

# A Cocktailed Way of Life

By Anne Rosso



photograph by Sara Troy

College students love keg parties, don't we? Yep, we've all jumped at an opportunity to crowd around kegs of cheap beer, desperately thrusting plastic cups toward the person who just *might* be holding the nozzle... hoping, nay, *praying* to ruthlessly jam ourselves in front of the guy preventing our consumption of those 16 ounces of stale, possibly even warm, Busch Light. These are the parties we came to college for, right? This is what all the cool kids are doing, isn't it?

A growing number of Iowa State students say no. Shunning the traditional malt-liquor orgies that have come to typify college life, these renegade students seek the enlightenment and sophistication found only in one beverage—the cocktail.

But, to be honest, the allure of a few martinis (shaken, not stirred) isn't the only draw. Cocktails embody a way of life, a culture all their own. With cocktails come ultra-smooth, xylophone-punctuated lounge music, long cigarettes, smarmy suits and sleek, retro dresses. Cocktail parties have come back into vogue across the nation and a growing number of Iowa State students are embracing them whole-heartedly.







# The Party

"I threw my first cocktail party last summer at my house in Illinois," said Chris Bobowiec, a senior in animal ecology and just one of the many Iowa State students with an affection for cocktail parties. "I found a display of lounge music compilations at Best Buy and I thought, 'We should throw a cocktail party and everyone can dress up.' So, I bought a CD, my friends got into it, and we ended up having a really good time."

Bobowiec's party vision moved with him back to Ames last fall. One of his roommates, Matt Petersen, agreed it was time for a new type of party.

"We just got really sick of the keg scene in Ames, where you go and wait for hours at a time to get a cup of bad beer," Petersen, a junior in animal ecology, said. "Both Chris and I really enjoy cocktails, and we couldn't find anything else to do with the bar in our basement, so we decided to throw a nice, kind of sophisticated party for our friends."

Their initial cocktail party was a stunning success, which prompted the two friends to host several more. They send out formal invitations, detailing the time and place of the party, as well as stressing the dress code, which usually demands suits for the guys and dresses for the girls.

"We've had people come who haven't been dressed up," Petersen said. "The funny thing is those people usually don't have as much fun because they feel left out."

Bobowiec agreed, emphasizing "not only were we unhappy seeing people in jeans and t-shirts, but even our guests were unhappy."

Bobowiec's and Petersen's basement bar, commonly known as the "Smokin' Perch Lounge," has become a haven for aspiring cocktail socialites.

Wendy Thoma, a sophomore in interior design, said cocktail parties give guests an opportunity to dress up and add some glamour to their lives.

"I like to think of myself as a classy gal," she said. "And these parties are definitely classy."

While atmosphere is important, what really sets the cocktail party apart from the typical fiesta are the drinks. There is no beer served at the Smokin' Perch Lounge; mixed drinks and cocktails reign supreme.

Gin and tonics and white russians are the most popular drinks served, followed by traditional cocktails. "There are a lot more martini and manhattan drinkers

than I ever would have imagined," Bobowiec said. "Both drinks are pure liquor and sometimes that can be hard to take. I was amazed, actually, at the amount of people requesting those hard-core lounge beverages."

While the only cocktail food Bobowiec and Petersen usually serve is pretzels or goldfish crackers in bowls at the bar, they are not against the idea of actual hors' d'oeuvres.

"Our friend, Jen, was way down with the idea of a cocktail party," Petersen said. "For the first one she came to, she made these 'pickle wrap' hors' d'oeuvres and served them on a tray to all the guests. It was really cool."

Charles Lawson, a regular party attendee and occasional bartender at the Smokin' Perch, said the appeal of the cocktail party lies in its uniqueness.

"We could have a kegger—*anyone* could have a kegger!" Lawson, a junior in anthropology said. "I think there's 16 keggers on the other side of this street right now! Look at 'em all... standing around in their baseball caps and slugging their beers. It's a horrible, disgusting view of the Earth and it makes me ashamed to say that I'm part of this town. But here, in *this* corner of the Earth—in *our* corner, where we live—we enjoy the sophistication of a couple of cocktails, and we have our times."



photograph by Sara Troy





# The Music

Because it was essentially the recent release of cocktail music compilations that spurred the Ames cocktail scene, Bobowiec and Petersen pay close attention to the music played at their parties. They list the *Ultra-Lounge* compilations put out by Capitol (just one set of lounge music compilations in the flooded market of cocktail re-issues) as their most-played party CDs.

"Lounge music is back, in a big way," Patrick MacDonald reported last year in the *The Seattle Times*. "A new, young Cocktail Culture is discovering the world of 1950s swinging bachelor-pad music, a Hi-Fi mondo mix of samba and cha-cha, space-age sounds, tinkling pianos, bouncing mariambas and utterly fake melodramatic vocals."

Rusty Poehner, M-Shop coordinator, said the lounge music revival has "done surprisingly well" in Iowa.

"Cocktail music is becoming popular again for two main reasons," Poehner said. "One, because it is the last thing that hasn't been recycled yet. And two, because it is just really funny to everyone. It's a primitive exploration of synthesized sound that gives us a glimpse of a happy, funky, Disney-fied future."

"Personally," she added. "I'm glad it's back. I mean, what else can you do with the whole grunge scene? You can only distort a guitar so much."

In Ames, most of the new cocktail compilations from Capitol, RCA, Rhino, Rykodisc and DCC can be purchased at Musicland (filed under "easy listening") or Peeples Music.

"We consistently carry the *Ultra-Lounge* cocktail compilation series, but we'll occasionally have some of the other series in as well," said Charlie Stewart, manager of Peeples Music. "We usually have about five volumes in at a time, but sometimes that varies. For example, last week I had someone come and buy out all my cocktail CDs."

Lounge icons run the gamut from silly to serious. It's difficult to break down what exactly "cocktail music" is, since it includes a variety of instruments, back-up singers, and swanky vocalists. The three main chapters in the old "Book of Lounge" are The Crooners, Futuristic Bachelor Pad Music and Tiki.

"The Chairman of the Board," Frank Sinatra, may be the highest ranking crooner of the 20th century. Sinatra was such a solid lounge icon that after reporters exhausted their probing examinations of his smooth singing style, they even sought his lofty opinions on world issues. "Ol' Blue Eyes" had answers to

everything, though. If you doubt the man's verbal prowess, just consider his answer to a 1963 *Playboy* query about his thoughts on war:

"I've always had a theory that whenever guys and gals start swinging, they begin to lose interest in conquering the world. They just want a comfortable pad and stereo and wheels, and their thoughts turn to the good things of life, not to war. They loosen up, they live and they're more apt to let live. Dig?"

How can we *not* dig, Frank? For those of you who are not acquainted with Sinatra's musical work, a good place to start is *The Capitol Years* (Capitol) or *The Reprise Legacy* (Reprise).

The "Second Book of Lounge" is the quirky space-age music designed primarily to show off the range of those new, swank hi-fis that were popping up all over in the early 1950's. The cocktail king that dominated this scene is the one and only Mexican Mood Megastar: Juan Garcia Esquivel. Esquivel

combined bongos, trumpets, harpsichords, steel guitars and a bevy of back-up singers uttering futuristic lyrics like, "zu-zu-zu" and "boip! boip!" to create a truly way-out sound. Those unfamiliar with Esquivel are in luck; Bar/None Records has released three solid Esquivel albums, including *Space-Age Bachelor Pad Music* and *Music From a Sparkling Planet*.

The third pillar of the old cocktail scene provides the Hawaiian flavor in the lounge. Martin Denny, the "spokesman for paradise," released Tiki albums with titles like, *The Enchanted Sea*

and *Forbidden Island*, to corner the market on the exotic percussion and animal impressions. Denny recorded 37 albums during his career, which to date have sold 4 million copies worldwide, thus illustrating the wide-spread appeal of his tropical tunes.

However, it's not just the old lounge favorites like Sinatra and Esquivel who are finding homes in mainstream America's CD players. New bands like Combustible Edison, the Mike Flowers Pops, Stereolab and Love Jones have all embraced the swinging cocktail sound.

"I still like rock music, but it's been done, done, done," Michael Cudhy of Combustible Edison told the *Chicago Tribune*. "It communicates the id well—I'm hungry, I'm horny, I'm angry. But lounge music has more color. It covers a wider spectrum. Frankly, I think putting on my tux is the most punk-rock thing I've ever done."







# The Revival

And so, the lounge scene has been re-discovered by a generation that was barely alive enough to recall the 1970s, let alone the 1950s... an age group that is more Devo than Dean Martin, more slammers than swizzle sticks.

"It's all about character," said Ames resident Scott Christy, in explanation of cocktail party popularity. "You really have to go someplace that makes you feel like you're experiencing life, not something trivial or pointless. And yes, cocktail parties are essentially just theme parties and whatever, but at least they put an *effort* toward having character."

In addition to the sweeping popularity of the cocktail compilations and parties, old lounge mainstays are using the current martini madness to revitalize their careers.

Pat Boone, the ultra-square singer who was popularly known to America as "Mr. Clean," has released an entire album of metal covers, including Metallica's "Enter Sandman" and Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water."

Also, Tom Jones was recently featured in Tim Burton's campy spoof, *Mars Attacks!* Jones not only whupped some alien ass, but he also closed the film with his trademark croon, "It's Not Unusual."

Clubs all over the U.S. are also catering to this new cocktail phenomena. In the Midwest, hot spots like Nye's Polonaise Room in Minneapolis and the Green Mill in Chicago provide the appropriate lounge backdrops to an evening of gimlets and martinis for every of-age hep cat and kitten.

So whether you're in the mood for a swinging night on the town with your fellow hipsters, or just an intimate evening with some close friends and your favorite highball, the cocktail scene beckons. Don't bother resisting, it's only a matter of time until you've succumbed to the lilting strains of "Baby Elephant Walk" and the sweet scent of your favorite mixed drink.



©Capitol Records



photograph by Sara Troy



photograph by Sara Troy





# Evolution of Swank

**1933**

Prohibition is repealed; Roosevelt mixes the first legal martini in the White House. Swankness soon to follow.

**1936**

Spam (a contraction of "spiced" and "ham") is introduced to the world. Low-budget cocktail snacks are revolutionized.

**1947**

"The Chairman of the Board," Frank Sinatra, embarks on his solo career; he is instantly thronged by young women and girls who continue to hound him even through his retirement.

**1956**

"The Steve Allen Show" debuts on television.

**1958**

Juan Garcia Esquivel records the album *Other Worlds, Other Sounds* for RCA. Americans are introduced to Esquivel's futuristic "zu-zu-zu" and "boip" lyrics.

**1959**

Hugh Hefner purchases the 70-room Playboy Mansion in Chicago. A brass plate by the front door reads: "Si Non Oscillas, Noli Tintinnare" which translates roughly from Latin as, "If You Don't Swing, Don't Ring."

**1960**

The Rat Pack film classic, *Ocean's 11*, is released.

**1962**

The first James Bond movie, *Dr. No*, hits theaters. Bond, played by Sean Connery, and Honey Ryder, played by Ursula Andress, exchange the following:

Honey: "Are you looking for shells?"

Bond: "No, I'm just looking."

**1963**

Helen Gurley Brown publishes her book, *Sex and the Single Girl*.

**1964**

Bob Moog markets the first analogue synthesizer.

**1973**

Dean Martin marries former model Catherine Mae Hawn. Martin insists at the reception that champagne glasses "should never get lower than half empty."

**1978**

*Fantasy Island* debuts on television. Ricardo Montalban's white suit is instantly catapulted into the Swank Hall of Fame.

**1994**

Combustible Edison, led by former Urge Overkill member Mike Cudhy, release their album, *I, Swinger*.

**1996**

Rhino, Capitol, DCC and Rykodisc release cocktail music compilations; the Mike Flowers Pops record a lounge version of Oasis's "Wonderwall."



## Gimlet

2 oz. gin  
1/2 oz. lime juice  
1 lime wedge

### Mixing instructions

Pour the gin and lime juice into a mixing glass half-filled with ice cubes. Stir well. Strain into a cocktail glass and garnish with the lime wedge.

## Salty Dog

5 oz. grapefruit juice  
1 1/2 oz. gin  
1/4 tsp. salt

### Mixing instructions

Pour all ingredients over ice cubes in a highball glass. Stir well and serve. Vodka may be substituted for gin.



## Manhattan

3/4 oz. sweet vermouth  
2 1/2 oz. bourbon whiskey  
2-3 ice cubes  
1 maraschino cherry  
1 twist of orange  
1 dash of bitters

### Mixing instructions

Combine the vermouth, whiskey, bitters and ice in a cocktail glass. Stir gently, don't cloud the drink. Place the cherry in the chilled cocktail glass and strain the whiskey mixture over the cherry. Rub the cut edge of the orange peel over the rim of the glass and twist it over the drink but don't drop it in.



## White Russian

2 oz. vodka  
1 oz. coffee liqueur  
light cream

### Mixing instructions

Pour vodka and coffee liqueur over ice cubes in a glass. Fill with light cream and serve.

## Tom Collins

2 oz. gin  
1 oz. lemon juice  
1 tsp. sugar  
3 oz. club soda  
1 maraschino cherry

### Mixing instructions

In a shaker half-filled with ice cubes, combine gin, lemon juice and sugar. Shake well. Strain into a glass almost filled with ice cubes. Add the club soda. Stir and garnish with the cherry.



## Martini (traditional)

1 1/2 oz. gin  
3/4 oz. dry vermouth  
1 olive

### Mixing instructions

Stir gin and vermouth over ice cubes in a mixing glass. Strain into a cocktail glass. Add the olive and serve.

