



East Meets West

These Asian-inspired cocktails add exotic flair to your home bar.

BY KELLY MAGYARICS
PHOTOS BY TODD HUFFMAN

Right now, sips are taking an exotic trip, as elixirs crafted with Asian ingredients are bringing the Far East as close to you as your glass.

Libations are brightened by a squeeze of yuzu or kumquat, while muddled kaffir lime leaves or chopped lemongrass turn up the volume on aromatics. Heat—chilies, sriracha, peppercorns or baking spices—appeals to masochistic mixologists who want to make you sweat. And that fifth taste, umami, pops up in hoisin, soy and bacon.

These shaker-worthy components deftly complement Far East spirits to create striking cocktail bases. The best part? These creative concoctions require neither a long list of ingredients nor a passport to deliver palate-piquing flavor.



Ma Collins

Recipe courtesy Juan Coronado, beverage director, ThinkFoodGroup, China Chilcano, Washington, D.C.

The name for this cocktail at China Chilcano, José Andrés's Peruvian/Chinese/Japanese fusion restaurant, derives from the Chinese word for horse, as 2014 was both the Year of the Horse and a most auspicious time for ThinkFoodGroup, according to Coronado.

"The yuzu imparts great aromas, and the five-spice syrup brings sweetness and earthiness to the cocktail," he says.

- 2 ounces Old Overholt Straight Rye Whiskey
- $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce Star Anise-Ginger Syrup (recipe below)

- $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce fresh yuzu juice
- Splash of sparkling water
- 1 piece star anise, for garnish
- 1 piece lemon peel, for garnish

Combine all ingredients except for the sparkling water and garnishes into a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously until chilled. Strain into an ice-filled highball glass, top with sparkling water and garnish with star anise and lemon peel.

STAR ANISE-GINGER SYRUP

- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup diced ginger
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup star anise pods

In a small saucepan, combine 1 cup water, sugar and ginger, and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, add star anise and let steep for 20 minutes. Double-strain syrup. Let cool before using.

You Do Yuzu

Bright, tart and more exotic than your garden-variety lemon or lime, Asian citrus fruits give bright, zesty notes to libations.

Yuzu, the most popular and readily available, is like a lemon-tangerine mash-up, and it works well in light-bodied cocktails, according to Spangler. He also likes to use heady kaffir lime leaves. Lightly bruised as a garnish, they're incredibly aromatic.

Brown makes a whiskey sour riff with tiny, full-flavored kalamansi or kumquat.

"The bitterness of the skin with the sweetness of the fruit is a stellar combination with rye whiskey and tamarind," Brown says.



Cambodian Mule

Recipe courtesy Les Baker, head bartender, Session Kitchen, Denver

Baker has long seen the synergy of coconut and kaffir lime, and he uses them here in an unexpected twist on one of the first vodka cocktails.

"We steep the kaffir lime leaves to extract the flavor," he says. "It adds a unique depth to the citrus component and creates a beautiful aroma."

The drink gets tropical flavor and a soft, textural component from the saké.

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces Kaffir Lime-Infused Vodka (recipe below)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce Ty Ku Coconut Nigori Saké
- $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce lime juice
- 3 ounces ginger beer
- 1 lime wheel, for garnish

KAFFIR LIME-INFUSED VODKA

- 20 kaffir lime leaves
- 1 750 ml bottle vodka

Add leaves to vodka. Infuse for 10–14 days, shaking occasionally. Strain out leaves before using.

Large fresh coconut flakes, for garnish

Add the vodka, saké and lime juice to a copper mug filled with ice. Top with ginger beer. Garnish with lime wheel and coconut flakes.

Spice Is Nice

"Spice doesn't always just mean spicy hot, as in chili peppers, but should also be thought of as a seasoning," says Spangler.

Soi 38 uses spicy elements that fuel the fire—green and red Thai chilies, black peppercorn and sriracha—as well as tamer, more tempered ones like ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, clove and coriander.

Brown employs galangal, which she says is similar to ginger, "but a bit sharper and spicier," but her current favorite is Sichuan peppercorn. Though overpowering when consumed whole, when properly used, it's more tolerable.

"They have this incredible floral, citrus aroma," she says.



Som Tum Sling

Recipe courtesy Chad Spangler, director of operations, The Menhune Group, Soi 38, Washington, DC

Thai green papaya salad, or Som Tum, is reimagined in liquid form in this creation.

"Although it has notes of spice, the salad is incredibly refreshing and citrus forward," says Spangler. In the cocktail, an Eastern-style gin hints of peppercorn and lemongrass, green papaya lends a vegetal note and Thai chilies ramp up the heat.

- 2 ounces Bombay Sapphire East Gin**
- ¾ ounce lime juice**
- 1 ounce Thai Chili & Black Pepper Syrup (recipe below)**
- Pinch of shredded green papaya**
- 1 Thai chili, for garnish**
- Green papaya strips, for garnish**

Add all ingredients except garnish to a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake hard for 10 seconds. Strain into a Collins glass over crushed ice. Garnish with Thai chili and green papaya strips.

THAI CHILI & BLACK PEPPER SYRUP

- 2¼ teaspoons coarse, freshly ground black pepper**
- 2–3 red Thai chilies**
- 2–3 green Thai chilies**
- 2 cups sugar**

Add first 3 ingredients and 2 cups of water to a large saucepan. Bring to a boil and add sugar. Boil for 5 minutes, then reduce heat, cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, strain out solids and let cool.



Hot & Sour Gimlet

Recipe courtesy Marisa Brown, wine director, Lukshon, Culver City, California

For this Southeast Asian take on the gimlet, bartenders use sweet Osmanthus wine, a floral-flavored Chinese beverage, to foil the chilies' heat. Lemon, lime and kinh gioi, a Vietnamese herb reminiscent of lemongrass, provide bright citrus tones.

"The best Asian food contains elements of sweet, sour and spicy working in harmony, and this drink exhibits all these notes beautifully," says Brown.

- 6 kinh gioi leaves (may substitute lemon balm or lemon mint)**
- 2 ounces Vodka Monopolowa**
- ½ ounce Thai Chili Syrup (recipe below)**
- ½ ounce Osmanthus wine**
- ¼ ounce lemon juice**
- ¼ ounce lime juice**
- 1 Thai basil leaf, bruised, for garnish**

Muddle kinh gioi leaves in bottom of a cocktail shaker. Fill shaker with ice, add all ingredients except garnish and shake until chilled. Strain drink into a chilled cocktail glass, and garnish with Thai basil leaf.

THAI CHILI SYRUP

- ½ cup sugar**
- 2–3 Thai chilies**

Combine sugar, chilies and ½ cup water in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, then remove from heat. Steep until desired spiciness is achieved, then strain out solids.