

Let the colors
of the holiday
blend into the colors
of your quaffs

Rainbow coalition

BY ROBERT RASTELLI
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Gather up friends and family for your Fourth of July celebrations, and then show them your true colors.

They might be green, orange, pink and even red, white and blue.

Bright colors and new unexpected flavors light up the panoply of summer drinks this year, and for those uninitiated in the world of bartending and mixology, these are the drinks that will get people to stand up and cheer, even without fireworks overhead.

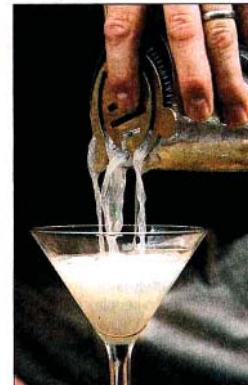
"In the food and drink business, we are constantly trying out new things," says Aaron Potocny, 34, of Harrison, a mixologist and corporate sales associate for Ome Caterers in Whippany. In his spare time — even with three kids at home — he invents new drinks, hoping to lure the company's clients with bold and unusual flavors.

During a visit to The Star-Ledger test kitchen, Potocny really shook things up with his new Cantaloupe Cooler — a breezy and intense mix of melon, mint, ginger and gin — and a smashing Sage Margarita with the distinct herb flavor accenting the tequila and Cointreau. It's the kick of the ginger at the back of the throat

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Want to make a Cantaloupe Cooler or a Sage Margarita? Mixologist Aaron Potocny will show you how. Catch the video at nj.com and tvjersey.com.



PHOTOS BY JOE EPSTEIN/THE STAR-LEDGER

At top, the Sage Margarita and the Cantaloupe Cooler from Aaron Potocny of Ome Caterers. Above, from top left: Potocny peels the cantaloupe, chooses sage for the margarita, strains the margarita into a martini glass, shakes the devil out of his cocktail mix, and prepares limes for both drinks.

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DRINKS

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Celebrate the colors of the holiday

that'll get ya.

"Botanicals are playing a large part in the drinks business now," he says, also suggesting fresh thyme as a boosting agent for the flavor of just about any drink. (Try a sprig in your next martini.)

"A lot of herbs have been turning up in drinks lately, herbs you would normally associate with food products instead. Now they are being implemented in mixology."

That's just how he came up with his special Sage Margarita, a potent layer of fresh sage flavor etched into the other ingredients. It's refreshing and unique at the same time, a drink he calls "light."

Potocny prefers Hendrick's Scottish gin for his cantaloupe cooler, which he says is distilled with cucumber to give it a garden-fresh and vastly different finish. "But you can make this drink with your own favorite gin, like Bombay



STAR-LEDGER FILE PHOTO

The bellini is a classic drink, celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

Sapphire, and it would be just as good," he adds.

All this invention behind the bar, however, doesn't eliminate the "standards," favorite drinks like the bellini, celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, or the daiquiri, being honored July 19 with National Daiquiri Day, of all things. Both are iconic and more popular than ever, say those in the business.

"Envision a spot on the beach or at the pool with one of the 'classics,' like the margarita or the colada," says John Bandman, a New Jersey native and certified mixologist, as well as a beverage and restaurant management instructor at the Art Institute of New York.

"Sour drinks are also classics for the summer, but this time they are being made with pisco — a potent

grape brandy from Chile and Peru — instead of plain whisky," he says. The whisky is substituted and the mix of lemon or lime juice, sugar and egg white gives this traditional drink a new and flavor-packed punch.

For David Martone of Classic Thyme cooking school in Westfield, a renewed interest in prosecco, the glistening sparkling Italian wine, is a trend no one can ignore anymore, especially for the lit it lends to summer.

"There is a smaller bubble size to prosecco as opposed to champagne, and people are beginning to like it more," he says. "It has more fruitiness to it and it's a pleasant drink as an icebreaker at a party and goes nicely with a first course for the dinner crowd."

For the drinking crowd — mainly in the bars — however, the experts are seeing standards like daiquiris and coladas, "two of the most popular drinks sought after in this situation," says Bandman. These seem to be less popular with the "eating" crowd, those out to dinner instead of just hanging at the bar.

"There's also the Mexican version of the liquado, a lot like a smoothy, with fresh fruit, milk, honey or sugar that's then blended with ice.

"We're seeing liquados made with watermelon, mangoes, papayas or any combination of them," he adds.

Bandman also is witnessing the resurgence of rosés as a drink for the elegant crowd during the summer.

"Rosés are really being marketed out there now, and they are cool," he says.

If you want to think pink during the summer sunsets, mix up a few new items being promoted by Pinky Vodka. Try the Madras, with one part Pinky Vodka, a splash of cranberry juice and a splash of orange juice. Shake this over ice and garnish with an edible flower, then smile.

How about a Grand Marnier sangria, tossing together the famous amber liquor with grapes, lemons, oranges, apples, cinnamon sticks, red wine, orange juice and



JOE EPSTEIN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Mixologist Aaron Potocny strains cantaloupe juice for the cooler he created with ginger and gin in The Star-Ledger test kitchen.



LARRY CROWE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Try a Red, White and Blue Sangria for a real taste of summer.

lime juice. This take on the "ordinary" sangria makes for an unexpected and welcome change.

Then there is the indescribable *caipirinha*, the serious, husky Brazilian drink with *cachaca*, a sugar cane-based spirit, mixed with fresh fruit and a little sugar. A blast from South America well worth the hype.

Then again, to be particularly patriotic on Friday, try the Red White and Blue Sangria from "101 Sangrias and Pitcher Drinks" by Kim Haasarud (Wiley, \$16.95).

There's everything in there from white wine and triple sec to berry vodka, lemon juice, simple syrup, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and pineapple chunks.

Celebrate in style and color, during and after the holiday.