

# Any way you like it, make French 75 your ally

By Becca Hensley

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Woodland bartender Tyna Hoang calls it “the most dangerous drink on the menu.” Oh, come on — the French 75 is an elegant little drink. It’s the sort meant to be sipped on a tennis court as you stretch languidly for a ball or carried through the Louvre — if they only allowed you — as you gaze at masterworks. Nay, there’s not a metaphorically nefarious bone in its little bubbly body. (OK, so what if it is named after a weapon of mass destruction? It is still a petite little drink, right?)

“Au contraire,” says Hoang, noting she’s watched people find it difficult to walk out the door, let alone slip off their bar stool, after a few. “It’s because you can’t taste the gin,” she says of the drink, which can call for gin, lemon juice, simple syrup and Brut champagne (or bubbly substitute) — as it does at Woodland, the restaurant and bar on South Congress Avenue.

But that brings up one of the big questions about the French 75: Should it have gin at all? Some people think so; but others swear by cognac. The gin-cognac debate isn’t the only heated hullabaloo associated with this drink that most everyone, at least, agrees dates back to the era of World War I. People bicker about the citrus element: lemon juice, lime or orange? Some go as far as adding something spiritual, like Grand Marnier — or, ugh, triple sec. Another squabble stems from the glassware required. Big shot global mixologist Dale DeGroff says you can serve it in a white wine glass, local wunderkind David Alan (Topsy Texan) says it must be a Tom Collins glass and tons of people take a lead from the key ingredient of champagne and pour it in a flute. And then there’s the dicey ice issue: chipped, cracked, rocked or not at all.

The French 75, it seems, is steeped in controversy.

One thing’s clear: its cognate. Named for

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## BARTENDER TYNA HOANG

a French artillery gun, a cannon really, popularized on the battlefields of World War I, somebody thought the cocktail packed enough punch to put it in the same category as a quick-firing field weapon. Was that because it sputtered and popped when sipped? Did it quickly end fights, with the French 75 drinker winning the war on words? Or, was it just enjoyed by Frenchmen in military garb? Nobody really knows.

If you like men in uniforms, the most romantic myth concerning its provenance might well be the story of that thirsty French American flying ace, Raoul Lufbery. According to most sources, the guy lapped up champagne by the tulip glass. (Well, who wouldn’t with all those daring combat missions to fulfill?) But one day, maybe after a particularly stressful day in the sky, he needed something stronger. That’s when his bartender helped out and added a dose of numbing cognac.

In New Orleans, where they make their French 75 with cognac, they’d have you believe they invented the drink. In fact, the French 75 Bar at Arnaud’s rather underscores the point and locals will tell you Arnaud himself was behind the recipe. Wait? Was he a French flying ace? It’s hard to keep the stories straight. At any rate, the fact remains, gin or cognac, it’s a damned good drink. We think we’ll take it however we can get it.



Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Tyna Hoang, a bartender at Woodland, makes a French 75 with gin, lemon juice, simple syrup and Cava, but it can be made with cognac or orange juice.

## French 75 tips

Choose your recipe, then choose your glass. Gin drinkers strongly should consider going with a Tom Collins glass and chipped ice. Those who order it for the champagne will prefer a flute. Don’t care? Grab any stemware that’s handy.

### Woodland’s French 75

1½ oz. gin  
¾ oz. lemon juice  
¾ oz. simple syrup  
Cava

Shake the gin, lemon juice and simple syrup with ice and strain into a champagne flute. Top with Cava and garnish with a lemon twist.

### Dale DeGroff’s French 75

1½ oz. Cognac  
¾ oz. Fresh squeezed lemon Juice  
½ oz. Bar syrup (or a tad less)  
Brut Champagne  
Lemon twist for garnish

Shake the gin, lemon juice and simple syrup with ice and strain into a champagne flute. Top with champagne and garnish with a lemon twist.