

# Hot Rum Punch



Illustration: J. Barnard from the 1872 edition.

*To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted, and looked as if he were making, instead of punch, a fortune for his family down to the latest posterity. As to Mrs. Micawber, I don't know whether it was the effect of the cap, or the lavender-water, or the pins, or the fire, or the wax-candles, but she came out of my room, comparatively speaking, lovely. And the lark was never gayer than that excellent woman....*

*'But punch, my dear Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, tasting it, 'like time and tide, waits for no man. Ah! it is at the present moment in high flavour. My love, will you give me your opinion?'*

*Mrs. Micawber pronounced it excellent.*

*'Then I will drink,' said Mr. Micawber, 'if my friend Copperfield will permit me to take that social liberty, to the days when my friend Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world side by side....'*

—CHAPTER 28, "MR MICAWBER'S GAUNTLET," DAVID COPPERFIELD

In this famous scene from *David Copperfield*, a disastrous dinner party is redeemed with the making of a bowl of punch. Punch was extremely popular during Dickens' time. As a recent *New York Times* article explains, "Most of us these days only see the bowl and ladle at year-end parties, if at all, but a thriving punch-drinking culture once existed throughout the English-speaking world. Bowls were shared in taverns and clubs, as well as the home. And this period — roughly from the 1670s through the 1850s — has become a point of inspiration for a growing number of American bars." (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/24/dining/24bowl.html>)

The punch recipe below—which is as faithful to that of Dickens' time as possible—was created by David Wondrich, a former English professor and now a writer, contributing editor for *Esquire* magazine, and an authority on spirits and cocktails.

1. Using a swivel-bladed vegetable peeler, peel four lemons, avoiding as much as possible cutting into the white pith. Reserve the lemons and put the peels into a large, non-reactive bowl.
2. Add one cup of sugar, preferably demerara or turbinado (such as "Sugar in the Raw"). Using a muddler, mash the peels into the sugar until the sugar is thoroughly wet with the lemon oil.
3. Pour one pint of boiling water into the bowl with the oleo-saccharum (the lemon oil-infused sugar). Press the solids in the strainer to extract whatever can be extracted and discard them. Stir the sugar in the hot water until it has dissolved.
4. Squeeze the reserved lemons and enough others to get eight ounces of juice.
5. Add the lemon juice, stir and then remove the lemon peels with a slotted spoon and discard them.
6. Add one liter of dark, full-bodied rum, such as Myers's or Gosling's. Stir, taste, and adjust for sweetness.
7. Pour this into a large (3-quart or bigger) earthenware or metal jug.
8. Immediately before serving, add a quart of boiling water, stirring to dissolve the sugar.
9. Grate about a quarter of a nutmeg on top.

To keep this hot, you will need to set it by a fireplace or heating-stove, if you want to do it the old-fashioned way, or on a hotplate set on low if you're determined to be modern about it. © 2009 David Wondrich. Used with permission.

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