November 10

Hartford's premier wine tasting event of the season. Attendees will have the opportunity to taste dozens of great wines from all regions of the globe, as well as attend specialty seminars throughout the day

Tickets on sale starting September 15th

MAX Chefs Showcase Dinner

at Max Downtown

Sunday, November 11

This will be a stunning dinner event featuring each Max Chef from all our locations. Each course will be paired with great wines from our cellars that best highlights the chef's cuisine.

Tickets on sale starting September 15th