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Whiskey chicks

New York City women are trading cosmos
for the hard stuff

By LISA ARCELLA

If the thought of ordering up an old fashioned the next time you're at a bar or club seems well, sort of old-fashioned, think again. Bourbon, gin and Scotch aren't just in your grandfather's liquor cabinet anymore. Bartenders throughout the city tell the Daily News that more and more young women are requesting the harder stuff these days.

"Many of my female customers are experimenting with different types of drinks, like Manhattans," says the bartender and bar manager of Taj nightclub, Justin Shafran. "They're tired of the sweet stuff."

Jennifer Adams, a 25-year-old teacher from Manhattan, says she used to strictly be a cosmo or apple martini girl, but now when she heads out to nightclubs like Pacha or Pink Elephant she'll ask for a dirty gin martini or Johnny Black with Coke, and at Culture Club/NerveAna it's a pearl jam - a specialty drink featuring Bacardi 151 rum. "I switched in the last year or so," she says. "All of my boyfriends always drank Scotch or bourbon or gin and, little by little, I would sip theirs and began to like it. I liked that I can now hang out with the big boys."

The desire to be one of the guys is one factor leading the trend, according to Judson Sherman-Rose, the beverage director for One Little West 12th and STK. "I have seen more and more women in their 20s and 30s the last six months drinking whisky," he says. "They're ordering Jameson on the rocks and Jack Daniels shots. The average girl next door can pound down shots just like any guy these days. Maybe in the past those kinds of drinks would have been associated with a certain type of established older man, but now a 36-year-old female stockbroker wants to feel like she is just a member of the club, too."

Last year Sherman-Rose's drink list centered on sweet-tasting concoctions, traditionally considered "girly" drinks. Now he says he is busy re-creating Prohibition-era cocktails with a base of gin or whisky.



GETTY

Hard liquor is increasingly the drink of choice at bars and clubs for women in their 20s and 30s.

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Naomi, a 29-year-old fashion designer from Manhattan, says she likes to order a bee's knees (gin, honey and grapefruit juice) or a sidecar (cognac, Cointreau and lemon juice). "I love Pimms, too," she explains. "Happy Ending has good drinks that are kind of classics. I think they go with my style, which is kind of a 1940s modern kind of thing, so it seemed natural."

And Maria Aereu, a 25-year-old accountant from Long Island, says she likes either Patrón tequila (tequila is reportedly the No. 1 growing spirit in America) or Hennessy cognac and Coke when she goes to clubs like Cain, and says she feels no stigma when she or her friends order hard spirits: "Really, I think that sometimes girls don't want to be perceived as ordering something considered too feminine."

At BED, bartender and consultant Leo DeGroff says that after 10 years of vodka-based cocktails, women in particular were ready for a change. "Palates change," he says. "Women in New York are more adventurous and willing to try new things. Sometimes they don't think they will like hard alcohol, until they taste something really great we mix up for them." DeGroff, 25, even created a specialty cocktail made with Maker's Mark bourbon to celebrate TV producer Mark Burnett's new AOL game Gold Rush (www.aol.com/goldrush), which can be specially requested at the club. It's called the gold rush mint and is a bit reminiscent of a mojito.

And according to bartenders Leanne Shear and Tracey Toomey, coauthors of the novel "The Perfect Manhattan," there's also another, more practical motivation for women to drink stronger spirits.

"Something like whisky on the rocks is much less of a calorie-packed, hangover-inducer than a sugary cosmopolitan. We women have learned our lesson," says Shear. "Most women can't drink too much hard alcohol in one sitting - unlike those fruity bikini martinis - and the little secret we've seen the smart women do is sip/nurse just a couple of vodkas on the rocks and keep their wits about them, making a much better social impression overall on the bosses and clients."

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