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Whet your palate with a Bob-Tailed Nag, doo da, doo da

September 08, 2005 | By Gary Regan, Special to the Chronicle

During the course of a typical work week I receive many cocktail recipes from bartenders. Some, though thankfully few, are mediocre, and a good deal more than you might expect are well-thought-out potions. But every once in a while the planets align and I find myself looking at the formula for a truly astounding drink, though it's seldom I know that until the drink actually reaches my lips.

Such a drink is the Bob-Tailed Nag, a new cocktail created by Jonny Raglin, principal bartender at Absinthe Brasserie & Bar on Hayes Street in San Francisco. Like many classic cocktails -- think the martini, Manhattan, Rob Roy -- its beauty lies in its simplicity. And its simplicity is oh, so complex.



Chronicle / John Storey

Jonny Raglin, principal bartender at Absinthe Brasserie & Bar, invokes the gleeful spirit of Stephen Foster's singalong song "Camptown Races" with the rye-based Bob-Tailed Nag cocktail. Chronicle photo by John Storey
 Credit: John Storey

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The Bob-Tailed Nag is a lightly fragrant, Manhattan-style drink with subtle herbal notes that complement, rather than detract from, the whiskey.

Raglin uses Michter's Single Barrel Straight Rye Whiskey, which has a pleasant spiciness and a sturdy backbone, as a base for the Bob-Tailed Nag. Michter's also offers an interesting 10-year-old bottling of straight rye. It's highly suitable on the rocks, or sip it neat to fully explore its beautiful perfumed finish.

Wild Turkey also issues a great straight rye whiskey -- not to be confused with blended whiskies that are often, quite erroneously, referred to as "ryes." The Rittenhouse Bottled in Bond rye is also a fine example of this style of whiskey. At 18 years old, Sazerac Rye is one of the finest on the market -- incredibly spicy but well-balanced with vanilla, oak and a hint of violets.

To soothe the soul of the whiskey, Raglin employs Cocchi Barolo Chinato, a product of which I was completely unaware until the recipe for the Bob-Tailed Nag prompted me to invest in a bottle. I was duly rewarded: This spiced Italian digestivo is refreshing, tart, spicy and welcoming. I sipped it neat, then on the rocks and finally I used it to fix Raglin's drink. It's heavenly.

Raglin calls for a half-ounce of this ingredient in his original recipe. I ended up doubling that amount, and preferred the cocktail that way, but this is merely a case of individual taste.

Raglin's masterpiece is finished with a few dashes of mint bitters, a product available from Fee Brothers in Rochester, N.Y. (800-961-3337, www.feebrothers.com), a fine family-owned business that's been in existence, in one guise or another, since the mid-1800s. If you can't wait to try a Bob-Tailed Nag I strongly suggest that you hightail it to Absinthe and get the drink straight from the horse's cocktail shaker. This is a drink not to be missed. [Bob-Tailed Nag](#)

Adapted from a recipe by Jonny Raglin of Absinthe Brasserie & Bar in San Francisco.

INGREDIENTS:

1 1/2 ounces Michter's Single Barrel Straight Rye Whiskey

1/2-1 ounce Cocchi Barolo Chinato

3 dashes mint bitters

1 lemon twist (for garnish)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Fill a mixing glass two-thirds full of ice and add all of the ingredients. Stir for approximately 30 seconds, and strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Add the garnish.

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