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Cocktail Hour

Fight the February Fog with an Exotic Cocktail

What is it that has driven the recent craze for cocktails and cocktail bars? The concept of mixed drinks is nothing new. According to Difford's Guide for the Discerning Drinker, Minoan Cretans were blending a mix of beer, mead, and wine some 3,000 years ago, and in Homer's *Iliad*, slave girls were preparing "concoctions of wine, cheese, honey and raw onions." OK, we've come a long way from that, but why has the heady world of alcoholic blends become so popular?

Today, cocktails and cocktail bars are a cultural staple, with punters demanding ever more creative mixes and dynamic flavours. Exotic ingredients are used to reinvent classic cocktails like the Negroni and Old Fashioned, while innovative new concoctions tempt drinkers to a new experience, usually in a cool and sophisticated setting.

Cocktails are made by mixing different types of alcohol with juices, syrups, and bitters, along with fresh ingredients like fruit and spices, and creating new flavours is one of the many attractive elements of cocktails worldwide. Those of a more adventurous nature love trying new flavours, and a feeling of sophistication combined with a sense of glamour can sometimes allow people to transport themselves to exotic locations without the need to jump on a plane.

Cocktails and cocktail bars give us a taste of optimism, and occasion even if it's just for a night out.

At Mercato Nero, the cocktail bar above Mercato Italiano on the Dreadnought Trading estate in Bridport, Barista David Smith was tasked by owner Ilaria Padovani to come up with signature cocktail that was to be named after the restaurant and cocktail bar. The brief was to produce a Montenegro (Ilaria's favourite) forward cocktail.

'I don't like Campari much' said David, 'so wanted to do a Negroni type drink that I enjoyed but it had to show off the Montenegro.' He decided to use Montenegro, Punt e Mes and R L Seale's 10-year-old rum. 'Punt e Mes is more of a cross between an Amaro and a Vermouth' explained David. 'So it gives it plenty of bitter notes without being overly sweet, and the rum is the back bone of the drink.' Stirred over ice with a grapefruit twist it has become a favourite. 'The rum keeps the drink from being too watery as it melts over the ice' he explains 'and it is robust enough to bolster all the flavours.'

A European influenced zinc bar with art deco appointments, formica tops, and atmospheric lighting; Mercato Nero offers an escape, a world within a world where visitors can truly relax and enjoy company with family and friends the Italian way.

Mercato Nero is open Wednesday to Saturday 5 -11pm at Unit 3B Dreadnought Trading Estate, Bridport, Dorset DT6 5BU. Telephone 01308 459274 or email: retail@mercatoitaliano.uk. To keep up to date on special events visit the website <https://mercatoitaliano.uk> and subscribe to their newsletter.

