

# Romance on the Rocks

Latin fever now infuses the cocktail hour.

**T**he cuisines of Latin America are the hottest in the country. Latin music has hit the mainstream and is more popular than ever. No wonder, then, that Latin cocktails—crisp, refreshing, undeniably potent—are the new stars of the spirits world, not just here in South Florida but in places where sun and sultry ambience are mere memories for the better part of the year.

First to achieve widespread appeal was the Mojito, the national cocktail of Cuba, a simple but sophisticated blend of rum, lime juice, simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water, heated and dissolved), a splash of club soda and muddled mint. Then came the Caipirinha, the drink to Brazil what the Mojito is to Cuba. Think of it as a pared-down margarita that packs an even more wicked punch—just sugar and lime wedges mashed together, topped off with plenty of cachaça, a form of brandy made with sugarcane.

Lately, the drink that's been lighting cocktailistas' fires is the pisco sour. It's similar to the Mojito and Caipirinha in that it calls for lime juice (a

tropical drink staple), simple syrup and a powerful liquor, in this case, pisco, a grape-based brandy that's the king of Peruvian spirits. But then pisco sour heads uptown, adding complexity and richness to the tart-sweet-potent trio with the inclusion of whipped egg whites and a few drops of bitters.

Each of these three iconic Latin cocktails has a long, distinguished (and somewhat murky) history. It is said the Mojito was invented either by slaves working in Cuba's sugarcane fields in the late 1800s or three

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centuries earlier by an associate of the English pirate (and later Sir) Francis Drake. The Drake story has the most currency these days, his original Mojito (derived from the African word "mojo," to cast a little spell) consisting of aguardiente (a rough precursor to rum), sugar or guarapo (sugarcane juice), lime juice, mint and shaved ice. That recipe has changed little over the years, except for substituting rum for aguardiente and adding club soda.

Of course, today's mixologists love nothing better than creating variations on a theme, and, at the Boca Raton Resort & Club, no variation is more popular than the pomegranate Mojito, made by tweaking the basic Mojito with a half-ounce of pomegranate syrup (see recipe). "It's our No. 1 seller," says Palm Court bartender Doug Caveney.





## POMEGRANATE MOJITO

FROM THE BOCA RATON RESORT & CLUB

- 1 ounce rum
- 2 lime wedges
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 1/2 ounce pomegranate syrup
- 6 mint leaves
- Club soda

Muddle lime and mint leaves in glass. Add rum, syrups and club soda; stir well.



## PINEAPPLE PISCO SOUR

FROM THE BOCA RATON RESORT & CLUB

- 1 1/2 ounces Pisco 100
- 1 ounce simple syrup
- 3/4 ounce pineapple juice
- 1/2 ounce lime juice
- 1 teaspoon powdered egg whites
- 3-4 drops bitters

Shake first 5 ingredients in cocktail shaker; strain and pour into martini glass, allowing egg white foam to rest on top. Add drops of bitters and create swirl effect by pulling at drops with straw, if desired.

The origins of the Caipirinha are even more obscure. Its name is reportedly taken from the Portuguese word "caipira," meaning "hick" or "rube," with the suffix "inha," meaning "little." Exactly who mixed the first "little hick," when and where is still unknown, though some say its antecedent is an old Brazilian folk remedy that would surely cure whatever ails you. Cachaça, the high-test fuel for the Caipirinha, dates back to the 1500s or 1600s and has long been considered a liquor for the lower classes. With the newfound popularity of the Caipirinha, the Brazilian government has set down several regulations intended to mark both the liquor and the cocktail as strictly Brazilian, and an artisan industry has sprung up, producing hand-made, aged cachaça that shares some of the characteristics of cognac.

There's remarkable unanimity on the origins of the pisco sour, the signature cocktail of Peru. Most everyone credits its creation to one Victor Morris—owner of The Morris Bar in Lima—who is said to have patterned his pisco-based cocktail on the whisky sour. That was in the early 1900s, and, like many historical cocktails, its initial popularity eventually faded, only to be reborn in trendy bars and restaurants around the country.

That trend is just beginning to catch on here, says Caveney, who, at the Resort, serves up a pisco sour spiked with pineapple juice (see recipe). (One caveat if you're planning on making your own pisco sour at home: Caveney uses powdered egg whites instead of whipping up the real thing;

the former have the advantage of being shelf-stable and pasteurized for safety. He notes, however, that, powdered or not, "it sticks to everything like glue.")

It is believed that the forerunner of pisco was first produced in Peru in the mid-1500s from grapes grown in vineyards planted by Spanish traders. Homesick for the brandy of their homeland, the Spaniards tried to replicate that spirit using Peruvian-grown grapes, eventually settling on the Quebranta grape and naming the result for the port from which the

brandy was exported. ("Pisco" also means "bird" in the Quechua dialect.) Its origins are a matter of great pride in Peru—and also a matter of some controversy, as Chile claims the creation for itself.

As with virtually every other spirit on the market today, artisan distillers are upping the quality of pisco and elevating it to the level of high-end cognacs, vodkas and scotches. The Resort is one of a handful of South Florida establishments to offer Pisco 100, the product of Peruvian master distiller Guillermo Ferreyros, whose pisco is just beginning to be available in the United States.

Ferreyros, on a recent marketing trip to South Florida, says two things make pisco stand out from other grape-based spirits. First, it's made only from the first pressing of the "meat" of the grape, without the stems, seeds and skins that can make Italian grappa go down like liquid sandpaper. Second, unlike brandy and cognac, pisco is not aged in oak casks, which impart both color and flavor to the spirit. "When you taste cognac, you never taste the grape," he notes.

You certainly do taste it in Ferreyros' pisco. Beguilingly floral, it reveals hints of ripe melon, peach and pear, and, while it makes for an excellent cocktail, it's even better taken straight up, in a snifter to concentrate the aroma. Who knows, it may be the next big thing.

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