

Frank Caiafa, the Expert on Ampersand Cocktails

December 1, 2017 by [Nancy Upper](#) — [Leave a Comment](#)



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INTRODUCTION by Nancy Upper

In the online *Phoenix New Times*, July 11, 2014, an article by JK Grence gave me an idea for our annual summer party. Grence's headline promised, "How to Make an Ampersand Cocktail: More Fun with Old Tom Gin."

I was into research for my book *Power of Ampersand*, and here was research you could pass around.

Grence called the Ampersand "a positively ancient cocktail," gave brief histories of the drink, the drink's name, and the word "ampersand." He gave tips on the proportions of spirits to use and concluded with the Ampersand Cocktail recipe.

The recipe made one drink, but the idea it gave me was this — Make the cocktail in quantity, serve it by the pitcher, keep the pitcher cold in a bowl of ice, and let guests pour their own Ampersands into cocktail glasses we provided. Grence's recipe did not mention "two dashes of Curacao on top," so we did not provide Curacao.

This was before I knew Frank Caiafa.

Grence wrote that the Ampersand dated from the repeal of Prohibition and "*The Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book* that was published back in 1935. It's said that the drink got the name from the punctuation mark seen on a bottle of Martini & Rossi vermouth."

I own a little book by Charles M. Adams titled, *The Ampersand in Schoolroom Song and Barroom* (Harbour Press, 1936). It tells what I believe is the true story of the drink's name. First note that, from the 17th century to the mid-20th, children learned "&" as the 27th letter of the alphabet.

According to Adams:

The gallant gentlemen of the older school who used to gather round the bar of the old Waldorf-Astoria were not forgetful of the services of this last but not least of the letters in the alphabet. They tipped their glasses to its memory with a faithfulness that would have done credit to their first teachers. After having used every letter at their command, quietly recalling past memories, they would order an *Ampersand* and as gentlemen raise their glasses in a toast: "& goa ta bed."

You can imagine the mellow gents at the end of an evening fondly naming their habitual nightcap *Ampersand* for the alphabet's caboose.

After our party, Spence and Adams gave me another idea — talk to the Waldorf Astoria bar manager personally for inside thoughts on the Ampersand Cocktail.

I called the New York City hotel, explained my *Power of Ampersand* book, asked the bar manager's name, and asked to please speak with him or her. The friendly receptionist suggested I write to bar manager Frank Caiafa through the hotel website.

My September 1, 2016, message outlined *Power of Ampersand* and invited Mr. Caiafa to write an essay about the Ampersand Cocktail for the book's Food & Beverage chapter.

Caiafa replied with warm thanks for my interest in the cocktail, asked if we could speak by phone, and gave his Waldorf Astoria number.

Preparing for our talk, I discovered that on May 17, 2016, Penguin Random House had released his one-volume update of the legacy guides *Old Waldorf Bar Days* (1931) and *The Old Waldorf-Astoria Bar Book* (1934), both written by Albert Stevens Crockett. Caiafa titled his new classic, *The Waldorf Astoria Bar Book*.

"What luck," I thought. "Fresh from his own writing, Mr. Caiafa will look kindly on mine."

One minute into our phone conversation, Mr. Caiafa assured me that he *would* write an essay, and send photos, for my *Power of Ampersand* book. "I want you to know I'm on top of this. I've just been so busy at the hotel."

Mr. Caiafa's current website, <https://handlebarsnyc.com>, shows his considerable credentials:

A twenty-year veteran of the hospitality industry, Frank was the beverage director of the highly celebrated Peacock Alley and La Chine restaurants at The Waldorf Astoria in New York City from 2005 until its recent closure for renovations [December 31, 2016].

He is also author of *The Waldorf Astoria Bar Book* (Penguin), a 2017 James Beard Foundation Award finalist ... [and] nominated for a 2017 Tales of the Cocktail 'Spirited Award' for Best New Cocktail and Bartending Book.

Mr. Caiafa began his update in 2010, spent two years researching the history of the cocktails, and the next three taste-testing every recipe.

Here are his thoughts on the ampersand symbol, and his update of the Ampersand Cocktail for the "modern palate." For bonuses, he gives you the winter temptation Biscotti & Cream, and a year-round Honorable Ampersand Mention: The Highball.

THE AMPERSAND & AMPERSAND COCKTAILS

by FRANK CAIAFA 28 June 2017

The Ampersand

The 'Ampersand' is a proprietary cocktail of the famous bar at 'The Old Waldorf Astoria' in New York City (located on the current site of the Empire State Building, 1893-1929). Its title is often attributed to the symbol found in the logo on the labels of Martini & Rossi vermouth. Whatever the true origin and inspiration, it was certainly the first use of the '&' as a title for a cocktail.

As for the ampersand proper, I think a large part of its appeal is that it demonstrates not only a connection between two entities but a profound and strong one. Simply by its being, it adds to that connection, emphasizing the relationship between two objects in a way that the word 'and' just does not. I think it's no coincidence that when young lovers desire to show their connection to each other, it's the use of the ampersand that makes it complete. Somehow 'Romeo & Juliet' means so much more than 'Romeo *and* Juliet', doesn't it? I believe that it's John & Yoko for a reason.

Joe Heron, owner of the recently founded Copper & Kings distillery in Louisville, Kentucky, includes the ampersand in their official logo and incorporates a pot still into the design. He writes on their website that "the ampersand represents *inclusion*," and to him personally, "*non-discrimination*." He continues, "The ampersand represents *invention*. It stands for *curiosity ... momentum ... never standing still*. The symbol ... is open-ended, like life, like learning, without something attached it is incomplete." I can certainly agree to all of that.

Ampersand Cocktail

During the lengthy process of updating the classic Waldorf Astoria bar books, it was my intention to research and reexamine all of the recipes within them. As expected, it turned out that almost all of them took to tweaking of some kind. Most whispered for a light touch, though some screamed for a much more heavily ‘adapted’ version for the modern palate just to make them potable (thankfully there weren’t many of those — these books and their recipes are classics for a reason).

As for the ‘Ampersand’ recipe itself, this boozy but complex concoction is really quite the find and one for the ages. What struck me most when I came across the original formula was how modern it looked right from first glance. The combination of ingredients could easily be imagined on the menus of any number of today’s most famous cocktail bars and discerning restaurants, though it had its heyday at the end of the 19th century. It’s unique use of two base spirits (brandy and gin —another use for an ampersand) makes for quite the offering. After tasting the original as listed, I thought that the only change I would make would be to include the “Two dashes of Curacao on top” into the build of the drink to help the ingredient state its orange presence on the palate. Here is the recipe as recorded by Waldorf Astoria press agent Albert Stevens Crockett, in *The Old Waldorf Astoria Bar Book*:

Ampersand (1934)

Two dashes Orange Bitters

One-third Brandy

One-third Tom Gin

One-third Italian Vermouth

Though tasty and memorable in this form (and with the aforementioned slightly revised in-built addition of Grand Marnier in the curacao role), I felt that utilizing specific, alternative modern ingredients in all of the slots could elevate this to a higher status and more importantly, a new audience.

The original called for brandy, which would have meant Cognac though the examples of the day would contain at least a touch more alcohol by volume than most products available on present day shelves. It's perfectly acceptable to use any decent, garden-variety rendition of Cognac here, but there are a couple of slightly over-proof varieties that would be worthy of inclusion for sure. As an alternate I opted to use a drier and fuller Armagnac, which would supply a sturdier backbone for the other ingredients. At the time of the development of my book, Copper & Kings American brandies were not available in NYC so I obviously could not use them. I will amend that here by stating that their brandy brings both the weight of Armagnac and the fruit of Cognac with historically correct higher alcohol content.

Considering the inclusion of the sweetened Old Tom Gin, I took the liberty of including an old-timey rendition in the Ransom Old Tom, which sees barrel aging and plays more like a lighter whiskey, making for a natural pairing with the other ingredients. I did not adapt the vermouth as Martini & Rossi makes for a great canvas, never stepping on the other ingredients toes. Lastly, I included another old-time take on curacao, Pierre Ferrand's recent entry. It's a bit less cloying than a liqueur-leaning Grand Marnier, which allows for it to play a bigger role and underscore the intended orange notes of the original. Here then is my current interpretation.

Ampersand (2017)

1 oz. Copper & Kings American Brandy (Pierre Ferrand Ambre Cognac, optional)

1 oz. Ransom Old Tom Gin (Hayman's Old Tom Gin, optional)

1 oz. Martini & Rossi Sweet Vermouth

1/3 oz. Pierre Ferrand Dry Curacao (1/4 oz. Grand Marnier, optional)

2 dashes Bitterman's Orange Bitters (Regans' Orange Bitters No. 6)

Add all ingredients to mixing glass. Add ice and stir for 30 seconds.

Strain into chilled cocktail glass. Lemon peel, for garnish.

Please feel free to use the ingredients included in parentheses for the Old Bar's more traditional and intended result.

Biscotti & Cream

This dessert cocktail was created with our wintertime, post-theatre guest in mind. Faretti Biscotti Liqueur is almond biscotti in a bottle. Very concentrated but balanced with notes of cocoa and vanilla which somehow pairs extremely well with the apple forward profile of apple brandy or Calvados.

Biscotti & Cream

1.25 oz. Faretti Biscotti Liqueur

1.25 oz. Copper & Kings 'Floodwall' Apple Brandy (or Boulard 'Grand Solage' Calvados)

1.5 oz. House made White Cocoa (see below)

Add all ingredients to mixing glass. Add ice and shake well.

Fine strain into chilled cocktail glass. Place thin chocolate biscotti across top of glass for garnish.

White Cocoa Mix

4 oz. heavy cream

8 oz. whole milk

6 oz. Valrhona white chocolate pistoles

Bring the Milk and Cream to a boil over medium heat, remove from heat, and add the white chocolate. Let sit for 2 minutes, then whisk until fully blended. Yield: About 18 oz.

Note: Though included in our 'Biscotti & Cream' cocktail, this can also be served warm as a decadent hot cocoa alternate in the winter months.

Honorable Ampersand Mention: The Highball

I think that this rumination would not be complete without a nod to the simplest of tipples, the sturdy and classic 'Highball'. Though the ampersand is by no means the official icon of these refreshing quaffs, in all of my experience, whenever given the opportunity to place one on a special event menu or mention one in an article, I have always utilized the ampersand in the title of every Gin & Tonic, Scotch & Water, Rum & Coke, Bourbon & Branch, etc...(you get the idea). Again, the ampersand adds an inherent connectivity to the two lone ingredients making its inclusion as essential as the components themselves. Try it for yourself. Prepare a Gin **and** Tonic and drink it. Then try a Gin **&** Tonic and drink that. The *Gin & Tonic* will win out every time.

Gin & Tonic (Basic Highball Recipe)

2 oz. Spirit of choice (Gin, Brandy, Bourbon, Rum, Rye, Scotch, Tequila, etc.)

4 oz. Tonic, Club Soda, Water, Ginger Ale or Ginger Beer, etc.

Add spirit of choice to Collins glass. Add large ice cubes and fill with mixer. Stir briefly to integrate and serve. Citrus wedge of choice for garnish (optional).

By Frank Caiafa, ['The Waldorf Astoria Bar Book'](#) (Penguin 2016)

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