

WINE IS ALL VERY WELL, BUT A STIFF MIXED DRINK IS WHAT WE ALL NEED TO INVOKE A SUMMERY MOOD >>



Rain or shine, the last Bank Holiday of summer is the perfect excuse to mix up a classic cocktail. Wine is all very well, but if the weather's lousy, a stiff mixed drink is what we all need to invoke a summery mood. And if it's warm, what could be more beguiling than recreating a tropical paradise in your glass, albeit without the legendary "green flash" as the sun sets.

I hate lurid, wishy-washy, sickly-sweet Mickey Mouse cocktails, complete with rainbow colours and dyed fruit that reeks of suntan lotion. Alcohol is the thing in every cocktail, and far better to opt for one full-strength, full-flavour glass of a grown-up tropical punch than descend to the kindergarten.

My version of a Mai-Tai (one measure dark rum, one measure light rum, juice and peel of one lime, one slice each fresh pineapple and orange, plus sugar syrup to taste) hits the right adults-only note and couldn't be simpler to make. Pour the lime juice into a large tumbler, add plenty of ice cubes, twist the lime peel and drop in before adding the other ingredients and giving the drink a good stir. Some mixologists claim that crushed ice is a Mai-Tai essential, but I think it dilutes and ruins this good drink.

A stronger variation of Mai-Tai that I tasted recently is the unpleasant-sounding but utterly delicious Tropical Itch. Substitute the deseeded juice of two passion fruits for the lime, add two fresh pineapple slices plus half a measure each of dark rum and light rum, along with half a measure each of bourbon and orange curaçao. Forget the back-scratcher swizzle stick (yes, really) that accompanied my cocktail. If you must serve weaker versions, a splash of soda water or sparkling mineral water does the trick.

Orange curaçao continues to be hard to find, though thankfully Vintage House

and Gerry's in Soho, London, sell Bols's version. This useful cocktail liqueur continues to be an essential ingredient in my Cheat's Pimm's recipe. As usual, lots of you have lost your copy and have requested another. Make it by mixing one measure of a good 40 per cent gin, plus a measure of red vermouth, either Italian or French, and half a measure of Bols orange curaçao per head, plus a slice each of fresh lemon, orange and cucumber, a sliced strawberry and, finally, a sprig each of mint, and borage if you have it. All you have to do before serving is top up with ice-cold sparkling lemonade, or ginger beer if you prefer. One part Cheat's Pimm's to four parts mixer is the way to go.

The great advantage of the latter cocktail, apart from costing a lot less than the commercial, namby-pamby 25 per cent alcohol Pimm's No. 1, which now costs a ridiculous £13.49 a bottle, is that it can be made up in large quantities in advance and kept in the fridge. ■

jane.macquitty@thetimes.co.uk



2007 La Baume Winemaker's Selection Viognier, Vin de Pays d'Oc, France, WAITROSE, down to £4.49 until August 26. Last chance to lap up this spicy, peachy, Languedoc viognier from a hot vintage but without the bitter flavours that this modish white grape suffers from in the heat.



2007 La Baume Winemaker's Selection Merlot, Vin de Pays d'Oc, France, WAITROSE, down to £4.49 until August 26. La Baume is one of the better big southern French names and with its viognier sister will make a terrific Bank Holiday duo, with this ripe, plummy merlot hitting the spot.



2004 Cliff Edge Shiraz, Mount Langi Ghiran, Grampians, Victoria, Australia, MAJESTIC WINE WAREHOUSES, £11.99, or buy two for £8.99 each. Majestic's late-summer Aussie wine sale is worth plundering, and this creamy, 14.5 per cent alcohol shiraz has lots of rich, velvety, black pepper, cherry and berry fruit and is perfect for the barbecue.



2007 Pualetts Polish Hill River, Clare Valley Riesling, South Australia, MAJESTIC WINE, £9.99 or buy two for £7.49 each. £1 cheaper than it was earlier this summer and such good quality I could not resist putting this lively, fat, spicy, sparky lime zest-spiked riesling in again.



2007 Auzells, El Vilosell, Tomàs Cusiné, Costers del Segre, Spain, THE WINE SOCIETY (01438 740222), £10.95. A decade or so ago, a contemporary Spanish white from the northeast, heaped high with complex, ripe, juicy, yellow plum and lemon zest fruit, would have been unthinkable. Dig in.



2006 Seresin Leah Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand, THE WINE SOCIETY, £14.95. Pinot noir is not Marlborough's strongest suit but in the right hands, such as Seresin, aged in French *barriques*, the result is a spectacular, smoky, gamey red with fine red fruits on the finish.