

BARCODE

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## Rebirth of a French spirit

By Luke O'Neil, Globe Correspondent | February 12, 2010

First created by a Benedictine monk in 1510, the French spirit known as Benedictine boasts a unique blend of herbs and spices (including hyssop, lemon balm, saffron, cardamom, and angelica) that has been passed down over generations as a closely guarded secret. Although the recipe was lost to history during the French Revolution, it was rediscovered in 1863. Recently, it has become a staple for history-minded bartenders, and coinciding with its 500th anniversary, it seems to be everywhere.

The Benedictine brand recently conducted a nationwide contest to find the Alchemist of Our Age. One of the five finalists was Eastern Standard's Jackson Cannon, the preeminent bartending historian in Boston. His winning cocktail, called the Vincelli Fizz, uses one egg white, 1 1/2 ounces of Benedictine, 1 1/2 ounces house-made rose vermouth, and 1/2 ounce fresh-squeezed lemon juice. The ingredients are shaken dry to emulsify, then shaken again with ice and poured into a coupe glass, topped with champagne and garnished with flamed Medjool date essence.

Benedictine appears throughout the Eastern Standard cocktail menu in drinks like the Commonwealth Cocktail (house-infused apple vodka, Benedictine, apple schnapps, \$10), a woody, cocktail-savvy drinker's alternative to an apple martini, and the King's Yellow (Bombay Sapphire, Benedictine, dry vermouth, orange bitters, lemon oil, \$10), the slower, more contemplative drinker of the three.

Deep Ellum, West Side Lounge, Drink, and Noir also mix it up with Benedictine. "New spirits are always coming out, and many fade away in under a year, but it's the true classics that stick around for as long as they do because they're just that good," says Noir general manager Keith Warner. They're currently offering the Ride the Pink Horse (pictured), made with 1 1/2 ounces of Benedictine, 22 splashes of Angostura Bitters, 1/2 ounce of peach brandy, two lemon wedges, two cinnamon sticks, and a dash of almond syrup, garnished with a dehydrated orange. The ingredients here "meld sweetness and the 'herbalness' of the Benedictine and the bite of the bitters," Warner says. It is an extraordinarily bitter but drinkable mix of burnt citrus.

Further evidence of the liqueur's versatility comes at Green Street. "Benedictine will typically have nice honey notes and sugars that lend a little body to cocktails," says owner Dylan Black. As in the Fort Washington Flip (Laird's applejack, Benedictine, Vermont maple syrup, fresh whole egg, nutmeg, \$8.50). Here they wanted to use only ingredients that its namesake George Washington himself could have used. "He was a big fan of applejack and Benedictine," Black says.

Rob Kraemer at Chez Henri is mixing the Chrysanthemum Cocktail (1 1/2 ounces dry vermouth, 3/4 ounce Benedictine, three dashes of pastis, \$9), a light and extremely refreshing aperitif. "Benedictine is not as cloying as some other liqueurs as it's got this cinnamon heat to it that keeps it buoyant," he says. It sure does: It's remained buoyant for five centuries now.

**Eastern Standard**, 528 Commonwealth Ave., Boston. 617-532-9100. [www.easternstandardboston.com](http://www.easternstandardboston.com)

**Noir**, 1 Bennett St., Cambridge. 617-661-8010. [www.noir-bar.com](http://www.noir-bar.com)

**Green Street**, 280 Green St., Cambridge. 617-876-1655. [www.greenstreetgrill.com](http://www.greenstreetgrill.com)

**Chez Henri**, 1 Shepard St., Cambridge. 617-354-8980. [www.chezhenri.com](http://www.chezhenri.com)

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