

A comprehensive home bartending course designed for the aspiring professional.

Professional Bartending From Scratch

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*P R O F E S S I O N A L*

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**BARTENDING  
FROM SCRATCH**

A COMPREHENSIVE HOME TRAINING COURSE

*...the affordable alternative to Bartending School*

*Barry Lee Marris*

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ISBN

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Design and layout by Tanja Lee Graphics, [tanjalee@comcast.net](mailto:tanjalee@comcast.net)

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# PREFACE

Bartending is easy to learn, requiring very little time, very little practice, especially if the learner is a serious student. This bartending course was originally organized to teach immigrant students certain professional hospitality skills in San Francisco's Chinatown. These students knew nothing about bartending or American pub culture, and most of them had limited ability in spoken English. In order to teach this course, I had to design a curriculum that would introduce the students to a very strange occupational world in a very organized, take-nothing-for-granted way.

Long ago, in a far distant galaxy, I had learned bartending from scratch in a similar fashion: two weeks in bartending school. It was enough information to get started. Having had a teaching background, I soon realized (once I was a working bartender) that the curriculum I had learned from was seriously lacking in many ways. So when I had a clean-slate chance to create my own curriculum, I organized it in a logical and informational way that would make sense to a complete outsider—a person that doesn't know the lingo, the protocol, the merchandise, or the mechanics. A person that may not even drink, much less frequent bars.

This course will give the learner all the skills necessary to get a good bartending job and perform the job well. And everything can be learned and practiced at home with minimal equipment and virtually no expense.

Most bartending courses are full of hype and romantic promises, making the learning appear much more complicated than it is. Let me repeat: bartending is easy to learn, especially if it is organized well. This is a no frills, no nonsense, learning curriculum that teaches you only what you need to get started in the field. It will give you insider tips, reveal industry myths, and provide straightforward, realistic advice.

While bartending is easy to learn, like any artistic pursuit, it takes time and experience to master. Notice I didn't say bartending was easy, I only said it was easy to learn. The ease of bartending will grow as your mastery grows. If you are serious in your endeavor and patient in your pursuit, you will find all the tools inside yourself. They say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This course will make your strides steadier, quicker, and more confident. Bon voyage.

*Barry Lee Marris*

## Chapter Two: Beer, Wine, and Champagne

**Beer is proof that God loves us  
and wants us to be happy.**

~ Benjamin Franklin

**A hangover is the wrath of grapes.**

~ Anon

**I'll stick with Gin. Champagne is just  
Ginger Ale that knows somebody.**

~ Hawkeye, M\*A\*S\*H\*

Every pub has its own selection of beer and wine—sometimes large, sometimes small—usually based on the needs and demands of its customer base. An upscale clientele usually demands a large variety of brands and styles, while a small neighborhood bar may only carry a few basics. Restaurant bars will have more wines than an airport bar. College town taverns may go heavy on beer, lighter on wines. A large wine selection does demand a bit more homework for the bartender who wants to be informed enough to be able to recommend something to the curious, less informed customer. And some restaurant bars may require a certain wine knowledge when hiring. Two points here: an intelligent understanding of wine can be attained easily with minimal study and most bartending jobs do not require more than a basic understanding of wine. It is also important to note that sophisticated wine palates are acquired—a talent of time and experience. In this respect, in my opinion, wine is as much a food as it is a beverage and, in this respect, large restaurant wine inventories are more rightly in the purview and responsibility of the kitchen than of the bar.

### BEER

Because beer brands are so regional and so numerous, there are only a handful of nationally sold brands. An East Coast bartender would have no way of knowing what beers are popular in the Midwest. A bartender in the Midwest will not know what folks drink in San Francisco. A San Francisco barkeep wouldn't have a clue about what they're guzzling in Dallas. And likewise, most probably, the bar in Dallas stocks beers they don't stock in Houston. It is that regional. So the good news is: there is no way, or no need, to overfamiliarize oneself with too many brand names of beer in preparation for a job. You will find out when you get there.



Beer is served from a bottle or a tap. Every bar will have bottled beers on hand, but not necessarily draught (draft) beer. With the rise of small regional breweries, tap beer has become much more common, for, theoretically, it provides the freshest way to serve up the brew. And beer, unlike wine, has a relatively short life before its fresh quality is noticeably diminished. Stale beer is no fun.

Beer is crafted and brewed in various styles, imparting to the beer a characteristic look and taste. Some have a deep dark, almost black color. Some are an amber color. Some are almost a pale yellow. Some beers are very light in flavor, some heavy. Some are “hoppy.” Some are “bright” or even “sweet” or “dry.” It is unusual for a customer to ask for recommendations when ordering beer. They usually know what they like. The exception to this is if there is a new beer on tap. In that case, a curious customer may ask about it or even request a taste. Very generally speaking, it is not important to know a lot about beer in a technical way, because, as with wine, the beer drinker usually has a favorite beer and a strong opinion to go with it, and, groundless or not, feels good about knowing more than the bartender. Go with the flow, no sense in trying to outsmart a smart ass. And there is a certain wisdom in listening: Mr. Know-It-All may actually know what he is talking about and you could be the lucky beneficiary of his vast, albeit pompous, library of facts.



Here are some styles of beer: Ale, Lager, Pilsner, IPA, Stout, Wheat (Hefeweizen), blah, blah, blah. Anyone who spends any time reading about the differences between beer types comes to one quick conclusion: no one agrees on much, names are used interchangeably and terms are used very loosely. And every country has the best beer. Conclusion: let the brewmasters worry and argue about it. All the bartender really needs to know is that there are four basic differences: Lagers and Ales, light and dark. The distinguishing difference between a Lager and an Ale is unessential (but interesting) information: Lagers are brewed with a yeast that ferments on the bottom of the brew tank and Ales with yeast that does its thing on the top, or surface, of the tank. Different strokes for different folks.

Only two more important differences to be aware of: beer is either light or dark in color (depending on the type of malted grain used in production). Yes, some have fewer calories (confusingly referred to as “light”), some have a higher alcohol content, some are less filling, yada-yada. “Pilsner” is a Lager style beer, although it is often used in speech as though it were a different breed. Don’t argue with those who insist on these silly subjects. Most “handcrafted” or “micro-brewed” beers are Ales, made with malted barley, some with more hops (the other critical ingredient) than others; India Pale Ale (IPA), for instance, is noted for its extreme hoppy character. Most of the

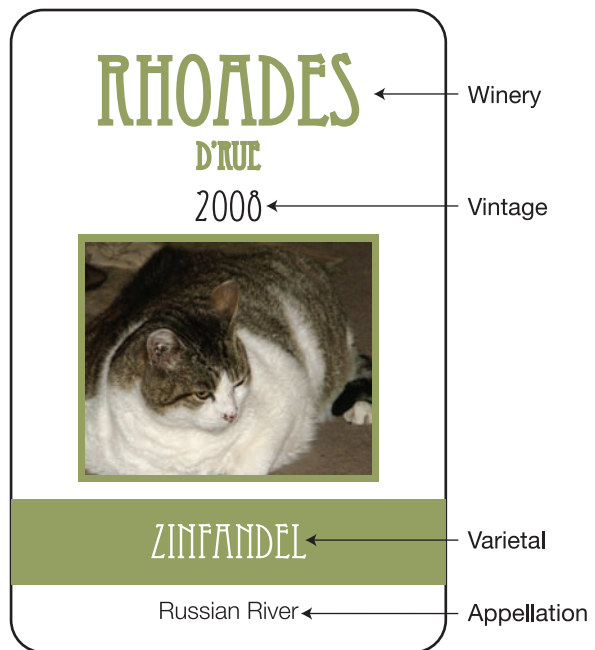
light colored bottle beers that are marketed nationally are Lagers, whether they be domestic or imported.

And there you have it: all you need to know about beer to function intelligently. And, should you want to know more, kudos! You've always got the internet.

## WINE

Wine preference is also very regional, as is its popularity. Time was, not too long ago, if a bar stocked wine at all, it was one of two choices: Burgundy or Chablis, Red or White. That is still true in some parts of America, but in the larger cities, and in the more sophisticated restaurants, wine choices are many. Still, this shouldn't be intimidating because, at its roots, wine is simple: it's Red or it's White, and sometimes pink (Rosé or Blush).

After that, there are three important distinctions: 1) the Varietal, 2) the Appellation, and 3) the Vintage. The Varietal is the kind of grape from which the wine is made. The Appellation is the name of the region where the grapes are grown. The Vintage is the year that the grapes were har-



### WHITE WINE VARIETALS

#### Very Popular:

Chardonnay /shar-doe-nay/  
 Sauvignon Blanc\* /so-vee-nyon-blahn/  
 Fume Blanc\* /foo-may blahn/

\*same varietal, different names

#### Other Whites:

Pinot Gris /pee-no-gree/  
 Riesling /reece-ling/  
 Gewürztraminer /geh-VAIRTZ-tra-meener/

### RED WINE VARIETALS

#### Very Popular:

Zinfandel /ZIHN-fuhn-dehl/ often  
 mispronounced /zin-vin-del/  
 Merlot /mare-low/ usually mispronounced  
 /mer-low/  
 Cabernet Sauvignon /cab-air-nay-so-vee-nyon/  
 Pinot Noir, often "Pinot" /PEE-no-nwar/  
 Syrah or Shiraz /see-RAH and shee-RAZ/

#### Other Reds:

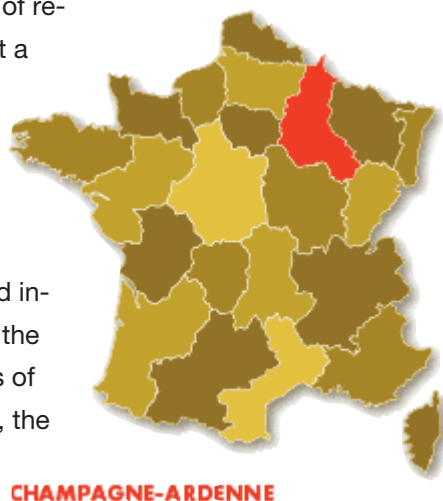
Sangiovese /san-joh-VAY-zeh/  
 Barbera /bar-BEHR-a/

vested, processed, and bottled. Think of a wine as a house with an address: the wine's Varietal is the house. What kind of house? A Chardonnay house. The Appellation is the house location: Napa Valley. And the house was built in 2002, its Vintage year. Voila! A 2002 Napa Valley Chardonnay! Here are some of the most commonly requested wines.

There are others, for sure, but these represent the common requests. Also, remember, if the wine selection is large, there will be a printed wine menu to guide the customer. French wines do not abide by the above “house address” protocol. French wines are all about the address and little about the house itself. They will be labeled by their region, and knowledgeable wine drinkers will associate the region with the grape. This is unessential information, but in no way uninteresting. For the eager and interested bartender there is a vast library of resources about wine and winemaking from which to learn, but a *sophisticated* knowledge of wine is not an arrow that the new bartender's quiver need carry.

## CHAMPAGNE

Champagne and Sparkling Wine—these terms are often used interchangeably, although, technically, “Champagne” refers to the French geographical region where it is made. Other products of its type are referred to in English as Sparkling Wines. Legally, the United States gets away with labeling any Sparkling Wine as Champagne because the U.S. was not a signatory to the original treaty forbidding any region other than the Champagne region of France from using this term.



The average bartender does not need much technical knowledge about Sparkling Wine. Opening a bottle can be intimidating, but it need not. It's a bit like dealing with a pressure cooker or inflating a tire: the anticipation of an explosion gives us the jitters. But the fear is un-



founded in each case, and perhaps more so with Champagne. Yes, the cork is under pressure and it will pop. Big deal, here is how to do it: Remove the foil (there is usually a little pull strip somewhere along the side of the foil covering, allowing one to easily tear the foil away from the bottle top). Then remove the wire capper above the cork (it secures the cork from any accidental disturbance) by slowly unwinding the wire until the capper is loosened. Take it off without fear—the cork will not blow off! Then, with a towel for traction on the cork, and to catch any overflow from the bottle, slowly turn and pull the cork until you can feel

its eminent release. Then, smoothly (and confidently) give it a final (but gentle) pull. There will be a pleasing “pop,” there will be no explosion. You may now pour the bubbly slowly down the side of the Champagne Glass leaving enough room at the top of the glass for the last bubbles to splash about. Also, Champagne, like wine, is often *shared* from a newly opened bottle, so by pouring less than a full glass, you are prudently conserving enough portions to go around.

Champagne/Sparkling Wines are categorized by their level of sweetness or dryness, and this level is indicated on the label by the following terms, listed here from driest to sweetest: Extra-Brut (driest), Brut, Extra Dry, Sec, Demi-Sec, and Doux (sweetest, a dessert wine). Don't worry too much about these categories, people usually know what they want. Remember this: Brut is drier (less sweet) than Extra Dry, and anything else gets noticeably sweeter. People will sometimes ask for something dry. Suggest an Extra Brut or Brut.

---

*An Irishman, an Englishman, and a Scotsman go into a pub and each orders a pint of Guinness. Just as the bartender hands them over, three flies buzz down and land in each of the pints. The Englishman looks disgusted, pushes his pint away and demands another pint. The Scotsman picks the fly out of his beer, shrugs, and takes a long swallow. The Irishman reaches into the glass, pinches the fly between his fingers and shakes it, yelling “Spit it out ya bastard, spit it out!”*



Of all the bar products one may serve, beer and wine are the most regional-centric. There is no way of predicting what is popular and where. Of course, all the nationally advertized domestic beers will be available in almost every bar, but after that, it's a matter of taste and local culture. The tastes and appeal of wine are even harder to generalize—it is that different from geographical place to place. Because there are so many individual brands (wineries), it is impossible to know, and foolish to try to learn, the hundreds of wines that may be available in any given location. A familiarity with the Varietals and the common Appellations is a good start. Each bar will carry its own choice of brands, which is usually the name of the winery from which it comes. You will learn which ones the establishment offers when you begin work. And remember, you will usually have a printed wine list that you can provide to the customer.

If you are working in a restaurant that offers wine and Champagne, remember this tip: Ask the servers for advice on wine/Champagne service and presentation. Even though table service is usually more formal than at-the-bar service, it is good to know the correct service protocol since it is a beverage department procedure.

As I suggested in Chapter One, make a field trip to a large retailer where you can see the wine and beer choices up close. They will be displayed and stocked by their variety: Merlots, Cabs (Cabernet), Chardonnays, Pinots, etc. Their Appellation (area where the grapes were grown) is printed on the label: Napa Valley, Dry Creek, Monterey, etc. Very often, these stores have free literature that provides information about the various wineries and local Appellations.

You'll notice that wine and Champagne retail prices run the gamut: from low-end (\$6 to \$15 per bottle) to high-end (\$20 to \$40), and ultra-fine or rare wines can go well beyond \$100. Although price is usually a reliable indicator of quality, some very good wines are very reasonably priced. And when the price is right and the wine is good, the wine tastes even better!

Some restaurants allow customers to bring their own wine choice from home foregoing a purchase from the house wine menu. In this case, a charge is added to the customer's tab for this privilege. The charge is called a Corkage Fee. Every establishment has its own set fee. Should the customer supplement his/her own wine with additional wine from the establishment's menu, the Corkage is sometimes waived.

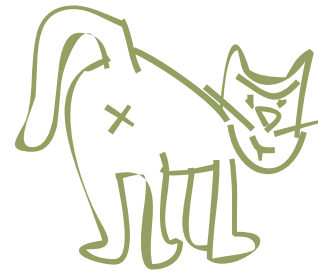
Generally speaking, only the very high end Champagnes have a Vintage date on them. If you see one, and the price isn't too extreme, and you like Champagne, chances are you are in for a treat.

*By the way, did you know...*

*The expression "mind your Ps and Qs" is very likely derived from the habit of keeping tabs in the old English pubs. Drinks were served in Pint and Quart size glasses. Bartenders and customers alike were admonished to keep track of their drinks by minding their number of Pints or Quarts. The modern bartender doesn't much worry about Quarts these days, but minding the Pints is an everyday responsibility.*

## CHAPTER QUIZ

1. What are the two basic types of beer?
2. Zinfandel, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon refer to a type of grape and, hence, a type of wine. What is the technical term used to identify the type of wine?
3. What is the term used to describe the location in which the wine grapes are grown?
4. Name three popular types of Red and White Wine.
5. What is another name for Fume Blanc?
6. What is the American term for Champagne?



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