

Maxwell Bitten's 'Gilded Age' Cocktail Recipes From Newport's Vanderbilt Hotel



Above image courtesy of HBO

We all know the “Julian Fellowes Formula”: complicated upstairs-downstairs relationships, deviously calculated social climbing, and superficial, century-old rich people problems; throw in a few still-unresolved nods to racial or economic inequality, and dress it up in eye-candy couture. Lord Fellowes’ *The Gilded Age* – which premiered on HBO in January – doesn’t mess with the blueprint. Yet, we’re once again completely intoxicated with his recipe for thoughtful, melodramatic escapism.

Naturally, all this drama and intrigue takes place in opulent, lavishly decorated mansions – and they’re ones you can actually visit. Scenes from *The Gilded Age* were filmed in the storied manors of Newport, Rhode Island, where the old money New York elites and their nouveau riche neighbors battled it out for social supremacy just over a century ago. Historic summer homes such as The Breakers, Marble House, Rosecliff and The Elms all get significant screen time.

No longer privately owned, they are now sensibly and sensitively held in trust by the non-profit Preservation Society of Newport County, who oversee all the tours, which hardly ever cease to be busy. And though summer and fall are obviously high season, some of the spectacular former “riche” residences are open all year round. (Best to make your visit by springtime, before the expensively attired beach season crowd pours into town.)



So yes, if you've been utterly swept up in the *The Gilded Age*, and have put the still very poshie – but definitely less catty – New England seaside town on your must-visit list, we strongly suggest skipping the Marriott for the old money luxury of the historic hotel The Vanderbilt, Auberge Resorts Collection. While you likely won't meet any scheming butlers or weepy housekeepers, you will find elegant old-world hospitality enhanced by all the necessary modern amenities (it was newly redesigned in 2021, but still looks every bit the 19th Century).

Indeed, amidst all the lavish fabrics and deep, rich jewel tones, one can now begin the day with yoga and crystal chakra balancing at the hotel's plush spa. But boozy brunch in the Conservatory still comes with the requisite Pimm's' and Juleps, which are sure to make the mansion tour along the Cliff Walk – a mile-long oceanside path with breathtaking Atlantic views – just that little bit more interesting. Dressing up for dinner in The Dining Room at The Vanderbilt is *de rigueur*, of course, with its deep blue walls and leather club chairs. The menu focuses on local seafood (lobster tagliatelle, halibut en papillote) and fresh, colorful produce.

But we strenuously recommend slipping into the hotel's secret bar inside the Doris Duke inspired parlor, for a posh tittle and some surely ear-burning gossip. The refined but certainly anything-but-staid drinks program is overseen by Chief Cocktail Curator Maxwell Britten – he famously of Brooklyn's exalted Maison Premiere – highlighting period classics with a few modern twists. And here he shares the exclusive recipes behind three surely Mrs. Astor approved sips to accompany your *Gilded Age* binge watching.

The Blithewold

A Manhattan (c. 1880s) riff using Tawny Port instead of sweet vermouth and mole bitters in place of the traditional Angostura bitters.

2 dash mole bitters

1.5oz Tawny Port (Taylor Fladgate 20 yr)

1.5oz Bourbon (Basil Hayden)

Add all ingredients to a mixing glass. Add ice and stir until well chilled and strain into a coupe. Express the oils from one lemon peel over the top and discard, garnish with a brandied cherry

Thames St. Old Fashioned

Inspiration for this cocktail is drawn from the old fashioned (c. 1806) format however it wasn't until the Gilded Age that bartenders started adding additional spirits and flavorings. Without the Old Fashioned, the Manhattan and the Martini may not be in existence today.

2 dash chocolate bitters

1/3 oz ume-gave syrup

1/2 oz Calvados (Drouhin)

1.5 oz Venezulean Rum (Santa Teresa 1796)

Add all ingredients to a mixing glass. Add ice and stir until well chilled. Strain into a rocks glass over a king cube, garnish with a lemon twist.

Fireside Flip

The Flip saw many different variations before landing on the version most people are familiar with today. This latter-day flip rose to popularity in the late 1870s.

2oz Newport Craft Brewing Malasada Stout

1.5 oz Thomas Tew Rum

.5 cardamom syrup

.5 simple syrup

1 whole egg

Add all ingredients to shaker and dry shake until egg is fully emulsified. Add ice and shake to chill. Double strain into snifter, dust with fresh nutmeg.

