

## IT'S ALL IN THE MIX

DiAunté Robinson's summer drink specials

What's your favorite drink? Odds are you have more than one. And even if you don't, there's great probability that "the usual" now comes in several flavored varieties. Mixologist DiAunté Robinson ([www.mixologistdiaunte.com](http://www.mixologistdiaunte.com)), who works at one of New York City's swankiest bars and also pours for private business functions, designs luxurious libations—often based on classic combinations—to wow even the most jaded sippers.

One way is with fresh fruit, which is now commonly used to update favorite tropical drinks such as margaritas and mojitos. "I only use fresh purees. The flavor is much more vibrant, explosive, fruit-forward," Robinson says. In addition to the popular use of strawberries and mangoes, he suggests trying watermelon, kiwi, or raspberries. Flavor industry forecaster *Flavor & The Menu* predicts a rediscovery of huckleberries and mulberries, along with pomegranates and Valencia oranges in the coming years.

Fruit also makes a great mixer for champagne. Strawbellinis and mango bellinis, twists on the traditional peach bellini, get a shot of complementary fruit-flavored liqueur. Robinson says younger club goers also enjoy straight champagne, no longer reserved for special occasions. "People are ordering bottles of champagne, and they are not sipping it, they are drinking it."

Robinson suggests trying a traditional cosmopolitan with a small amount of champagne poured to float on top of the drink—a cocktail he created and calls an imperial cosmo. "It's crisp, light, classy, elegant," he says, and perfect for summer. Or skip traditional altogether. Robinson says the venerable cosmos and martinis coexist with a few upstarts—such as the Jäger bomb, which pours Jägermeister with Red Bull energy drink—whose names and pedigrees announce them as not-your-father's cocktail.

All of Robinson's drinks are made with the finest products. He believes strongly that top-shelf brands create smoother, better tasting cocktails. Many others obviously agree. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States reports that sales of super premium brands, or top-shelf liquors, increased 20% in 2005, compared to 2.9% for spirits as a whole.

Robinson explains that several factors contribute to the higher quality, and price, of top-shelf liquors. Brands can be distinguished by the ingredients, such as using only the first press of sugar cane in 10 Cane rum or 100% blue agave juice in Patron Silver tequila. Long aging in specially chosen wood barrels makes a difference in brown liquors such as Woodford Reserve bourbon. The distillation process, which removes impurities and mellows the alcohol "burn," is important for clear liquors such as Hendricks gin and Imperia vodka. —Renee Catacalos



**To mix a great drink like a pro, Robinson recommends a few must-have bar tools:**

- **Shaker and strainer:** "Everything should be shaken and use tons of ice. Then strain and you get that nice froth at the top."
- **Speed pourers:** "Measuring is really, really, really old school. Use a speed pourer and do a leisurely four-count, 1-2-3-4." Then add mixers to fill the glass or to taste. Recap the bottle with the original top unless you use it often.
- **Multitiered glass rimmer:** "These are nice for presentation and for space and practicality purposes." It can be set up to accommodate various drinks at once, such as salt-rimmed margaritas and sugar-rimmed lemon drops.