

The Martini

A short essay by Rick Brusca

"A dry martini," [Bond] said. "In a deep champagne goblet."

"Oui, monsieur."

"Just a moment. Three measures of Gordon's, one of vodka, half a measure of Kina Lillet. Shake it very well, until it's ice-cold, then add a large thin slice of lemon peel. Got it?"

"Certainly, monsieur." The barman seemed pleased with the idea.

"Gosh, that's certainly a drink," said Leiter.

Bond laughed. "When I'm...er...concentrating," he explained, "I never have more than one drink before dinner. But I do like that one to be large and very strong and very cold and very well made. I hate small portions of anything, particularly when they taste bad. This drink's my own invention. I'm going to patent it when I can think of a good name."

—Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale* (1953), Chapter 7, "Rouge et Noir"

After taking a long sip, Bond says to the barman, "Excellent ... but if you can get a vodka made with grain instead of potatoes, you will find it still better," but then he adds, "*Mais n'enculons pas des mouches*" ("But let's not bugger flies"—an indecorous French idiom meaning "let's not split hairs"). One reason Bond prefers his *Vesper* shaken well is that potato-based vodka can be slightly oily, and the ice agitation is thought to somehow remove much of the oiliness. But, of course, the only martini worth drinking is one with a thin skim of ice on the surface, which is only attainable with vigorous shaking (a critical step that less informed bartenders often miss).

Lillet is a French aperitif wine that has been made by the Lillet family in the village of Podensac, 20 mi south of Bordeaux (France), since 1887. It's a secret family recipe (of course) consisting of various herbs and spices, blended with the classic Bordeaux white wines—Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Muscadelle. It is a delicious sipping aperitif and, as noted on the label, "It can be enjoyed anywhere, on any occasion; however, it is perfect for those special times when day turns to evening and evening turns to night." It is not an easy aperitif to find, but then, good things are often hard to come by.

In the next chapter, "*Pink Lights and Champagne*," Bond decides to name his drink the *Vesper*, after the beautiful Vesper Lynd, after she has explained to him that she "...was born in the evening....on a very stormy evening...." Vespers, of course, are the evening prayer services in many Western churches (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, etc.). The word itself comes from the Latin *vesper* which means evening. In the Eastern Orthodox church, the "Great Vespers" were performed on Sunday evenings—a mighty fine time to enjoy Bond's version of a *Vesper* in my opinion, whether there is a storm brewing or not. And, in fact, you might want to put Rachmaninoff's incredibly inspired "Vespers" on the turntable (or your iPod) while you sip this fabulous drink. Or Handel's "Messiah." Or better yet, Ignacio de Jerusalem's amazing 1764 "Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe" (Jerusalem's *matins* have rarely been recorded, but several versions of this stunning composition do exist; my favorite is "Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe, 1764," by Chanticleer; Teldec 3984-21829-2). After all, a really great martini can be a religious experience.

Of course, a *Vesper* differs from Bond's usual cocktail of choice, the “regular” martini, in that it uses both gin and vodka and Kina Lillet instead of the usual dry vermouth. Although there is considerable discussion about the *Vesper*, it is only ordered once throughout Fleming's novels—although Bond again drinks the *Vesper* (six of them in fact) in the film *Quantum of Solace*, the 22nd James Bond film (but a story not written by Ian Fleming) and the direct sequel to the 2006 film *Casino Royale*.

My favorite version of the *Vesper* (so far) is:

3 parts Nolet’s, Plymouth Dry, or Fifty Pounds Gin (none of these have too much juniper or spice)

1 part Summum Vodka (a French wheat vodka)

½ part Lillet

Shaken very well with ice, with a large lemon peel twist

Plymouth and Fifty Pounds are widely regarded as two of the world’s great gins (and who am I to disagree). Fifty Pounds was launched in 2010. Plymouth has been made since the late 1700s, and its initial popularity led to it becoming the preferred gin of England’s Royal Navy. By 1850, producer Coates and Co. were supplying over 1000 barrels of “navy strength” (~50% alcohol) gin a year to the Navy. In 1896, the first ever recipe for a dry martini specified Plymouth Gin (in *Stuart’s Fancy Drinks and How to Mix Them*). It is the only gin still around today to be named in numerous recipes in the renowned *Savoy Cocktail Book*—still the bible of mixology.

My favorite “Perfect Martini” recipe is:

3 shots Tanqueray Rangpur gin* (per drink) in an ice-filled shaker (or Fifty Pounds gin if you want to splurge)

Shake vigorously

Swirl a bit of dry Vermouth around the inside of martini glasses fresh from the freezer, then toss the Vermouth out

Pour the shaken gin into the glasses through a martini strainer (using a martini strainer is essential to achieve the perfect fine-crystalline ice in the drink)

Add 3 stuffed olives

*This delicious gin is infused with Rangpur limes, named after Rangpur, Bangladesh. It is known as the Canton lemon in South China, a hime lemon in Japan, a cravo lemon in Brazil, and a mandarin-lime in the U.S. In Costa Rica, it is preferred over both regular limes and lemons.

