

# Time-honoured concoctions



By JEREMY TAN - THE BAR HOP

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The selection of classic cocktails at Farquhar's Bar in E&O Hotel, Penang, befits the opulent ambience. – Photos: JEREMY TAN/The Star

GOOD things never go out of style and classic cocktails are no exception.



Some that date back over a century have delighted generations of imbibers and continue to do so today simply because they taste great, are memorable and can easily be concocted in just about any bar in the world.

In Penang, one of many to hark back to classic cocktails

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heart of George Town.

Billed as a vintage cocktail bar, it is located in the hotel's Heritage Wing. When entering the main lobby, make a 180-degree about-turn to the left and head down the corridor until you come to a pair of French doors on the right.

Stepping inside is like going back in time. Cobalt blue walls, dark oak finishes, brass fittings and muted lighting evoke a sense of Victorian opulence typical of posh gentlemen's clubs. Antique decorations, old photographs and eclectic furniture further add character.



The bartender serving up one of the signature classics of Farquhar's Bar, the Gin Setengah.

The centrepiece bar is brightly lit to showcase the top-shelf spirits used in concoctions. The belief is that great cocktails need only a handful of good ingredients, and be done right.



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**A GATEWAY TO CENTRAL SARAWAK**

On a recent visit, I asked bartender Fiqi to make me one of their signature offerings. In a head

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A martini glass filled with a yellow concoction soon arrived. One worthy of social media flaunting, it had London Dry Gin as its base, with longan, pineapple juice and Grand Marnier.

I expected it to be overly sweet, but it was actually well balanced. The gin was pronounced, but the zing and fragrance of the tropical fruits made it refreshing and easy on the palate. One could easily down a few before feeling the alcohol kick in.

Flipping through the hotel's history book, I learned that the Gin Setengah was a favourite among guests (as well as the Armenian Sarkies brothers who founded the E&O in 1885) during the early 19th century, when alcohol was supposedly safer to consume than tap water.



The New York Sour, with a float of red wine (front) and Boston Sour (back).

The drink derived from a “stengah”, which was a half measure of whisky served with soda over ice. Hence the name, as “setengah” means half in Malay. With Penang being a British outpost then, gin was eventually swapped in.

The colonial influence does not end there. The bar is named after Robert Townsend Farquhar who served as Lieutenant-Governor of Penang from 1804 to 1805 and was credited for improving Fort Cornwallis to what we see today.

Fiqa recommended the Clover Club next. This drink also has a London Dry Gin base but is sh with Lillet (a French. wine-based aperitif). raspberries. lemon juice and a foamv head of egg v

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Another time-honoured concoction, it is said to predate Prohibition in America and was named after a men's club in Philadelphia, US, with the first published recipe appearing in 1901. Whoever conceived it certainly got it right, as it is still made largely the same way today.

Served in a goblet, its rich burgundy hue makes it equally Instagrammable. Taste-wise, it offers a sharp yet fruity hit, with the foam emulsifying everything and giving it body.



The Clover Club.

According to Fiqa, the raspberry puree made fresh provides a world of difference as you get a brighter burst of flavour.

With the night still young, I ordered a New York Sour next. Supposedly created in Chicago in the 1880s and known by various names before the present moniker stuck, it is essentially a Whisky Sour (bourbon, lemon juice and syrup) with added dry fruitiness thanks to a float of red wine.

The Classic and Aged Negroni are popular too. Both feature the winning combo of gin, sweet vermouth and Campari — though the latter is mixed then aged in-house in oak barrels for at least 90 days.

“It imparts a deeper and more smoky flavour profile, plus a hint of sweetness,” Fiqa said of the drink served with special ice cubes imprinted with the E&O logo.

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Also recommended here are the Old Pal, Old-Fashioned and Classic Martini. There is a selection of bar bites for those feeling peckish.

Farquhar’s Bar, E&O Hotel - No.10 Farquhar Street, George Town, Penang. Business hours: noon to midnight, daily. For reservations, call 04-222 2000.

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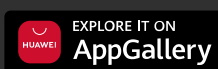
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