

Some Like It Hot

JUST IN TIME FOR WINTER, BARTENDERS AROUND TOWN ARE FIRING UP. BY JORDAN MACKAY

One of the few proven remedies for the San Francisco cold is a hot drink of the alcoholic sort. I know this firsthand: A couple of winters ago, when I got back from a trip to Mexico—dressed idiotically in sandals, cotton pants and a T-shirt for the flight home—I exited the BART station to wind and a drizzle that stung my skin like acid. Once inside, I found my house colder than it was outdoors (an only-in-SF phenomenon). I put on a kettle. Into a mug I poured cognac, a squeeze of lemon and a spoonful of honey, and topped it with boiling water. One sip and I felt life return to my toes. After that, one hot toddy was followed by another—and then another. Within an hour, I was toasty warm (not to mention pleasantly drunk). I woke up with no trace of a cold.

SPANISH COFFEE

This hot drink from Absinthe is a pyrotechnic showstopper. Serves 1

Sugar for coating rim of glass
1 ounce 151-proof rum
ground cinnamon (preferably in a shakable container)
4 ounces hot coffee
½ ounce Kahlúa
½ ounce brandy
whipped cream

Coat the rim of a wineglass with sugar, and pour the rum into the glass. Using a lighter, ignite the rum. Being careful not to tip the rim of the glass toward the ground, twist the glass in your fingers and sprinkle the fire with cinnamon. (Be careful: This will generate some large bursts of fire!) When sugar is caramelized around the rim of the glass, put the fire out by pouring coffee into the glass. Finish with Kahlúa and brandy, and top with whipped cream.

No longer just a cold remedy, hot drinks are showing up in bars all over town just in time for the chill: from hot buttered rum at the Presidio Social Club and Clock Bar to a warm variation on the Kentucky Pilgrim (cardamom, cinnamon, cranberry-infused Wild Turkey, maraschino and lemon) at Elixir to a hot Pisco, espresso and Kahlúa drink created by Victoria d'Amato for La Mar.

Absinthe GM Jeff Hollinger, one of SF's true doyens of drink, says he plans to bring back the mulled cider and bourbon drink he offered last winter, and that he expects to see an upswing in the restaurant's perennial hot ticket, the Spanish Coffee. "Part of the appeal of hot drinks is the aroma and the spectacle," says Hollinger. "People come in on a winter day, and the first thing they smell is our hot pot of cider, steaming with all the spices. And if one person sees the Spanish Coffee being made"—a lengthy process that involves setting a glass of rum on fire and toasting grated cinnamon over the flame—"everyone else at the bar immediately wants to order one. And the thing is, once you've had one, it's hard to resist having another." Now that's a temptation I'm familiar with. x

