



# Bitters: A Spirited History of a Classic Cure-All, with Cocktails, Recipes, and Formulas

*Brad Thomas Parsons , Ed Anderson (Photographer)*

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**Gone are the days when a lonely bottle of Angostura bitters held court behind the bar.** A cocktail renaissance has swept across the country, inspiring in bartenders and their thirsty patrons a new fascination with the ingredients, techniques, and traditions that make the American cocktail so special. And few ingredients have as rich a history or serve as fundamental a role in our beverage heritage as bitters.

Author and bitters enthusiast Brad Thomas Parsons traces the history of the world's most storied elixir, from its earliest "snake oil" days to its near evaporation after Prohibition to its ascension as a beloved (and at times obsessed-over) ingredient on the contemporary bar scene. Parsons writes from the front lines of the bitters boom, where he has access to the best and boldest new brands and flavors, the most innovative artisanal producers, and insider knowledge of the bitters-making process.

Whether you're a professional looking to take your game to the next level or just a DIY-type interested in homemade potables, Bitters has a dozen recipes for customized blends--ranging from Apple to Coffee-Pecan to Root Beer bitters--as well as tips on sourcing ingredients and step-by-step instructions fit for amateur and seasoned food crafters alike.

Also featured are more than seventy cocktail recipes that showcase bitters' diversity and versatility: classics like the Manhattan (if you ever get one without bitters, send it back), old-guard favorites like the Martinez, contemporary drinks from Parsons's own repertoire like the Shady Lane, plus one-of-a-kind libations from the country's most pioneering bartenders. Last but not least, there is a full chapter on cooking with bitters, with a dozen recipes for sweet and savory bitters-infused dishes.

Part recipe book, part project guide, part barman's manifesto, Bitters is a celebration of good cocktails made well, and of the once-forgotten but blessedly rediscovered virtues of bitters.

## **Bitters: A Spirited History of a Classic Cure-All, with Cocktails, Recipes, and Formulas Details**

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# From Reader Review Bitters: A Spirited History of a Classic Cure-All, with Cocktails, Recipes, and Formulas for online ebook

## Kirk Dobihal says

Has given me incite into the world of bitters. Maybe even make my own. Imbibe ya'll.

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## John says

This was a bit disappointing for me. I hoped for some in-depth history on the subject of bitters; a few cocktail recipes with bitters as a focus; such as in the magnificent Trinidad Sour; and a lot of recipes and formulas for making bitters, including a thorough discussion of the flavors, aromas, bitterness level, and other qualities of the various ingredients that go into different bitters.

Instead, the book provides quite a brief history; merely a baker's dozen formulas for house-made bitters, all of which, as far as I can ascertain, are made using exactly the same technique (thereby padding out the book by a dozen pages); and a substantial number of cocktail and kitchen recipes. If you're somewhat of a cocktail novice, some of the recipes (such as the delicious Trident) might be new to you, but if you're an enthusiast, you won't find much that's new here. You will however find some things that will make you wince, or at least raise an eyebrow. Bitters in a Mint Julip? No. Just no.

The section on bitters in the kitchen is pretty interesting, however. While a few items in there seem gratuitous (bitters vinaigrette, compound bitters butters), others such as the Chinese-style spareribs or the bitters ice cream look interesting.

All in all, this seems more like a starting point for an exploration of the subject than the definitive guide I'd been hoping for. It'll stay on the shelf with my other booze-related books, but I'm not sure how often I'll pick it up.

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## MiLi says

Al comprarlo pensé que el enfoque iba a estar más en la parte teórica, pero resultó ser mucho más completo, ya que la mitad del libro es una compilación muy buena de recetas para hacer bitters caseros, para la realización de algunos tragos, tanto clásicos como modernos, y hasta de algunas comidas que utilizan estos ingredientes.

Buenas fotografías, recetas claras, bien escrito... Creo que este libro es fundamental en la biblioteca (física o virtual) de cualquier aficionado a la coctelería. Vale la pena.

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## Sara says

There's a lot of good info here on contemporary cocktail culture, as well as a great collection of drink (and food) recipes. It's also a beautifully designed book--it's lovely just to leaf through. This is great volume if you're looking for new things to try in your home bar or kitchen or if you're a craft cocktail fan/avid DIYer. If you are looking for the history of the usage of bitters, though, you'd be better off looking elsewhere.

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### **LeeAnn Close says**

As a bitters newbie, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. And recommended it to my husband, as well. The history was interesting. And all the various brands and types of bitters! Oh my! This book gave me a new world to discover and enjoy. And I have to try the recipe for the Hot & Sticky Bitter Wings and Sweet & Spicy Bitter Bar Nuts. We will also be trying the Ten Essential Bitters and definitely the Underberg. This was a great book gift to get!

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### **David says**

If this is a culmination of the bitters knowledge of the world, then I guess there just isn't that much to know.

But that's fine. Honestly, unless there was a rousing back-story of evil chemists and immortal sex pirates, I'm not sure a long and detailed history of bitters would have been much fun to read anyway.

I certainly learned all I need to know about the creation of bitters as medicinal elixirs and their fundamental importance in the genesis of the cocktail.

Really, the bulk of the book turns out to be a list of drink recipes calling for bitters and a guide to creating your own bitters (and other, less common drink ingredients you're not likely to find on your supermarket shelves like roasted chicken beaks with oak-aged sea cucumber).

I was delighted to learn that I could create a jug of my own passable bitters for less than the price of a used car. And so I have begun the month-and-a-half process of making the lemon bitters. Actually, that reminds me that I need to pull the jar out of the kitchen cabinet and give it the daily shake. We'll see how they turn out. I expect good things.

The drink recipes are interesting. You'll find most of the classics elsewhere, but I enjoyed Parsons' descriptions of them nonetheless. For some reason, cocktail book authors always like to wax poetic about the origins of drinks and how some 1920's movie starlet poured the ingredients down her ample curves under a gleaming moonlight into the hollowed-out head of an Abraham Lincoln ice sculpture in an exclusive and secretive club run by the CIA in the basement of the Empire State Building. But they rarely describe what the drink actually tastes like!

You'll spend a fortune and a week of your life that you'll never get back in order to create some of the modern drinks in listed in the final portion of the book. They're creative and they sound damned interesting. But it's unlikely I'll ever taste any of them.

I give this book four stars for existing. I love obsessive fixations, and cocktail culture is a great place to find them (or form some of your own)!

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## **Kimberly Ann says**

What a wonderful book on the use of "Bitters" with cocktails, recipes & formulas. Bitters are an aromatic flavoring agent made from infusing spices, herbs, flowers, barks, roots & other botanicals in a high-proof alcohol or glycerin. They were long ago used for medicinal reasons: indigestion, cramps, headaches or constipation (Castoria?).

Most animals & humans shy away from bitters as historically BITTER usually signaled the presence of toxins, which could very possibly lead to death.

Contents of the book contain: Introduction; A brief history of Bitters; A bitters boom; Making your own bitters; Setting up your bar; Bitters Hall of Fame; 3 sections of recipes; Resources; Recommended reading; Acknowledgements; and Index.

Old Guard Cocktails: Abbey Cocktail; Angostura Fizz; Cuba Libre; Fourth Regiment Cocktail; Harvard Cocktail; Jersey Cocktail; Martini; Pink Gin; Rob Roy; Satan's Whiskers; and Vieux Carre.

New-Look Cocktails: 5th Avenue Cocktail; Bitter Handshake; Black Feather; Black Scottish Cyclops; Fernet & Coke; Gargoyle & Spire; "Michelada"; Shady Lane; Sorghum Flip; Tombstone; Trident; Woodland Sunset; and Zim Zala Bim

Bitters in the Kitchen: Broiled bitter grapefruit; Sweet & spicy bitter bar nuts; Compound bitters butters; Bourbon bitters holiday ham glaze; Hot & sticky bitter wings; Bitters sweet chocolate malted pudding; and Aromatic bitters ice cream

Very interesting and creative recipes.....

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## **Eric says**

If you are like me, the thought of making your own bitters is enough to reach first for the Underberg (to relieve the heartburn), and then the Angostura (for another Manhattan). Even so, there is much to like about Mr. Parson's Bitters, which is a handsome, if superficial, introduction to bitters & cocktails.

The superficiality lies in the "Spirited History" part of the title, which is entertaining but all too brief - 30some pages - and spends half of those pages retelling the current bitters boom, much of which is destined to be ephemera. Following that, another nearly 30 pages are dedicated to properly stocking your cocktail bar. This is valuable information if you are new to cocktails, but if you've been around the block there isn't much new here.

On the plus side, there 90 pages of cocktail recipes, about 45 of which are dedicated to the classics, all of which are paired with witty banter. If you are looking to switch up from Angostura and Peychaud's to Orange Bitters and other exotic flavors, you'll find some cocktails to fit the bill.

Finally, the book ends with 20some pages of food recipes. I'm looking forward to trying the Bourbon bitters

ham glaze.

Beyond that, the book itself is a finely crafted monograph, and a reminder of why we all love physical books. The hardcover binding is solid, the cover text is embossed, the pages are heavyweight and inviting to the touch, and the photography is gorgeous. She is a pleasure to look at, either on your cocktail shelf or in your lap as you sip a Sazerac in your club chair.

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### **Stuart says**

A concise history of bitters that also charts the rise of the craft cocktail. Well designed and full of great recipes. Shout out to my homie BTP for including the same boilerplate text across like 30 full pages of DIY bitters recipes. Nobody can fill a book better!

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### **H4tt3r says**

Great information and fairly entertaining, and overall, really pretty build quality. As a side note, this book is really resonant, like way more than your average book. I'm definitely going to record some samples thumping around on this book.

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### **Amanda Mitkov says**

This is a fantastic reference for anyone interested in well-crafted cocktails with quality ingredients. There's an entire section on making your own bitters, which I can't wait to try, I've been making my own flavored liqueurs for years. There's also a section on the craft of bartending itself, essential tools and what spirits and ingredients are recommended to build up your home bar with, along with brand recommendations. The writer's experience shines through here. Trying to remember that the flavor of a spirit or liqueur can affect the taste of a drink is important when you're thinking about substituting an ingredient in a cocktail with something of a lower quality (and remember that cheaper doesn't always mean low quality, you just have to experiment and find what you like). I was also intrigued by the cooking recipes using bitters and being an avid cook, it really got my imagination going. If you love making cocktails at home or just want to learn more about the craft and history of the cocktail, this book is essential. It's also wonderfully put together, with gorgeous full page photographs.

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### **Rooks says**

Ok, so on the one hand, while I love to read cookbooks and the like, I expected this book to have more history and fewer recipes; it has sections on history and lots of lovely li'l anecdotes, but it's really more of a practical guide than a history, and my head was all prepped for a history. In a good way. I mean, I love me some random history of a niche subject. Actually, there's this great book on the Mann Act . . .

Ahem. Back on track.

Now, on the other hand, it has recipes and advice for making one's own bitters! Holy smokes! It also has recipes for drinks - mainly classic cocktails or variations thereon, using base spirits that are more often than not currently popular among the fancy drink set (Yes, I'm looking at YOU, St. Germain, because I have yet to be convinced of your merits, no matter how many ways I've tried you) - and for using bitters in food, even Bitters Compound Butters, which you'd better believe I have every intention of trying. It's also got an amazing resources section (no really, it's Tony-the-flippin'-Tiger GRRREAT, in my opinion) and a lot of really fun tidbits about the current cocktail scene.

Clearly I am behind the times since taking a sabbatical from the bartending trade, though I doubt I e'er worked in places that are the sorts of beacons of mixology Parsons tends to cover in this book. Regardless, apparently making bitters is totally a thing now. Especially in Brooklyn. And our author, he's a total amalgamation of a certain kind of Brooklyn and Seattle, a fact about which he makes no bones, and also a fact that is really, really evident. Really. Ask me about the intro to one section that explains his love of bourbon and sometime repetitious use of same by making an analogy to the notion that occasionally, well, you just need two Pavement songs on a mixtape. Yes, really. It's not particularly annoying, unless you're, for whatever reason, predisposed to being annoyed by that sort of thing. Me, I was ok with it.

So yes, at times it felt more like a history of the modern cocktail revival and a catalogue of bitters than a per se history of bitters. In that way, reading it was akin to when you take a sip of a glass of clear liquid thinking it's water, and it turns out it's gin. Are you sad? No, probably not. However, are you rather a bit disquieted? Hell yes. It just takes a second to fully adjust one's expectations.

As such, when trying to decide what to rate it, I was torn. In the end, I felt that the great info contained herein definitely outweighed my mild chagrin at the somewhat misleading title, and went with the 4/5.

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### **George Marshall says**

I really enjoyed reading and experimenting. I would have had appreciated a much heavier hand in history and lighter on the recipes, but the recipe quality and commentsry was itself quite enjoyable.

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### **Niki Ganong says**

This is worth a purchase as a recipe book. But I have heard the stories elsewhere before.

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### **Anne Frisbie says**

An absolutely wonderful book. My favorite part was the history of bitters which was enlightening and completely entertaining.

Brad Thomas Parsons is my kind of person: "When I'm into something - a band, a book, a bourbon - I tend to get a bit obsessed." Clearly, a "bit" is said with loads of sarcasm as this book - which is filled with so much passion and random in-depth knowledge - is born from one of his "minor" obsessions. BTP's passion for bitters really shines through, and that is what makes this book an absolute joy to read.



I also enjoyed his later book *Amaro: The Spirited World of Bittersweet, Herbal Liqueurs with Cocktails, Recipes, and Formulas* - though I think that this book on bitters - a narrower subject than Amaro - was covered with more even more passion and depth.

Some of the fascinating lessons about bitters in the book: 1) Peychaud's and Angostura were really the only two bitters with success from the early to mid 1850s until the modern cocktail revolution around the turn of the 21st century with The Fee Brothers "keeping the flame" those 150 years, but not doing much else than that. Clearly that is not the case today where the early 21st century is exploding in bitters! 2) Bitters are classified as non-potable alcohol and are usually regulated as food not alcohol, despite their high alcohol content but because you only use a dash. 3) Regans Orange Bitters No 6 (not #4 or #5 - despite those recipes being published in earlier books by the Regans) is what we buy today because #5 would have been classified as alcohol because it was too delicious and consumers would have not limited usage to a dash or two! Lots of other interesting facts about bitters but those are a few of the highlights.

Loved the book for the history, but have also been trying the cocktail recipes with success. Cocktails I have tried so far are - Pith Helmet, Shady Lady and Tippsy Nissley - which were all good and worth having again. Considering trying the food recipes - especially the Broiled Bitters Grapefruit. I am not sure that I want to try DIY bitters - because there are so many fabulous ones available on the market - but for those that want to make their own I am sure this is the book for you.

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