

who's thirsty for a fall classic?

by tony abou-ganim

Fall immediately brings to mind cooler weather and leaves changing colors, falling from the trees, and awaiting the attention of a rake. I also think of the wonderful produce—apples, pears, and pumpkins—and the delicious pies and pastries made from them. And one of my favorite autumn indulgences, which has found its way into my cocktail repertoire, is hot apple cider.

HOT CIDER AND MORE

Although wonderful all on its own, hot apple cider lends itself so perfectly to the addition of what I call the spirits of fall. When the temperatures drop and the wind chill is frightful, one needs a tittle that will raise the spirits and stick to the bones. This is a time for the brown spirits. Aged and spiced rums immediately come to mind, as do bourbon, rye, and Tennessee whiskey. And who could overlook the allure of Irish whiskey, steaming coffee, and fresh whipped cream combined in a classic Irish Coffee? All of these work wonderfully with hot cider, but my personal favorite is the lost-and-forgotten Rock & Rye.

A COMFORT AND CURE

At one time in history, most bars had their own recipe for making Rock & Rye, a traditional wintertime elixir commonly believed to hold medicinal properties of sweeping proportions. This interesting creation, made by dissolving rock candy in rye whiskey with the addition of fruit, was often drunk to ward off sickness or to aid digestion. The libation was served neat, on the rocks, or with hot water and a slice of lemon in a toddy.

Rock & Rye also seemed to transcend its value as a cure-all, judging by this account in *The Esquire Drink Book* (1956):

“Once upon a time, a person afflicted with rasp, or contemplating the possibility that he might be in the near or distant future, would prepare his remedy by putting rock candy and citrus fruit slices and peels into a jug of rye, corking, and setting it aside. . . . The only trouble is that sympathetic friends who rush to the sick one’s bedside will want to share his medicine (which has the taste and texture of a liqueur), possibly forgetting to leave a thimbleful for him.”

Charles H. Baker, Jr., writing in his seminal work, *The Gentleman’s Companion* (1936), shares a similar sentiment:

“Rock & Rye can be served hot with excellent effect to fight off colds, influenzas, miasmas, migrains, swamp mists, and blackwater fevers. In fact, any sort of excuse seems to work.”

This is a wonderful beverage to keep around the house to help ease you through those long, cold autumn and winter nights. And, who knows, it may very well prove a great elixir for weathering one of those pesky colds!

SPICED APPLE TODDY

By Tony Abou-Ganim

Yield: 15 servings

- 5 cinnamon sticks
- 30 whole cloves
- 1/2 vanilla bean
- 1 gallon apple cider
- 1/2 cup clover honey
- 25 oz homemade Rock & Rye*
- Cinnamon-stick garnish

Start by breaking the cinnamon sticks and cloves and bruising the vanilla bean. Fill a mirepoix bag with the spices. In a large saucepan combine the cider, honey, and mirepoix. Bring to a boil, let cool for at least four hours, and remove the mirepoix. Reheat when ready to serve, adding the Rock & Rye at the last moment. Serve in heated mugs with a cinnamon-stick garnish.

*Homemade Rock & Rye recipe below courtesy of *The Gentleman’s Companion*, by Charles H. Baker, Jr.

- Jigger Jamaica rum
- 1/2 cup rock candy, left in large lumps
- 12 whole cloves
- 1 or 2 cinnamon sticks
- 4 quarters small orange, peel left on
- 4 quarters seedless lemon, peel left on
- 1/5 gallon (750 ml bottle) rye whiskey

Combine the rum, rock candy, spices, and fruit in a jar; cover with the rye and let stand for a fortnight. Strain out the spices through fine cloth or filter paper. Put back on the fruit until needed.



Tony Abou-Ganim is the proprietor of the Modern Mixologist, a beverage consulting firm that specializes in bar staff training, product education, and cocktail development. He and his recipes have been featured in a variety of magazines, books, and television and radio shows. He is presently at work on his first book, *The Modern Mixologist*.