

Scott Beattie mixes drinks at Cyrus, a restaurant in the Sonoma County town of Healdsburg that opened in 2005. The California eatery has been lavished with praise for the cooking of chef Douglas Keane, accolades that spurred the bartender to ratchet up his game. "Once I took a careful look at the incredible food coming out of Douglas's kitchen, I started to feel a little unsettled," Mr. Beattie writes. "I felt that my contribution to the restaurant was average by comparison." You can't say that anymore. Mr. Beattie has created a new style of cocktail -- lavish, strange and extravagant concoctions that (with the help of a team of publicists) have made the bartender's reputation. Now Mr. Beattie has written a book, "Artisanal Cocktails," detailing how to make the fantastical drinks for which he is famous.

Some of Mr. Beattie's general principles are unobjectionable -- use seasonal ingredients, preferably those locally grown and at the height of their ripeness. But there are limits to the approach, especially if your hometown is sub-Edenic. Live, as Mr. Beattie does, in a garden spot like Sonoma County, where farmer's markets abound and a few strolls down random alleyways turn up rare citrus growing in backyards, and you'll suffer fewer frustrations sourcing the ingredients needed for Cyrus-style libations.

But it isn't the fresh ingredients that make Mr. Beattie's drinks stand out: All the best bartenders make a similar commitment. It is that the drinks are stunning to look at, such as the Frondsong, a gaudy goblet packed with pink, green and purple foliage -- borage flowers, shredded dianthus petals, sliced anise hyssop leaves, and pickled fennel. The floral mélange makes the average Lilly Pulitzer print look tame.

Oh, and yes, there is liquor in the glass, too: The Frondsong includes gin, pastis and green Chartreuse, together with lemon juice and simple (sugar) syrup. In fact, take away the crazy flower arrangement and you have a drink from Harry Craddock's 1930 "Savoy Cocktail Book" called the Biter Cocktail.

Does the shrubbery add anything? Yes and no. There is no denying the visual appeal of such drinks. Well, at least of some of them. Others just end up looking like chunky Vietnamese pho soup. Take the Rhubarbarella, a short drink in which nearly a dozen slices of candied rhubarb fight for space with a tangle of shredded shiso leaves. Or how about a Gin Kimchi, in which the shiso menace takes on a tag-team of eight pieces each of pickled ginger and pickled daikon radish? Maybe not.

One might deride the drinks as salad in a glass, but Mr. Beattie would take that as a compliment. Indeed, he celebrates his concoction The Upstairs Neighbor as "a Caprese salad (without the mozzarella!)." I guess there just wasn't any room for cheese in the mix, given all the cherry tomato halves, purple opal basil leaves, and sweet Italian basil leaves choking the glass.

All the pretty junk in the goblets has left patrons flummoxed over how to sort the liquids from the solids. And so the "edible" cocktails are served with surgical-steel straws, the bottom ends of which are split into prongs to accommodate spearing of the roughage. As Mr.

Beattie told Santé magazine: "There's all kinds of things you can eat that end up on the bottom." In a way, you could call them cocktails for catfish.

Highball flotsam is nothing new. If you've had a proper Mojito made with fresh mint, there were likely bits and pieces of the leaves intermingled with the rum, lime juice, soda and ice. It is a drink very similar to a Mojito that inspired Mr. Beattie to get serious about drinks-making in the first place. Having done the basic Cosmo and Lemon Drop routine for a couple of years as a young man behind the stick, the author tells us that several years ago he went into Absinthe Brasserie (a premier bar in San Francisco) and sipped a drink that set him back on his heels, and eventually set him on his current path.

The delightfully named Marco Dionysos was Absinthe's head barman at the time, and he had devised a house special called the Ginger Rogers (not to be confused with a couple of vintage drinks so named, one a Dry Martini with apricot brandy and lemon juice added, the other contrived entirely from port and cognac). The Ginger Rogers Mr. Dionysos came up with entailed muddling -- the bar equivalent of crushing with a pestle -- fresh mint in a ginger-infused sugar syrup. Add gin, lime juice, ginger ale and ice, stir, and there you have it -- a very tasty gin and ginger ale sort of Mojito: "It was unlike anything I'd ever tasted," Mr. Beattie writes.

But after years honing his own skills and no little R&D, the random flakes of mint in the old Ginger Rogers were no longer quite so appealing to him. Muddling, Mr. Beattie writes, "tears up the herbs in a not-so-pretty fashion." His solution is to pile up the leaves and flower petals and then slice them into thin strips, creating what is called a chiffonade. The technique, writes Mr. Beattie, "creates long, beautiful strands of herb that look fantastic clinging to the ice in your cocktail." True enough, though the approach is also likely to call to mind Ophelia drowning in weedy garlands of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long purples.

Happily, not all of Mr. Beattie's creations are so strangled. Among the seasonal recipes he suggests for fall is a rather traditional punch that is a cross between mulled wine and Sangria. Toast nutmeg pods, allspice berries and cinnamon sticks in a saucepan before adding orange juice and pineapple juice. Simmer for half an hour and then strain away the spices. Combine the mulled juice with a Spanish red, cognac, dark rum, and simple (sugar) syrup to taste. Toss in some fresh orange slices and let the batch sit in the fridge.

Served with ice and a single, restrained slice of orange, the Painful Punch, as Mr. Beattie calls it, is simple, elegant and delicious. It may seem a little out of place -- a demure dowager in a boisterous crowd of hammy vaudevillians -- but it is one of several excellent recipes in Mr. Beattie's book that can actually be made at home and served with a straight face.