

How to...

Mix a martini for James Bond. By Agostino Perrone

I'd always dreamed of making a cocktail for James Bond. Then one day, Pierce Brosnan came into the Connaught Bar in London and asked for a martini. I mixed him one: gin, Italian vermouth, a twist of lemon, a dash of lavender bitters, stirred not shaken. Months later he came back. 'Hi Ago,' he said. 'Same again.' My drink had been a hit.

I've been a mixologist for 20 years but I grew up in Lake Como, Italy, where wine was the staple. At 16, I started going to Cafe Broletto, a bar that, unusually for Como back then, served cocktails. It was more about the atmosphere than the drink: I was obsessed with *National Geographic* travel guides, and Broletto was full of the well-travelled and their fascinating stories.

My father is an accountant and he expected me to follow in his footsteps, but I started skipping school to spend more time at Broletto. I worked there full time until 2003, when I was approached to help start a new bar in London called Cedar.

Unfortunately, Cedar was not a success, but by that point I was dazzled by London's nightlife and decided to stay on, finding work in



The Connaught Bar's master mixologist Agostino Perrone, and the perfect martini (below).

Photographs by Victoria Birkinshaw



some of the hippest bars of the time: Dusk in Battersea, Montgomery Place in Notting Hill and Salvador & Amanda in Bloomsbury, from where I was poached by the Connaught Bar in 2006.

By then mixology was taking off, thanks in part to the rise of the internet. Anyone could google 'margarita recipe' so mixologists had to be inventive; we began experimenting with

creams, foams and exotic ingredients, such as spirits from Asia and ginger liqueurs.

I still play around with new blends today - I'm currently using black cardamom to make a syrup and purée.

People assume I spend my days knocking back cocktails, but I work long hours and prefer to keep a clear head. When I do drink, I pour myself a Scotch on the

rocks or, occasionally, a martini. My perfect blend is similar to the one enjoyed by Brosnan: five parts gin (usually Sipsmith or Tanqueray), one part vermouth, and a dash of ginseng and bergamot essence, which I crush myself. It's dry but beautifully balanced, as the perfect martini should be.

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As told to Laura Powell