

The New York Times

The Waldorf's Cocktail Bible, Remixed

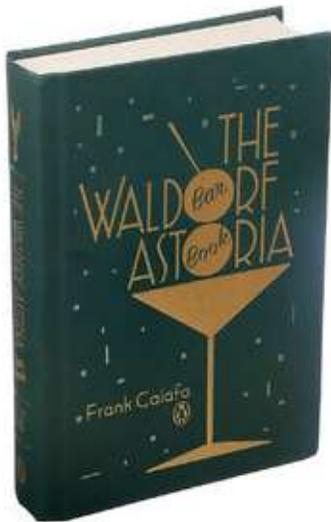
By ROBERT SIMONSON MAY 3, 2016



Frank Caiafa, manager of the Waldorf Astoria's Peacock Alley bar, updated the hotel's drinks guide. Credit Sasha Maslov for The New York Times

Way, way back in the pioneer days of the cocktail renaissance — say, 2003 or thereabouts — questing mixologists and curious enthusiasts didn't have many drink manuals to lean on. Out-of-print bartending texts of the 19th century were hard-to-find treasures, and publishing houses like Mud Puddle Books had not yet begun to reprint the old volumes.

"The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book" was one of the few texts that remained in print and could be found at a local bookstore. First published in 1934, it contained hundreds of recipes from the original hotel on Fifth Avenue, which had been torn down a few years earlier to make way for the [Empire State Building](#).



The updated version will be released on May 17.
Sonny Figueroa/The New York Times

“The value of the original book was that it was a great snapshot of the cocktails that existed right before Prohibition began” in 1920, said Robert Hess, an authority on the recent cocktail movement.

It took more than 80 years, but the ancient compendium has been given a makeover.

The [updated version](#), which Penguin Random House will release on May 17 (dropping the “Old” and the hyphen from the title), was the idea of Frank Caiafa, manager of the hotel’s [Peacock Alley bar](#). He was aware of the legacy of the original manual and of its predecessor, “Old Waldorf Bar Days” (1931), both written by Albert Stevens Crockett, a newspaper columnist and sometime publicist for the hotel.

When Mr. Caiafa suggested bringing the books into the modern era, his boss bit. That was in 2010. Mr. Caiafa spent two years researching the history of the cocktails, and another three testing the many recipes.

“It was strange the rabbit holes you would go down,” said Mr. Caiafa, 49, a born-and-bred New Yorker with the bulky build and soft-sandpaper voice of a 1940s film barkeeper. “Some of the drinks that, on paper, I’d think: ‘Oh, this will be a breeze. I’ll be on to the next recipe by the end of the night,’ I wouldn’t be on to the next recipe for days.”

Besides the two Crockett books, Mr. Caiafa drew on three other related volumes: “Drinks” (1914), by Jacques Straub, a Swiss-born bartender who was a friend of Oscar Tschirky, the Waldorf’s famed headwaiter; “Bottoms Up” (1951), by Ted Saucier, who was publicity director for the Waldorf in the 1930s and ’40s; and Mr. Tschirky’s own “100 Famous Cocktails” (1934).

Mr. Caiafa tweaked and updated most of Crockett’s recipes to suit the modern palate. In his introduction, he compares the old versions to “scratchy recordings on well-worn vinyl.” And he likens himself to a “modern audio engineer brought in to master old recordings.”

Recipe: [Peacock Alley Martinez](#)