Myrtle Bank Punch

A true cocktail mystery

MYRTLE BANK PUNCH

If the name of this drink is any indication, both Donn and Vic visited the Patio Bar of Jamaica Myrtle Bank Hotel. It's hard to believe they didn't, since it was the social epicenter of Kingston in the 1920s and '30s. Donn put his version of the Myrtle Bank Punch (an unpublished recipe that I found in the private papers of Beachcomber's barman Mariano Licudine) on his 1941 menu, and Vic published his version in his 1946 Book of Food and Drink. *Vic called the Myrtle Bank Punch "the most widely publicized drink of the West Indies." This may well be true, but there's no mention of it in West Indian newspapers of the time. With the wide gulf between Donn's recipe and Vic's—and the propensity of both men to tinker with indigenous Caribbean drinks—there's no reason to assume that either one of these two versions is "authentic." But it's interesting to see how Don and Vic interpreted the same drink, especially one they both likely encountered in their early exposure to Caribbean mixology.*

Trader Vic

1½ ounce Lemon Hart 151-proof Demerara rum
⅓ ounce maraschino liqueur
½ ounce fresh lime juice
Teaspoon white sugar
Teaspoon grenadine

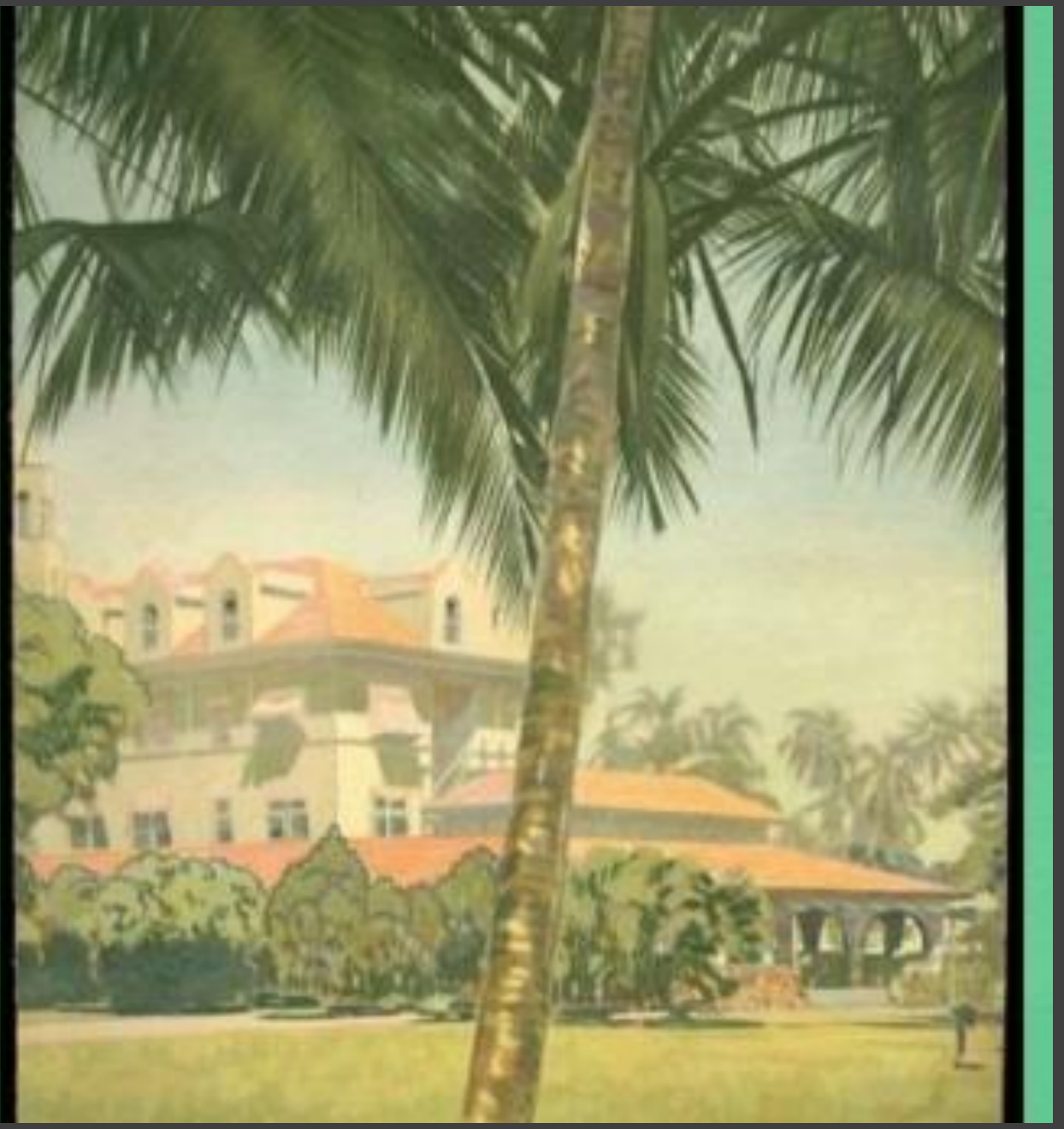
Dissolve sugar in lime juice. Add rum and grenadine, then shake well with ice cubes. Strain into an 8-ounce glass filled with crushed ice. Float maraschino.


MYERS'S
RUM
Original Dark
Rum-Bar
GOLD

Myrtle Bank Punch

- 1 ½ oz dark Jamaican rum
- ¾ oz Gold Jamaican rum
- ¾ oz fresh lime juice
- ¾ oz Grapefruit juice
- ¾ Don's Honey
- ¾ oz soda water
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters

- *Don the Beachcomer 1941*




JAMAICA


JAMAICA
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CARIBBEAN SEA
Jamaica Channel
CARIBBEAN SEA
Montego Bay
Falmouth
Lucea
Green Island
Negril
Negril Point
Little Bay
Savanna la Mar
Rio Bueno
Runaway Bay
Duncans
Clark's Town
St. Ann's Bay
Galina
Port Maria
Ocho Rios
Oracabessa
Wakefield
Montpelier
Maroon Town
Grange Hill
Cabarita
Frome
Bethel Town
Catadupa
The Cockpit Country
Great River
Steawart Town
Brown's Town
Claremont
Dry Harbour Mounts
Troy
748
Denham
986
Newmarket
Maggotty
Balaclava
Belmont
Baptist
Black River
Luana Point
Parottee Point
Santa Cruz
725
Willamsfield
Mandeville
Chapelton
Frankfield
Moneague
838
Highgate
Annotto Bay
Troja
Ewarton
Linstead
Bog Walk
836
Rio Minho
Stony Hill
Buff Bay
Orange Bay
Hope Bay
Port Antonio
Boston Bay
Fellowship
Long Bay
Blue Mountain Peak
2076
2256
The Blue Mountains
Wag Water River
Spanish Town
KINGSTON
Gordon Town
Manchioneal
Hectors River
Holland Bay
Morant Point
Portmore
Harbour
Port Royal
Old Harbour
Bull Bay
Seaforth
Bath
Yallahs
Bowden
Morant Bay
May Pen
Rest
Hayes
Salt River
Polink Point
Bull Savannah
Treasure Beach
Great Pedro Cape
Port Kaiser
Alligator Pond
Lionel Town
Carlisle Bay
Portland Cave
160
Rocky Point
Portland Point
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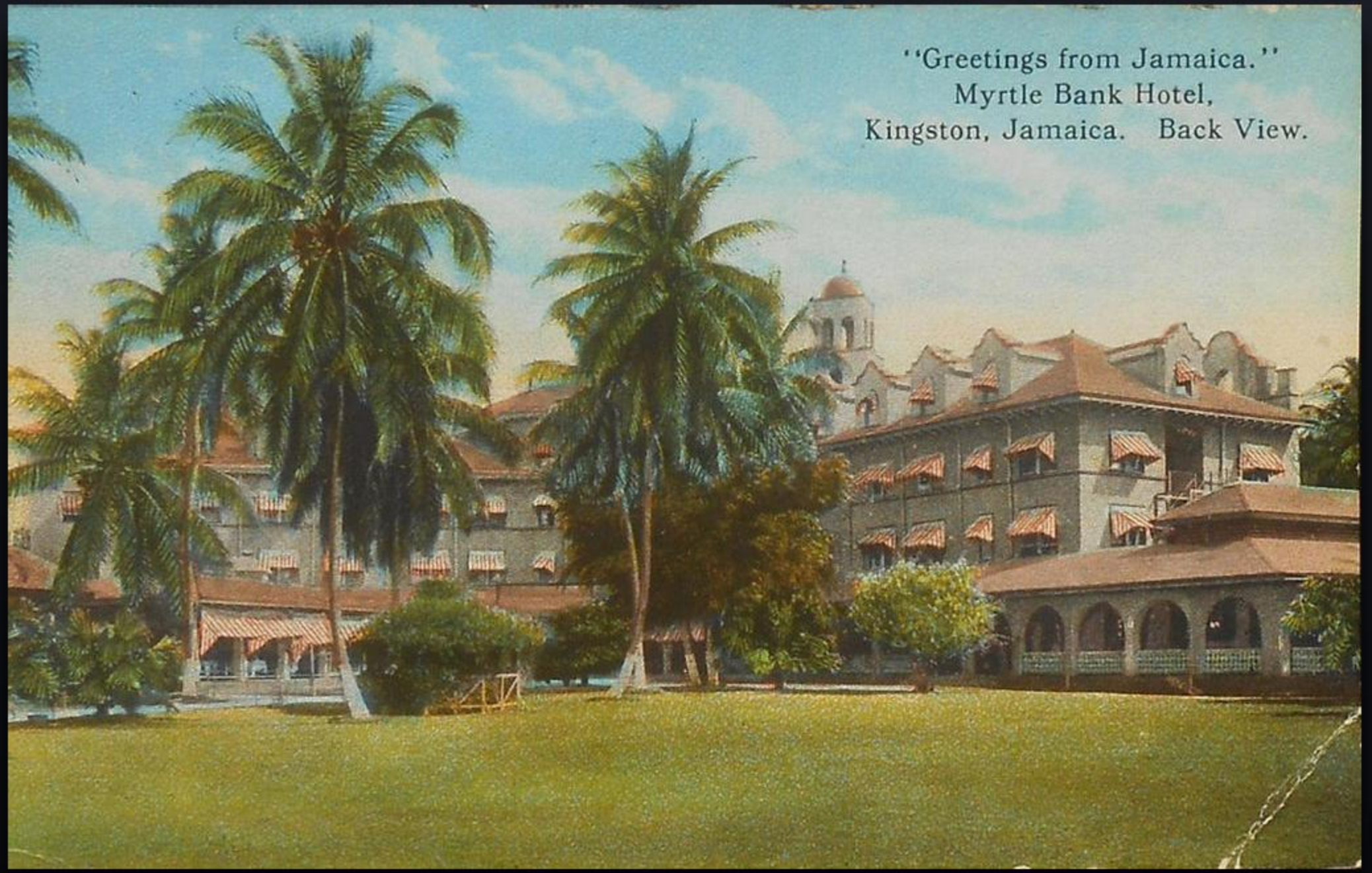

"Greetings from Jamaica."
Myrtle Bank Hotel,
Kingston, Jamaica. Back View.


Patio Bar
Myrtle Bank Hotel

The Myrtle Bank Hotel was built in the 1800s. It was owned by Scotsman James Gall and was converted from a Shipyard into a special boarding house and offered personal health advice on health issues. By 1875 when downtown Christmas Bazaars become popular and draw large crowds, the Myrtle Bank became a recreational and social center. A music stand was erected in the center of its tropical garden and the West India Regiment Band entertained large crowds twice a week. When Gall died the property was acquired by the Government and a modern Hotel with long French Windows that open on all sides into verandahs was built on the side in preparation for the great exhibition of 1891. It was destroyed in the 1907 earthquake, reconstructed in 1918 and sold to the United Fruit Company. At that time, it was the largest Hotel in Jamaica, with 205 rooms and a filtered salt-water Pool.

The spot where this elegant once stood has now become urban shadows of former elegance, including an empty lot by the water where the Myrtle Bank Hotel once one of the Caribbean's most glamorous had stood. The vacant space now borders a parking lot where hundreds of young people reveled to loud dance hall beats in the middle of a Sunday afternoon.

The PERFEC-STEREOGRAPH. (Trade Mark.)
Patented April 14, 1903. Other Patents Pending.

H. C. WHITE CO., Gen'l Office N. Bennington, Vt., U.S.A.
Branch Offices: New York, Chicago, London.

(7) 7907. The Drawing Room of the Myrtle Bank Hotel, Kingston, Jamaica.

JAMAICA EXHIBITION

1891.

The Great Exposition of 1891

The Great Exhibition of 1897

The Great Exhibition Hall was of glass and wooden structure of Moorish architecture. It was built on lands now occupied by Wolmer's Schools(click for larger image)

...IN THIS 1890 letter to the people of Jamaica, Governor Henry Blake attempted to rally support of Jamaicans to the cause of the

Great Exhibition of 1891. The Exhibition itself was the dream of native Jamaican A. C. Sinclair. One of the compilers of the annual Handbooks of Jamaica, Sinclair was inspired by the 1851 Great Exhibition at London's Crystal Palace. He tried in vain for many years to drum up support for his ambitious project. When Sir Henry Blake arrived as Jamaica's new Governor in March 1889 Sinclair managed to persuade William Fawcett, director of gardens and plantations and chairman of the Institute of Jamaica (IOJ) to help him present his cause to Governor Blake.

Governor Blake was so enthusiastic that at a public meeting on the 19th September he put three resolutions before the leading gentlemen of Kingston, one of which requested Jamaican gentlemen to act as guarantors to the extent of £10 or more. The response was so overwhelming that over £800 was collected at that same meeting. Soon after a special committee received over £10,000 in guarantees in Kingston alone; the country parishes raised nearly £17,000 additional by the end of June 1890.

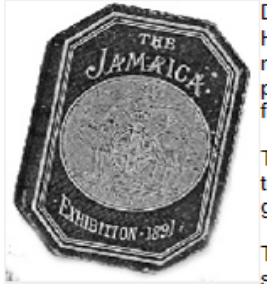
As early as April 1890 The Prince of Wales had agreed to serve as patron of the event and indicated that his son Prince George (the future King George V) would represent him and the royal family. An entire exhibition grounds needed to be constructed and the Kingston Race Course (now the site of National Heroes Park) was designated as most appropriate. The wooden exhibition building itself was to be built on lands now occupied by Wolmer's Schools by local architect, George Messiter. It was to cover 40,000 sq. ft., be of Moorish architectural style and expected to cost close to £15,000. In order to start the construction Governor Blake first approached the banks for an advance of £15,000 and was refused. Undaunted he managed to raise that same sum from three individual donors Ernest Verley, a noted horse-breeder, George Stiebel, Custos of St. Andrew, millionaire owner and builder of Devon House, and Col. Charles Ward , the Custos of Kingston (who would later give £12,000 to rebuild the Ward Theatre after the 1907 earthquake).

Myrtle Bank Hotel was one of the hotels built to accommodate visitors to the Great Exhibtion

The public treasury matched that £15,000 so that the £30,000 total estimated cost of the exhibition was secured within Jamaica itself.

The plan for the Exhibition site was fairly simple in design but grand in scope. Turrets would adorn the angles of the building and the grounds would be laid out with trees, fountains, ornamental walks, a bandstand, concert hall and a Jamaica village and pavilions. By August 1890 it became obvious that more space was required as Canada alone requested 50,000 sq. ft. for what would become 247 exhibits detailing everything produced by Canada that could have a market in the West Indies. An annex, exhibition hall and art gallery were added.

Five hotels were built including the Queen's and Myrtle Bank in Kingston and the Constant Spring Hotel in St. Andrew. Roads, bridges and railways were improved and constructed to secure transport from the countryside.



Season pass for admission to the Exhibition.

Despite predictions to the contrary, this Exhibition billed as "the most extraordinary commercial event in the history of the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indies," opened on time on January 27, 1891. According to the 1891-1892 Handbook of Jamaica: the light and airy character of the (exhibition) structure with its subdued and harmonious colouring, the rich and in many cases brilliant hues of the exhibits, the glitter of bright metal and glass, and the ever-moving, many coloured dresses of the visitors formed a scene never before witnessed in Jamaica and which could not fail to impress both the foreigner and the native. On opening day the grand assembly at Kings House proceeded to the Market Wharf downtown where the pier was decorated in bunting to greet the 25-year-old Prince George. Crowds assembled on all sides to welcome the royal visitor. Flowers showered down on the procession from Harbour Street as flags and banners with welcoming slogans swayed in the air. Nearly 8,000 people visited the Exhibition on its opening day.

Throughout the Great Exhibitions over four-month run, there were flower shows, a fine arts gallery (including famous Winterhalter portraits of the Queen the Prince Consort on loan from the Queen), plays put on by a London troupe and music by the resplendent West India Regiment and the Kingston Volunteers. For the kids there was a merry-go-round, a toboggan slide, a mystic vanishing lady, a ventriloquist, acrobats, a nine-winged Leviathan, and a giant maze.

The island's main products sugar, rum, coffee and cocoa were on display in the Jamaica Village but emphasis was also placed on minor crops such as palm oil, potter's clay and sisal hemp which was seen to be the most promising of these new industries. An exhibit of cigars, cigarettes and tobacco won a diploma of honour. The IOJ received an award for its engaging displays of maps, minerals and botany that also included a working potter. Outside of the main building one could find a working dairy, an apiary, a model schoolroom, and an industrial village replete with potters, fishermen making nets, weavers making jippi-jappa hats, and small working sugar and coffee mills. Exhibition souvenirs including handkerchiefs, fans, jugs, plates, cups, mugs, and even sharks' teeth containing photos of the Exhibition and charms used by Obeah men and women were also on sale.

Special coins were minted for the event. The front of the coin carried a picture of the Queen, and on the back, the Exhibition Hall

Foreign Exhibitions included lectures on Canada illustrated by Canadian scenery, a Canadian caribou head, American machinery and furniture, English dog biscuits and billiard tables, a Scottish piper and whisky, aqua vitae from Sweden, railway timetables and guidebooks from Switzerland, wire nails from Greece, champagne from France, Norwegian and German beer, Belgian lace, Russian liquors, and Dutch tulip bulbs. Most of the West Indian islands sent exhibits based on sugar and rum but St. Vincent's six basket-weaving Carib Indians were very popular.

After receiving 302, 831 visitors the Great Exhibition closed on May 2, 1891. Its attendance was estimated to be larger than that of any previous exhibition in Europe or America in pro-portion with the island's population. Between 13-14,000 people were said to have witnessed the brilliant closing fireworks display. Yet, despite its popularity, the Exhibition failed to pay its way, managing to lose over £4,500. It is said, however, that many who lent their money expected to lose it, neither regretting having lent a hand nor doubting the ultimate benefit Jamaica would receive.

History of Punch

Though it's mainly known as a non-alcoholic beverage today, punch was invented as a beer alternative in the 17th century by men working the ships for the British East India Company. These men were accomplished drinkers, throwing back an allotment of 10 pints of beer per shipman per day. But when the ships reached the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean, the beer held in cargo bays grew rancid and flat. Once the boats reached the shore, sailors created new drinks out of the ingredients indigenous to their destinations: rum, citrus and spices.

The sailors brought punch back to Britain and soon the drink became a party staple, spreading even as far as the American colonies. Massive punch bowls were ubiquitous at gatherings in the summer months: the founding fathers drank 76 of them at the celebration following the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It's around this time that the first mention of non-alcoholic punches appears, specifically made for ladies and children.

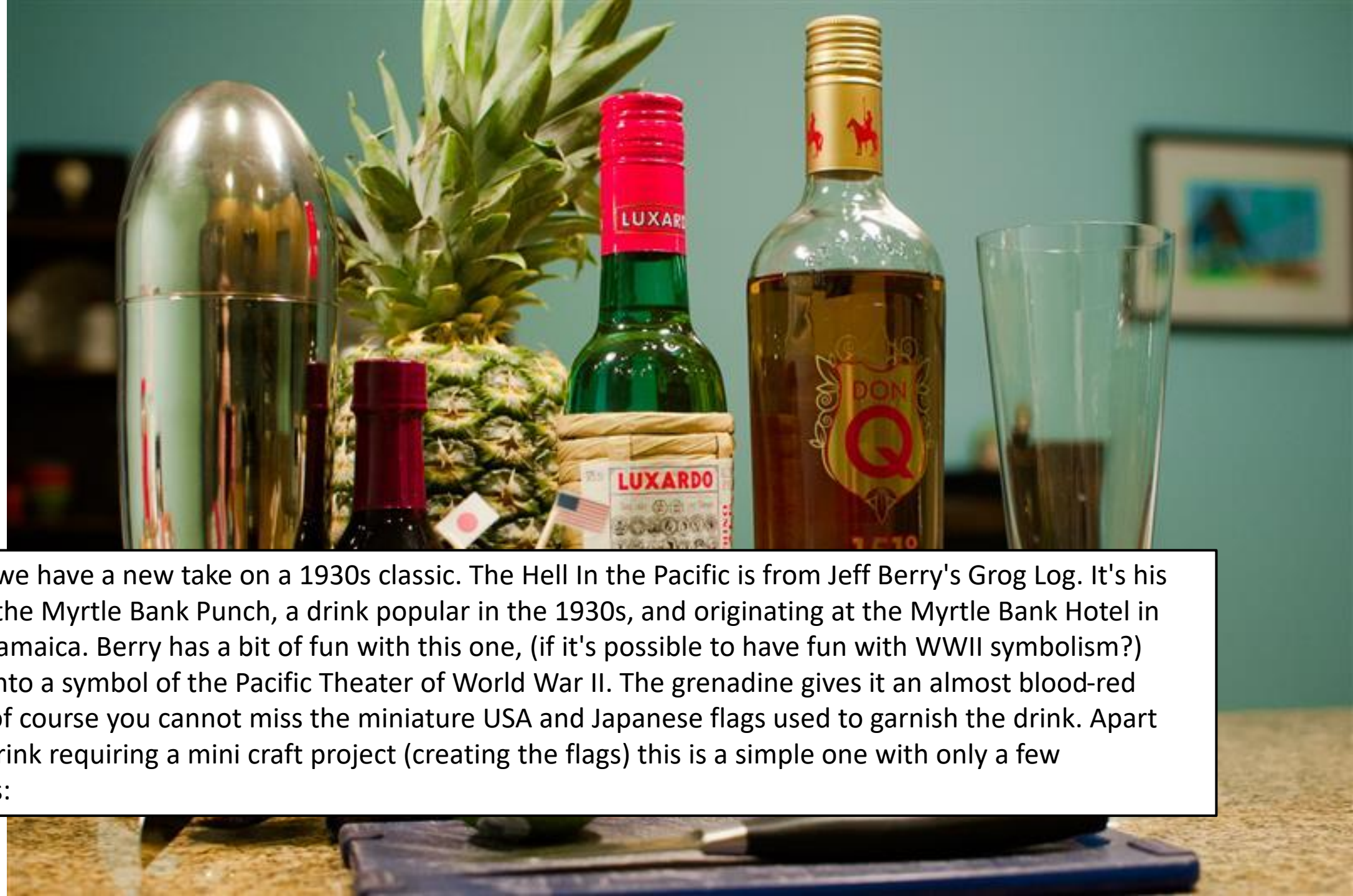
By the Victorian Age, those teetotalling punches ruled the day. Queen Victoria disapproved of strong drink, so alcoholic punches gradually fell out of favor. Frothy egg white-based and sherbet versions grew popular, and continued to be served to ladies who lunched until the 1950s. By that time, cocktail culture was in full effect, and it was socially acceptable for women to drink in public. Punch was relegated to the footnotes of history, only to be resurrected in the 2000s by mustachioed mixologists in cities like New York and San Francisco.

History of Planter's Punch

In the Caribbean, punch began as something enjoyed by the plantation owners, or "planters," hence the name. Variations pop up all over the islands, but Planter's Punch became linked strongly to Jamaica in the 1920s. Myers's Rum started to sell a Planter's Punch Rum formulated for the drink. Planter's Punch served at the upscale Myrtle Bank Hotel in Kingston, and Titchfield Hotel in Port Antonio also popularized it.

Follow the classic sing-song punch template: one of sour, two of sweet, three of strong, four of weak (the latter is often tea, fruit juice or even dilution from ice, as below). Some folks also add "a touch of spice to make it nice." The recipe below is inspired by Jamaica's classic.

Hell in the Pacific



This week we have a new take on a 1930s classic. The Hell In the Pacific is from Jeff Berry's Grog Log. It's his version of the Myrtle Bank Punch, a drink popular in the 1930s, and originating at the Myrtle Bank Hotel in Kingston, Jamaica. Berry has a bit of fun with this one, (if it's possible to have fun with WWII symbolism?) turning it into a symbol of the Pacific Theater of World War II. The grenadine gives it an almost blood-red color and of course you cannot miss the miniature USA and Japanese flags used to garnish the drink. Apart from the drink requiring a mini craft project (creating the flags) this is a simple one with only a few ingredients:

Don’t’ forget the Garnishes