



Try the iconic bar's dead-simple cheat code for balanced, citrus-forward drinks.

Bartender Sam Ross has a penchant for equal-parts cocktails. His creation of the Paper Plane in 2007—a contribution he made to the debut menu of Chicago's Violet Hour—stood on the beautifully simple architecture of four ingredients in equal proportion. The combination of whiskey, lemon, Aperol and Amaro Nonino spurred countless derivatives, and now enjoys the status of being one of the most widely traveled modern classics.

Lightning struck twice when, 10 years later, Ross—who earned his stripes at New York's Milk & Honey and launched the celebrated bar Attaboy with partner Michael McIlroy in 2012—created another recipe using the formula of four three-quarter-ounce pours. This time, he assembled a cocktail called the Mosquito: mezcal, lemon, sweetened ginger juice and Campari.

“Equal-parts stirred cocktails have long been a staple at Attaboy, as we base our recipes on older classic cocktails,” says Ross, who estimates that the bar's repertoire—a scarcely accessible library of drinks, given Attaboy's reliance on bartender's choice rather than written menus—contains roughly 20 to 30 equal-parts originals. The Paper Plane, a shaken entry in the bar's equal-parts library, looked to the classic Last Word, and in turn Ross revisited the Paper Plane to come up with the Mosquito. “It's all about balance. You have to nail each component perfectly for the end product to sing.”

The Mosquito scratched a certain itch for Ross, namely his affinity for cocktails that balance sweet, sour and bitter flavors. “I find that combo to be the most pleasing for the palate,” he says. “With the Mosquito, I wanted to introduce the element of spice to contrast with bitter,” leading to the inclusion of ginger.

You can guess what happened next. Staffers at Attaboy, which has locations in New York and Nashville, began remixing the Mosquito, spawning more variations following this sour-esque equal-parts template. Now, no fewer than eight drinks exist in what the staff have dubbed the family of “bug cocktails,” since most are named after critters. Ross' favorites include the Praying Mantis, the

Lantern Fly and the Maverick. Each iteration keeps the lemon and ginger components of the Mosquito intact but swaps in a different spirit or bitter ingredient or both.

While the equal-parts citrus cocktail, to which the bug family belongs, may seem like a foolproof plug-and-play formula, it takes care to get things right. Ross says that to create a successful one, the team follows a methodical balancing act. The base spirit—whether it be Scotch, gin, mezcal or something else entirely—and citrus quotients are constants. “Orange or grapefruit juice do not cut it when it comes to the citrus component; you need the sharpness and acidity of fresh lemon or lime juice,” Ross warns.

A liqueur or amaro comes next, and can determine the bitterness of the drink. The sweet component is last: Its ABV (or lack of) is critical, because incremental alcohol will dry a drink out, Ross says, regardless of whether it contains sugar. Aperol, for example—which serves this role in Ross’ Paper Plane—is going to react differently in this formula than a nonalcoholic syrup would, resulting in a drier drink. “You need to factor this in when selecting your third and fourth components,” says Ross. “And remember, bitter is the opposite of sweet on your palate, so you can offset some of the sweetness for an extra bitter amaro [or] liqueur.” In the case of Ross’ Mosquito, bitter Campari is there to rein in the sugar in the sweetened ginger juice.

Here, get to know Sam Ross’ favorite bug cocktails.

[RECIPES](#)

Mosquito

A four-ingredient cocktail balancing smoky, spicy, sour and bitter.

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Praying Mantis

This equal-parts recipe stars Scotch and Gran Classico.

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[RECIPES](#)

Maverick

This bright, bittersweet gin cocktail gets a kick from ginger juice.

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[RECIPES](#)

Lantern Fly

Rum and Mexican amaro form the base for this simple shaken drink.

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