

THE COCKTAIL LOVERS

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A question of taste...

Bitters, think of them as the essential condiment for your cocktails; the salt and pepper if you will. Just a couple of dashes adds extra ‘oomph’ to even the simplest of drinks. Everything from flirty Champagne cocktails and plain old gin and tonics through to big boy Manhattans and robust Old-Fashioneds get more balance, more complexity, and more interest when bitters are added to the mix. The same can be said for their effect in food.

Yes, food. In the Caribbean, no home is complete without a bottle of bitters to wake and shake up pretty much everything that comes out of the kitchen. Actually, strike that. No Caribbean kitchen is complete without a bottle of Angostura aromatic bitters. A tiny amount of this liquid powerhouse goes a long, long way to tease out and enhance every last drop of flavour in stews, delicate cheese dishes, fish, soups, and salad dressings – even cakes and ice cream succumb to its spell. It’s like some kind of magical elixir adapting itself to marry the flavours of any ingredients you throw at it.

If this bitters and food love-in sounds like something modern and cheffy, study that all too familiar oversized label a little closer. Also bear in mind, said label hasn’t changed a jot since Dr. Siegert concocted the secret recipe as a cure-all in 1824.

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“Because of its delightful flavour and aroma it has become extremely popular for use in soft drinks, cocktails and other alcoholic beverages. It also imparts an exquisite flavour to soups, salads, vegetables, gravies, fish, meat, fruit juices, grapefruit, mixed cut fruits, stewed prunes, stewed figs, preserved fruits, jellies, sherbets, water-ices, ice cream, sauces for puddings, hard sauces, plum pudding, mince and fruit pies, apple sauce and all similar desserts, regulating the quantity according to taste.”

Rita Held, a culinary consultant for 20 years can’t get enough of them. Granted she’s been a spokeswoman

for the company for the past three years but the passion she exudes about the way a simple splash can transform every major food group goes beyond being on any pay roll – the bitters bug has got her well and truly hooked.

“In the US, and I think other parts of the world, bitters is something unknown in food,” she says as we chat at Angostura HQ in Trinidad. “For me, it’s a tastebud tantaliser! It adds an extra layer of flavour; a subtle but oh-so vibrant kick. If you love dark chocolate and dark coffee, you will love Angostura bitters,” she enthuses.

We got to try chef Jason Heath’s bitters-based menu at a special lunch at the Hyatt Hotel during our stay in Trinidad. Everything from the artisan green salad to the herb encrusted red snapper and guava cheesecake was heightened with Angostura bitters, either in a vinaigrette, infusion, marinade or glaze. And boy did it do the trick, pairing up perfectly with each of the rum cocktails (Angostura, naturally) created by Jamie Stephenson.

“In a way, Angostura is what fish sauce or anchovy is in foods,” continues Held. “Not the same flavour but the same background enricher without which a dish would be a tad boring.” She now uses a generous splash in gravies and stews, chicken, lamb, seafood “as well as fish chowder, tartare sauce, barbecue sauce – the list is endless.”

So much so that the brand chose to tie-in with *All Mixed Up*, a three-part reality cooking show in America which challenged students and aspiring chefs to whip up original recipes using the product. Smart move. Not only did this put bitters in the spotlight, it opened up its manifold uses to a culinary audience hungry for new ideas.



“The surprising thing is that Angostura aromatic bitters is that it is not at all bitter when added to food,” says *All Mixed Up* winner Emman Christopher Eugenio (above, right). “They are potent but the sweet cinnamon and herbal aromatic flavour is fantastic when treated with respect, it enhances the flavour and adds depth to pretty much every ingredient – sweet or savoury.” Add a bottle to your kitchen cupboard now.



Marinated Chicken Breasts

- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1/2 cup cooking sherry
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp Angostura aromatic bitters
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp fresh ground pepper
- 6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

DIRECTIONS:

Mix marinade ingredients and pour over the chicken in a non-metallic container. Cover and refrigerate for 8-12 hours, turning at least once. Barbecue or grill for about 5-7 minutes each side or until cooked through, basting occasionally with marinade.



Angel Hair Pasta with capers and basil

- 1/2 pack of angel hair pasta
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp lime juice or 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Angostura aromatic bitters
- 2 tbsp crushed capers
- 1 tbsp tarragon leaves, bruised
- 1 tbsp basil leaves, bruised and torn
- Cracked black peppercorns

DIRECTIONS:

Cook pasta in salted water until *al dente*. Meanwhile, whisk olive oil, lime juice (or red wine vinegar) and bitters in a bowl until thickened, then add capers, tarragon, basil and black pepper and stir. Taste and add more lime juice (red wine vinegar) if desired. Drain pasta and transfer to bowl with oil dressing. Mix pasta with dressing until completely coated. Serve hot or cold.

Recipes above taken from 'Angostura aromatic bitters: The Taste That Changed The World'.



Sweet-Salty-Bitters-Glazed Nuts

- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp Angostura aromatic bitters
- 6 tbsp sugar
- 1-1/2 tsp Kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 3 cups raw nuts
(pecan or walnut halves, whole almonds or cashews)

DIRECTIONS:

Preheat oven to 300°F. Place oven rack in the middle of the oven.

Melt butter with Angostura bitters in a 6-cup bowl in the microwave or in a 4-qt pan on the stovetop. Stir, then add sugar, salt and cinnamon; stir well. Sugar does not have to be completely dissolved, but a warm sauce will coat nuts more thoroughly. Add nuts to bowl (pan) and stir until well coated. If needed, warm up mixture a little.

Line a large, rimmed sheet tray with parchment paper. Spread nuts out evenly on paper, separating them as much as possible. Roast 13-16 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to cool for 10-15 minutes, then use your fingers to break up clusters. When completely cooled, transfer nuts to serving bowls or store in an airtight container.

Recipe by Rita Held



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