



THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO WINTER

How to mix up a cold-weather antidote



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As an Arctic nation mostly buried in snow much of the year, Canada sure seems to have come up short in the field of hot-cocktail exploration. Nordic countries have their *glogg*, Germany *glühwein*, Ireland Irish coffee. Even Mexico has gifted the world with Mexican coffee (or did that come by way of The Keg?).

Us? There's the Caribou, Quebec's signature winter blend of hot wine, Canadian whisky and maple syrup. Not bad, but not on the same vaunted level as poutine or Montreal smoked meat.

This is a shame. Seeking a more potent antidote than chicken soup to the recent polar vortex, I put out some calls. Most yielded diddly squat or Irish coffee. Then I connected with Martin Corriveau, a mixologist in tune with the country's needs.

Head bartender at La Pentola della Quercia in Vancouver's Opus Hotel, the Quebec City native is offering customers an inspired take on one of the steamy classics, the hot buttered rum.

At its most rudimentary, the cocktail is little more complicated than the name: dark rum, butter and hot water, sweetened with sugar. Borrowing a page from what he calls the drink's Pacific Northwest embellishment, Corriveau works in a symbiotic ingredient.

Decades ago at the Heathman Hotel in Portland, Ore., the story goes, an inventive barkeep mashed vanilla ice cream with butter to make a paste - or, in bartending parlance, batter. Corriveau does the same, but with trendy tonka-bean ice cream.

Legumes with a wrinkled dark outer shell, tonka beans taste mainly like vanilla and caramel, with overtones of cinnamon,



Vancouver's La Pentola della Quercia serves up a fresh take on hot buttered rum. RAFAŁ GERSZAK FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

clove and marzipan. They also happen to be outlawed in certain jurisdictions because of a compound called coumarin, linked to Coumadin, the patented blood thinner. Worried? I suspect a non-government chemist would fall on the floor laughing. La Pentola's pastry chef Matt Wilson gets his beans from a spice purveyor in Calgary - all above board.

At dbar in the Four Seasons Hotel Toronto, intrepid customers can bypass the published cold-cocktail menu to request a rotating selection of off-the-list hot drinks.

Should you feel a chill, the bar can whip up "a little bit of Canada," says Tasio Baserga, assistant bar manager.

That would be 1 1/2 ounces of Ontario-distilled Forty Creek whisky, 1/2 ounce Becherovka herbal liqueur from the Czech Republic and 1 ounce sweetener made of equal parts maple

syrup and water. The mug is topped up with hot water and garnished with a lemon twist.

Depending on your mood, you might alternatively favour the house-made hot chocolate spiked with The Kraken spiced rum and Kahlua coffee liqueur.

What I appreciate most about hot cocktails, besides warmth, is the general simplicity and latitude where measurements are concerned. If you can brew tea, you'd make a fine winter bartender.

The pillar is the dead-simple hot toddy, at its core a blend of three ingredients: spirit (usually brown), sweetener and water. One shot of booze to a teaspoon or two of sugar or honey and 3 to 5 ounces water work nicely. Should you crave additional aromatics, add a peel or squeeze of citrus and dusting of spices, such as cinnamon or nutmeg.

"This is one of those things

where it can be very personalized," says Veronica Saye, bartender at two fashionable Toronto establishments, Home of the Brave on King West and Hudson Kitchen on Dundas West. "My favourite is Scotch," she adds. And so is mine.

Strictly speaking, a toddy is defined by water, but tea can make just as compelling an aqueous solution.

Black teas - orange pekoe or Earl Grey - work well not only with brown spirits but also with aromatic gin, the spirit providing herbal yin to the tea's earthy yang.

By contrast, green tea marries well with whisky, I think, as in the popular Chinese cocktail that combines green tea with Scotch. It is usually served on the rocks, but I find it just as compelling served warm, especially this frigid month as a fitting way to celebrate Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan. 31.

HOT BUTTERED RUM

To make a facsimile of Martin Corriveau's version of hot buttered rum, mash together roughly equal volumes of room-temperature vanilla ice cream (though he uses house-made tonka-bean ice cream at his restaurant) and unsalted butter.

For one serving, use roughly a tablespoon each. Work in an equal volume of sugar and add the batter to a mug filled almost to the rim with 1-1/2 ounces dark rum and boiling water. The ice cream "just gives that extra touch of decadence," he says.

Veronica Saye's favourite hot toddies feature Scotch. Here's her recipe: 2 ounces Scotch plus either 1/2 ounce of honey or 1 ounce honey sugar, which blends more quickly.

She likes to drop in a lemon wheel (i.e., a slice), sometimes studded with whole cloves, and occasionally adds a dash of Angostura bitters. To that she adds 3 or 4 ounces hot water.

Beppi Crosariol

Cider is another enticing vehicle. Caleb Caswell, an Edmonton-based writer, came up with his own ingenious East-West fusion in a sleight-of-hand drink he calls the *Chai Cider*. Instead of actual cider, he uses 1-1/2 ounces Calvados, the French brandy distilled from cider, to spike a mug of Saigon Chai organic tea from David's Tea company, a Canadian chain.

Steep the tea for three to four minutes, pour in the Calvados and stir in a tablespoon of honey.

"The cider flavour comes from the apple brandy," he says, "and you have cinnamon coming from the chai." Subtle. Happy Chinese New Year, my Arctic brethren.

The *Flavour Principle*, a new cookbook and drinks compendium by Lucy Waverman and Beppi Crosariol, is in bookstores everywhere. Published by HarperCollins.