

Where to sip on the James Bond Martini

Dukes bar in London is legendary for its Martinis—it is where Ian Fleming would drink. People still come here to be shaken and stirred

Ruma Singh
feedback@livemint.com

A classic cocktail is the stuff of legend. Starting as a simple drink of its time, stories are woven around its origin, adding to its mystery. Finally, it attains cult status—reinvented, recreated but never irrelevant.

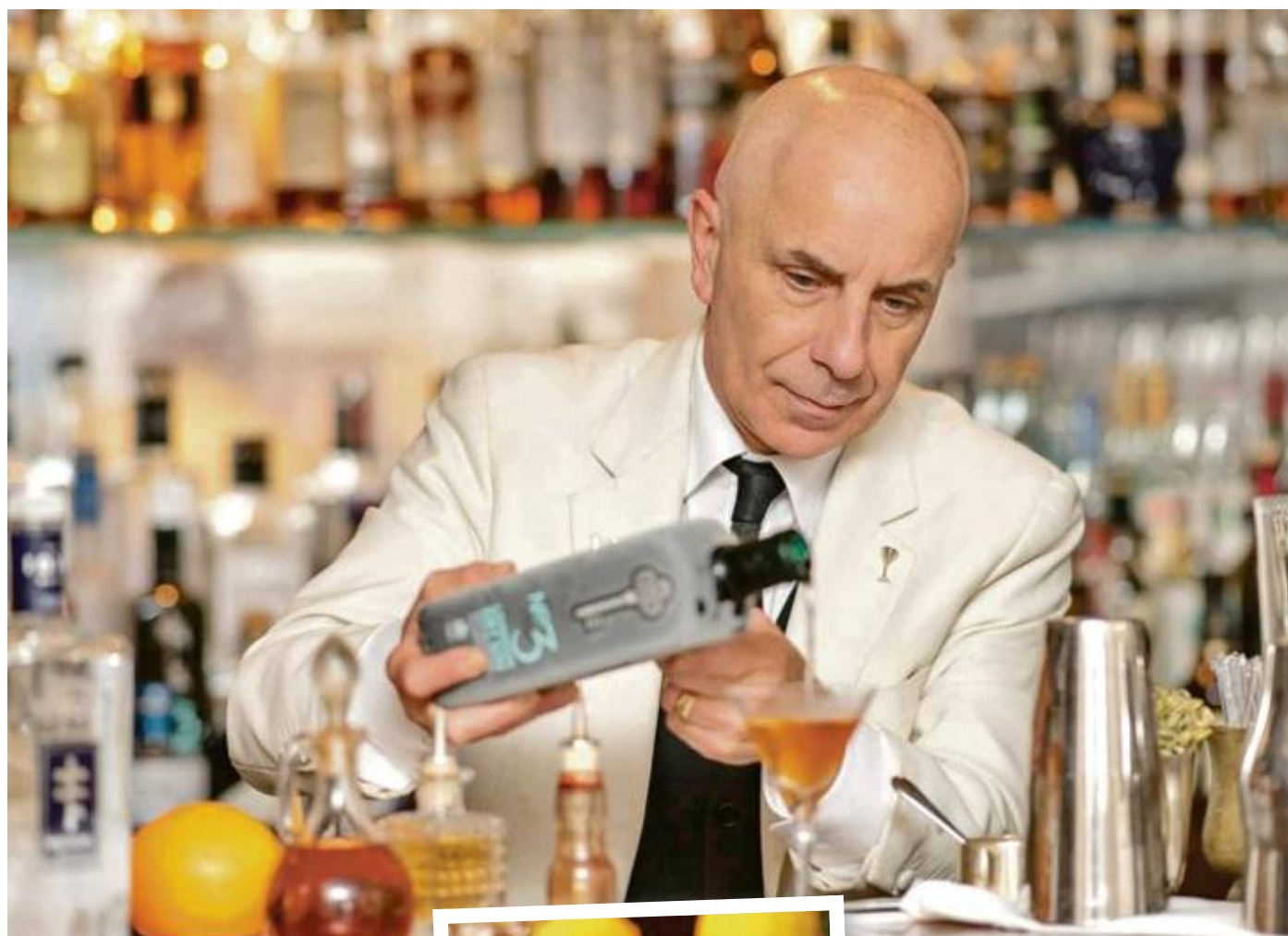
This is true of the Martini. My all-time favourite cocktail has been recreated a zillion times, but try as they may, the places that make it right are few. Which is why, on a recent trip to London, I decided a pilgrimage to Dukes was mandatory.

The legendary bar at the Dukes Hotel, situated in a quiet cul-de-sac in the historic heart of London's St James' district, is known for its Martinis, including its now-iconic Vesper Martini. Here, it is believed, Ian Fleming would often visit and James Bond's famous line about his preferred style of Martini ("shaken, not stirred") was conceptualized.

However, one must overcome the first challenge: finding a seat at the cosy bar. Dukes takes no reservations. Every guest must queue in the lobby for a table, no matter what their pedigree. The website suggests a smart casual dress code; leisurewear is actively discouraged. After a patient wait as I am finally ushered in, I find the surroundings understated and simple, much like the drink itself. The walls are sand-coloured, while low lighting and silk curtains underline the bar's elegance. An old-fashioned mahogany bar dominates a corner; on the walls are photos and memorabilia, including one signed (unintelligibly) by either Fleming or Sean Connery. The three-man bar team is overseen by another legendary figure—head barman Alessandro Palazzi, whose storied career includes stints at The Ritz and George V in Paris and London's Mandarin Oriental. Palazzi's international fame (he belongs to UK's Gin Guild and is Keeper of the Quai) is well-earned.

The signature cocktail at Duke's is the classic gin-based Martini, prepared tableside in a wooden trolley by Dukes' expert white-coated bartenders, along with the Bond-created Vesper, and several variants. The demand for Dukes' cocktails is so high that guests have been known to book a room at the hotel in the anticipation it would bump them up the queue. At £26 a drink, the Martinis—the menu features 13 versions with more possible—are far from cheap, but sipping one is an experience that fans have created travel itineraries around. Little wonder that nearly 300 Martinis are consumed daily, despite the two-Martini limit per head.

During a Zoom chat with my spirits teacher Rose Brookman, founder of The Mixing Class, UK's top WSET spirits course provider, we dis-



cuss Martinis. She believes that the sheer simplicity of the cocktail makes it difficult to replicate. "A Martini has two ingredients. It is so simple that it is hard to get 'right.' That is a good reason a cocktail endures and becomes a classic." The standard Martini might have started out as seven parts gin to one part vermouth, but it has come a long way since, she adds.

FLEMING AND FRIENDS

There is little doubt that the Ian Fleming connection is a major component of the mystique of Dukes. Fleming, a former intelligence officer turned writer, by all accounts, enjoyed his drinks as much as his fictional spy did.

Bond's recipe for the original Vesper Martini as mentioned in the 1953 book *Casino Royale* consists of three measures of ice-cold Gordon's gin, 1 measure of

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Blanc), shaken and served in a goblet with a thin slice of lemon peel. Over time, the original Vesper Martini was replaced in the Bond movies by the secret agent's new preference, the vodka Martini.

Historically, the Martini has seen many passionate advocates, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Ernest Hemingway to Winston Churchill. Did any frequent Dukes? Are there modern-day celebrities who have visited incognito? "We deliberately do not share that as it is the anonymity of not being spoken about that brings people back time and time again," the Dukes' marketing team informs me. The buzz is that it remains the haunt of fashion and movie super-



The Dry Martini at Dukes; head bartender Alessandro Palazzi

stars and rockstars. Many cocktails boast Fleming-esque names—Le Chiffre, Odd Job, Tiger Tanaka, Goldeneye, Miss Money Penny.

Dukes' version of the Vesper, one of its highest-selling drinks, features Potocki vodka (a nod to the Polish female spy Vesper Lynd is allegedly modelled on) combined with the much-awarded London Dry No 3 gin—a gin with a high alcohol content, making the cocktail far more potent—plus a dash of angostura bitters and a spray of amber vermouth from London's Sacred distillery. It is finished with a sliver of orange rind from Sevilla, shaved off the fruit tableside and swirled into the glass.

Dukes' signature classic gin martini, on the

other hand, marries Plymouth gin, a spritz of Sacred's extra dry vermouth from a crystal atomiser, with a twist of organic lemon zest from Italy's Amalfi coast. For olive lovers, a request to replace the lemon with olives would be entertained.

I am now halfway through my ice-cold classic Martini, expertly prepared tableside by Maurizio, and chatting with the Australian ladies from Perth at the next table. It is their fifth visit to Duke's—made every annual trip to London. Dukes offers more than Martinis, everything from Champagnes to world whiskies for those seeking variety, but expectedly, Martinis rule. Brookman adds, "A Martini is the perfect end to a tough day—everyone has one of those. Then, one sip and you feel your shoulders relax. It is like a breath of fresh air." It is for such emergencies that she pre-mixes a batch and stores it in her freezer. I personally prefer the convenience of Berry Bros and Rudd's pre-mixed Vesper Martini, created by Palazzi. It saves you the trouble of assembling and shaking, while replicating the taste of the Dukes' cocktail.

But in the end, a Dukes' customer visits the bar not just for a drink but the overall experience that Brookman calls the theatre of cocktail making: the ambience, combined with the mystique of the Fleming legend, the thrill of an experienced bartender making your very own customised Martini tableside. The first sip can transport you back to the scene in *Casino Royale* when Vesper Lynd asks Bond if he named the drink after her "because of the bitter aftertaste". 007 replies that he named it for her, "because once you have tasted it, you won't drink anything else."

That works for me.
Ruma Singh is a Bengaluru-based wine and travel writer.



'Time Bandits' show reimagines Gilliam's film

The TV series 'Time Bandits' is based on the imaginative 1981 fantasy film

Agencies
feedback@livemint.com

Adapting a cult-classic film into a television series is a daunting task, but for Lisa Kudrow and her collaborators on *Time Bandits*, that challenge just meant there was more room for exploration.

"The series version of a film means you're gonna expand and really go into some more details about that world, and that's what I was excited about," Kudrow said in a recent interview with *The Associated Press*. "It was really fun."

Time Bandits, an Apple TV series that begins streaming July 24, is based on the 1981 film of the same name directed by Monty Python's Terry Gilliam and co-written by him and frequent collaborator Michael Palin. Both the film and the series follow a rag-tag band of time-traveling thieves, led by Kudrow as Penelope, who join forces with their newest recruit—an 11-year-old history buff named Kevin—as they journey through time on a quest to save the boy's parents from evil forces.

While the series stays loyal to several key details and bits from the source material, Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement, who created the series with Iain Morris, said it was important to them that the show didn't feel like an imitation of the film.

"We had to be different as not to just be thieving or tracing over what they had," Clement said.

In the biggest departure from the original film, the bandits are not played by actors with dwarfism—a move that the duo said was swiftly criticized by the dwarfism community when the casting was announced early in the show's development.

Waititi said he and his co-writers initially wrote the script with some of the main cast as people with dwarfism but he doesn't think the film "should be defined because of the presence of

little people in it." They ultimately went with different actors. Clement said the creative team wrestled with the casting decision, referencing "two big sides of this debate": "Whether it's right to stereotype little people as magical creatures, and then also whether, by not doing that, you're cutting out jobs for smaller actors."

Following the casting announcement, Clement said they "reacted to those complaints and added parts for some smaller actors," saying that should the series be renewed for a second season, those roles would be more prominently featured.

Waititi and Clement both appear in the series themselves in recurring roles. The duo is known for their work on *What We Do in the Shadows*—a movie and FX series—and Waititi has also directed and appeared in major films, including *Jojo Rabbit* and two Thor movies.

While it does stray from the beloved film, *Time Bandits* brings the story to a new generation and strives to honor the original's humor and heart. "There's always a pressure of making anything, but we don't want to anger fans of the original movie, of course," Clement said before Waititi quipped: "We're scared of fans."

How Janam responded to the urgency of the moment

In this excerpt from a new biography of theatre activist Safdar Hashmi, the author recounts the early days of his troupe

Anjum Katyal
feedback@livemint.com

Less than four months after *Machime*, Safdar drafted and circulated a paper on street theatre, which he described as being 'documentary and brief, shocking yet familiar', so that its impact was 'not only emotional but also rational—and therefore a lasting one.' As a form, this kind of theatre was not subtle or overly analytical; rather it was 'loud and spectacular, and funny', albeit in a particular way, where 'loudness and clownery in actual practice meant not a multiplication of antics but rather a sureness of touch where precise and clear details established a situation or a mood with an economy of gestures and postures.'

Street theatre was, to him, 'a sort of newspaper-in-action, "to make explicit our stand on contemporary events from day to day." Beyond this agitprop role, street theatre also had a larger function: "of taking healthy entertainment to the culturally starved people."...

Around this time, Janam (the street theatre group) got news of a fresh series of communal riots in Aligarh which had, as Safdar puts it, 'a long history of Hindu-Muslim riots.'... They decided to create a play on communalism; but not before doing the research and 'analysing the political and economic factors which antagonise the traditionally harmonious coexistence of two communities.' The

ensuing *Hatyare* (Killers, December 1978) was based on a report on the riots circulated in 'progressive circles' by 'three friends of ours from Delhi University' who went to Aligarh to investigate the outbreaks.

As Safdar recounts, the report found that these 1978 riots were 'qualitatively different' from earlier clashes between the two communities. Aligarh was a thriving centre of the lock-making industry. Locks manufactured by Aligarh locksmiths were renowned, and had a large market. The entire traditional lock-making process consisted of seven interdependent stages, with each stage customarily being handled by Hindu or Muslim artisans—some parts by one community, some by the other. When riots broke out, the lock-making industry was severely hit—if the locksmiths of these two communities did not work together, locks could not be made.

According to the field research, over the previous two years two large lock factories had been set up in Aligarh, but due to the reputation of the traditional locksmiths, these factories with their mass-produced products were unable to break into the market to their satisfaction. 'It was in their interest to create a riot and thereby destroy the traditional lock-making industry and consequently, force the artisans to become wage-labourers in their factories. We took this as the basis for our next play.'



Jana Natya Manch's Safdar Hashmi in Hissar

SURENDRA RAJAN/GOOGLE ARTS & CULTURE

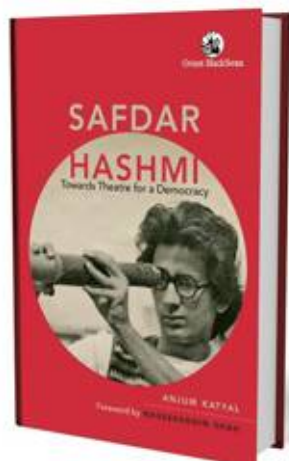
Having traced an apparently inter-religious clash to its economic and political root cause, Janam set to work to expose this conspiracy through their play, with the aim of helping the working-class identify the true enemy. *Hatyare* begins with a comprehensive introduction by the narrator, who, speaking directly to the audience, lays out the entire situation, from the traditional cooperation and friendship of the locksmiths of the two religious communities to the vested interests that wished to divide them and break up this solidarity and thereby kill two birds with

one stone—destroy their chief competition and gain cheap skilled labour for their lock factories. The rest of the play is a dramatised rendering of this scenario, weaving in the roles played by the administration, politician, capitalist factory owner and hired goons. Riots are instigated, and workers of both religions die in the violence. Eventually the dead rise and speak, alerting the audience to the insidious ways in which such clashes are instigated and manipulated by vested interests... The sutradhar or narrator draws the connection between such riots in towns

like Ahmedabad, Bhiwandi, Kanpur, Meerut, Muradabad, thereby linking the local incident to the larger national scenario. They stress that those who labour for their livelihood should realise that fellow workers, regardless of their religion, cannot be their enemy... With these original plays, Janam had established that as a street theatre group they were committed to taking up workers' rights and issues as the focus of their creative output. Their next play consolidated this approach further. According to Safdar, "This was the first time that we operated like real street theatre should. There was an event and within hours we were able to come up with a play and take it over the city."

The 'event' in question was the announcement by Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) in February 1979 of a hefty fare hike. The play that emerged was *DTC Ki Dhandhali* (The Stratagems of DTC).... The immediacy of the theme and the promptness of the performance ensured its popularity; they performed it that day at Super Bazar in Connaught Place and followed it up with three more performances in that area. They chose bus stands as performance venues. 'The people flocked to see it. ... The song became a hit,' says Safdar. 'Like film songs in our country become hits.'

Excerpted with permission from *Safdar Hashmi: Towards Theatre for a Democracy* by Anjum Katyal, published by Orient Blackswan.



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