

Orange Coast

¡TAMALES!
We Found 'em & Best
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Mulling

It's Over



here's no such thing as a bitter-cold O.C. winter, which makes hot drinks hard to find at bars and restaurants. But it's the holidays, and frankly, we could use a little comfort in these hard times. Fortunately, we discovered some local bartenders who pour dreamy sippers.>>>>>>>>>>

BY CINDY ARORA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHALLENGE RODDIE

The first time I tasted mulled wine was at a backyard party in the middle of December.

It was cold, even by Southern California standards, so I sought refuge from the night air in my stepsister's kitchen, where she hovered over a small stove, slipping cardamom pods and orange slices into a large pot of red wine.

As the mixture simmered, the smell of sugar and spice wafted through her apartment and into the yard, where everyone waited with anticipation. When the red wine became sufficiently infused with the fruit and spices, she shooed me out of the cozy kitchen and ordered me back into the evening air so I would be cold enough to appreciate her efforts.

It was love at first sip.

The ethereal blend of wine

and spices gave me the same romantic feeling sangria did during the summer. But this, this was a cup of comfort that embodied the holidays, and because of its copious amounts of wine and brandy, warmed me with its spirits.

About this time every year, I find myself trying to describe this drink to bartenders who never include it on their menus. Each time I ask for it, they whip me up a hot snifter of rum with a fragrant cinna-

mon stick, or a cup of cocoa with peppermint schnapps. Charming, but not the same.

Intrigued by the absence of mulled wine in Orange County, I researched its history, hoping for a clue as to why this traditional sipper doesn't have a place on our hot-drink scene.

Like most food and drink recipes, mulled wine is entrenched in family and cultural traditions. There isn't one particular recipe, but hundreds from all over the globe.

The drink is found most frequently in snow-heavy countries, where long winters call for hot beverages to ease the chill and warm the fingers.

In Norway, *bisp* is the drink of choice, made with spice-infused raisins soaked in wine and simmered for hours. The Swedes get a powerful kick from red-wine *glögg* spiked with Tawny Port and brandy, and peppered with almonds and orange slices. England's classic mulled wine includes orange peel, while the Germans have their Christmas *glühwein*. American versions are—surprise—an amalgam, with some recipes including riesling, rosemary, honey, and lemon.

The options are endless, which is why, after all my research, I couldn't under-

Here are four of the best hot-drink discoveries Orange County has to offer.



SIPPING CHOCOLATES

Martin Diedrich's Kean Coffee is an urban coffeehouse typically crowded with locals, students, hipsters, and chocolate aficionados searching for darling pint-size sipping chocolates. Take a seat on the busy outdoor patio and enjoy four ounces of creamy chocolate (from Madagascar, Ecuador, or Venezuela), mixed with three ounces of steamed milk. Warning: The snugly good feelings chocolate is known to produce are addictive. \$2.75. 2043 Westcliff Drive, Newport Beach, 949-642-5326, www.keancoffee.com.



SNOWBALL CAPPUCINO

Sapphire Pantry might be the ideal setting for a warm holiday drink—the patio, the views, the fresh night air. All are conducive to enjoying this sweet concoction of espresso, vanilla syrup, chocolate sauce, freshly toasted shredded coconut, steamed milk, and enough airy foam to make you think you're kissing a cloud. Anyone else hear sleigh bells? Small, \$3.25; large, \$3.65. 1200 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949-715-9889, www.sapphireinc.com.

stand why a drink with so much versatility got no love in Orange County.

My curiosity took me to Dana Point, where I met Bill Jonas, owner of Purple Feet Wines. Jonas, an East Coast transplant, drank plenty of mulled wine in his day. Now that he lives beach side, he still craves it and considered teaching a class in making mulled wines, but the locals weren't interested. "It doesn't get cold enough here and people don't even think about it."

I beg to differ. Why would so many places offer other such drinks if people didn't have a soft spot for a hot cocktail?

I visited wine shops, hotel bars, and restaurants that were highbrow, lowbrow, and straight down the middle. I

made pit stops at dive bars, neighborhood pubs, and chic lounges up and down Coast Highway. Bartenders tried to win me over with their newest hot drink, or cold one. One even made me dessert.

Just as I was getting discouraged, I met Paul Wilcox.

The 30-year-old bartender surfs during the week and pours a mean "filthy martini" at Memphis Café & Bar in Costa Mesa. He also has a penchant for mulled wine that could rival a New Englander's.

During holidays when he was growing up, his mother made mulled apple cider and mulled grape juice. As an adult, he replaced the grape juice with Port or a late-harvest wine, and simmered the mixture with cloves, grated

nutmeg, and cinnamon.

"It's almost like a hot sangria," says Wilcox, who serves the drink at Memphis. "You can add chunks of fruits, minced dried fruits ... there's just so many ways to change it and make it yours. It's the best drink to have when it's cold outside and you want to snuggle up on the couch."

Wilcox made a batch for me and a few friends, and on a hot fall night in Orange County, we sat around sipping from little mugs, taking in the spicy aroma. Even though most of us were in tank tops and flip-flops, it didn't matter; it really did feel like winter.

CINDY ARORA is an Orange Coast contributing writer.

Clove Port Mulled Wine

From Paul Wilcox, Memphis Café & Bar, Costa Mesa

40 whole cloves
2 whole nutmegs
3 cups water
6 cinnamon sticks
750 milliliters of Port, or late-harvest wine of your choice
2 tablespoons sugar (or to taste)
Dried chunks of mango, pear, nectarine, peach (optional)

Grate fresh nutmeg. Pour water into a medium pot and add the cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon sticks. Bring the water to a boil and simmer for about 10 minutes.

Add to the mixture your choice of wine. Allow the ingredients to simmer on low heat. Do not boil. Stir and taste. Add more sugar if necessary; if too sweet, add more wine.

For best results, let mixture cool, then pour into a container and refrigerate for a couple of hours, to allow the flavors to meld. When ready to use, reheat and serve in mugs. Garnish with cinnamon sticks.



HOT RUM PUNCH

The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, is the quintessential antidote for a chilly Southern California day. Curl up in front of the bar's fireplace or perch yourself on a stool and watch surfers from a massive bay window that overlooks the glistening ocean. Wrap those chilly fingers around a hot toddy of rum, cognac, sherry, freshly squeezed lime juice, and finely minced ginger, garnished with sliced green apples dusted with nutmeg. Picture perfect. \$14. 1 Ritz Carlton Drive, Dana Point, 949-240-2000, www.ritzcarlton.com.



SPICY CHAI LATTE

Find a haven of tranquility amid the bustle of Bristol Street at Milk + Honey's Zen rock garden, where locals come for organic tea, coffee, and some peace and quiet. Try the wintry organic spicy chai tea latte mixed with steamed milk and liberally doused with cinnamon sprinkles. A most fragrant and calming drink. If you feel the urge, go ahead and say "Om"—no one will bat an eye. \$3.45. 2981 Bristol St., Costa Mesa, 714-708-0092, www.milkandhoneyshop.com.