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SHAKEN & STIRRED

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BRIDAL CHOICE A red currant and cocoa cocktail at Arrows Restaurant in Ogunquit, Me.

A Liquid Keepsake

SOMETHING borrowed, something blue. And something shaken, something stirred.

The signature cocktail at wedding receptions — a novelty 10 years ago, when brides besotted with “Sex and the City” began calling for Cosmopolitans all around — has gone, in the last few years, from optional to almost obligatory.

“It’s absolutely become part of the wedding party checklist,” said David Tutera, a New York City party planner and the host of “My Fair Wedding” on cable television. The mad rush to the bar that once started receptions, sometimes evoking Wal-Mart on the morning after Thanksgiving, is being steadily replaced by something tamer: a server bearing a tray of pre-selected cocktails, greeting arriving guests.

But until recently, what went into those cocktails was usually an afterthought, or dictated by the wedding’s color scheme. “We used to be able to throw together

some prosecco with pomegranate juice, for some pink color,” said Xochitl Gonzalez, a Manhattan wedding planner, “but now it’s gotten more thoughtful.”

Cross-cultural couple? Look for a signature cocktail with ingredients from both cultures mixed into the drink. Geographic touchstone? The cocktail can tell that story, too, as an Alabama slammer did at a reception last month, orchestrated by Ms. Gonzalez, for a New York couple relocating to Alabama. “Crazy as it sounds,” Mr. Tutera said, “the drink can make a statement about the couple.”

Sometimes the statement is subtle. At her wedding reception last summer, at Arrows Restaurant in Ogunquit, Me., Jane Brown, 26, chose a sake-based cocktail, to reflect her husband’s fondness for Asian cuisine, along with a classic sidecar for herself. Danielle Johnson, the restaurant’s events coordinator, said she had seen a significant increase over the last two years in the attention couples are paying to their cocktails. Extensive tastings are now commonplace.

So are offbeat requests. Recently, Ms. Johnson said, “we had a bride who was a pastry chef who wanted to use cocoa powder in a drink.” The restaurant’s bartender devised a cocktail in which gin is shaken with red currant sorbet and cocoa-infused simple syrup, then served in a glass rimmed with cocoa powder. It’s a lively, complex drink — a far cry from the weak gin-and-tonics that once defined wedding reception drinking.

Ms. Gonzalez, along with several other wedding planners, pinned the intensifying focus on cocktails to brides and grooms who are increasingly savvy about their drinking. “The whole mixology trend has definitely transferred to bridal,” she said. “The game has been raised.”

Some, like Mr. Tutera, also credited the economic recession for spurring the trend, noting that serving a signature cocktail, no matter how thoughtful or complex, is considerably less costly than hosting a full open bar.

For Mrs. Brown, however, there are more lasting benefits to a memorable signature wedding cocktail. “It’s something like the first-dance song,” she said. “Something iconic that you can hold on to for years to come. Even now, when we’re out to dinner, my father-in-law will sometimes get a goofy look on his face and say, ‘I’ll have a sidecar.’”

COCOA-CURRENT COCKTAIL

Adapted from
Arrows Restaurant

Lemon wedge and cocoa powder, for rimming the glass
2 ounces gin
1 teaspoon cocoa-infused simple syrup*
1/4 ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 small scoop red currant sorbet (or raspberry sorbet)
Edible flower, for garnish (optional).

1. Rim a chilled cocktail glass by swabbing the exterior of the rim with a wedge of lemon, then rolling the rim in cocoa powder to coat evenly. Shake off excess.

2. Combine liquid ingredients and sorbet in a cocktail shaker with ice, and shake. Strain into the prepared glass, and garnish with the flower.

Yield: 1 drink.

*To make cocoa-infused simple syrup, combine 1/2 cup water and 1/2 cup sugar in a saucepan over high heat; bring to a boil, and cook until sugar is dissolved. Stir in 1/2 teaspoons cocoa powder and let cool. Chill until ready to use.