

Botanical Booze

Retro liqueurs make a comeback and imbue the cocktail with some major flower power

| By Felicia Feaster | Photography by Calvin Lockwood |

Cut flowers die and spring fades. But loveliness springs eternal in a host of pretty potions that arrest the elderflower, hibiscus and violet in intoxicating, potable form. As the retro cocktail fascination grows, floral liqueurs are back with a vengeance, carried over from the Old Country by a savvy breed of importers. In 2007, for instance, Haus Alpenz brought stateside the previously unavailable Austrian-brand Rothman & Winter Crème de Violette. Like another violet liqueur, Parfait Amour, crème de violette originated in 19th-century Europe and has a perfumey, girly aroma evocative of its key ingredient: macerated violets from the Alps. Distinguished by its strong notes of oranges, vanilla, spices and very subtle violet scent, Parfait Amour is distributed by 1755 Bordeaux distiller Marie Brizard.

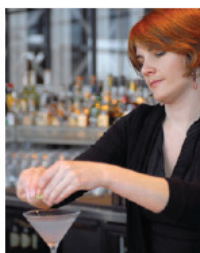
Mixologist Eric Simpkins of Drinkshop explains the sudden vogue for botanical booze. “Until recently, we were unable to get the products. They either weren’t made anymore, or they weren’t imported and so we were left either having the occasional bottle hand-carried from Europe; finding it by accident in someone’s old collection; or trying to make it ourselves.”

Some of the resurgent flower power can be attributed to spirits revivalist Robert Cooper, whose Philadelphia-based company Charles Jacquin Et Cie introduced the St-Germain elderflower liqueur in 2007 in a gorgeous beveled container, evocative of a perfume bottle, to much boozehound adulation. St-Germain (made from macerated elderflower blossoms, cane sugar and eau-de-vie, using a distillation process dating to 1884) is now on heavy rotation at virtually every smart bar in Atlanta. ONE. midtown kitchen offers the Julie Andrews featuring St-Germain, gin, orange bitters, simple syrup and Prosecco. Foodie-cool Top Flr flaunts Hayman’s Old Tom gin, crème de violette, basil and lemon in its Nature Boy. JCT. Kitchen mix-mistress Lara Creasy uses St-Germain and Centenario Rosangel Tequila (as well as simple syrup, lime juice and grapefruit juice), infused with hibiscus flowers, for JCT’s Texas Star cocktail.

Cooper will make his next revivalist booze masterstroke with the 2010 reintroduction of the Provence violet-flavored Crème Yvette, unavailable since the ‘60s and said to possess a more complex flavor than crème de violette. Until then, Atlantans can

COME FLY WITH ME

The circa 1916 everything-old-is-new-again Aviation cocktail (right), featuring the floral liqueur crème de violette as prepared by Miller Union’s mixologist-with-the-mostest Cara Laudino (below).



Heavy on the tequila, with the merest hint of violets, [The Long Desert Train] is like the brawny guy’s guy who got into his girl’s Yardley soap and leaves a trail of flowers in his hulking wake.

make do with the Aviation, a classic cocktail invented at the dawn of the aviation age—its pale sky blue color imparted by the addition of crème de violette. The classic sip is on offer at Abattoir, Drinkshop and Buckhead’s new speakeasy Prohibition. Going light on the crème de violette, barkeep Cara Laudino serves up a surprisingly un-girly, milky-colored Aviation at Miller Union, which allows the musty, dusty flavors of the Aviation’s other key ingredient, Luxardo Maraschino, to come through. Laudino is not alone in cultivating

her violet hour. Under the able cocktail guru-dom of manager James Ives, 4th & Swift is doing a contemporary application of crème de violette, the Long Desert Train, that’s robust enough to appeal to masculine palates. It’s a satisfying wallop-of-a-cocktail featuring Reposado Tequila, orange bitters, and a dash of Vermont maple syrup. Heavy on the tequila with just the merest hint of violets, it’s like the brawny guy’s guy who got into his girl’s Yardley soap and leaves a trail of flowers in his hulking wake. ▣