

# WHISKYMOODS

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- HOME
- WHISKY ▾
- WOMEN ▾
- SONG ▾
- FINE ARTS ▾
- MOVIES ▾
- MEMORIES ▾

YOU ARE AT: [Home](#) » [Uncategorized](#) » [Sugar and Wry](#)



## Sugar and Wry

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BY LESLIE NIPKOW

UNCATEGORIZED

I imagined New Orleans for forty years before I ever set foot there. Intrigued by the “New Orleans” entry in the World Book Encyclopedia, I scoured the library for info on the shimmer and lore of Mardi Gras Indians, the creepy/handy practice of voodoo and the proper technique for sucking crawfish head, then graduated to the sweaty historical romances of [Frank Yerby](#), the [Storyville photographs of E.J. Bellocq](#), and, finally, at 40, debarked at Louis Armstrong Airport to find myself in the only other place in the world besides New York City where, if you feel like wearing sequins and a purple wig to the grocery store, just because it’s Tuesday, no one will blink an eye. Nor will the checkout person care if all you have in your basket are three nearly-ripe plantains, a lemon, a bottle of Peychaud’s bitters and a tube of Pillsbury Pop ‘n Fresh biscuits. (In truth, you could make biscuits from scratch, but after a couple of Sazerac cocktails, flammable activities are not recommended.)

The Sazerac is a whisky cocktail made with rye, bitters — Peychaud’s only, Herbsaint, sugar and a generous twist of lemon. My local whisky bar, [On the Rocks](#) at 696 Tenth Avenue between 48/49 Streets, uses a rye called [Redemption](#). Bitter, sweet, 92 proof and in need of redemption: if it were a mood it would be called the been-there-done-that-going-there-again blues. I call a Sazerac-soaked happy hour historical research, since the cocktail dates back to before the Civil War. It does feel antebellum-y, at first delicate and sweet, followed by a smooth steamy slide all the way down. Before you know it you’re delightfully confused, and your corset’s coming undone.

Redemption. Herbsaint. Bitters. Sounds like a recipe for rue. Erotic, unlikely, and wry with just a hint of corruption.

New Orleans in an old-fashioned glass.

In 2008, Louisiana State Senator Edwin R. Murray moved to have the Sazerac designated Louisiana’s official state cocktail. Louisiana balked, just as New York State would if we wanted the Manhattan (cocktail) so designated. (If it weren’t for the tax revenue, I doubt Louisiana or New York State would object if either city opted to secede.) The Louisiana pols went back and forth over the ethical implications of making the Sazerac the New Orleans-only official

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cocktail (rather than going statewide), but when the senators finally agreed, the House voted nay. Why? That's Louisiana politics. Unabashedly filthy but with a bravura that invites admiration. Ultimately, the Sazerac prevailed, and the bill was passed.

But you won't see drunken tourists cruising Bourbon Street with Sazeracs in neon [go-cups](#).

A Sazerac cocktail commands attention. It's best sipped in slightly seedy surroundings, out of a glass that weighs heavy in the hand. A substantial glass with history of the Big Easy variety: sketchy, perhaps, to citizens of the rest of the world, but just right for New Orleans. An invitation to anything.

If your corset's starting to chafe, and you can't get to NOLA tout de suite, rinse out your dead grandma's sippin' whisky glass (but not too well), and [follow this recipe](#). Biscuits optional. Time travel guaranteed.

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LESLIE NIPKOW

Leslie an Emmy Award and two-time Writers Guild Award winning scriptwriter and she is a Muay Thai kickboxing student. Her essay collection, *How to Kiss Like a Movie Star*, will be published by Greenpoint Press next year. She is an actress who turned her experience playing Erica Kane's prison guard on *All My Children* into the one-woman show, *Guarding Erica*, which is anthologized in *Talk to Me: Monologue Plays* (Vintage Press). Her work has been published in the *New York Times*, *O Magazine*, and *Salon.com*.

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