

## Provisions: Apple Brandy Holiday Punch

Whether you're serving one person or 20, Alembic Bar has a crowd-pleasing holiday cocktail for all your ugly sweater party needs

December 16, 2015 | Words by Liv Combe | Photos By Alex Souza

Ah, the holidays. A time of joy, gift-giving, and ugly sweater parties. Whether you're playing host to friends or family this year, you'll undoubtedly find yourself in a situation where lots of festive people need a festive amount of alcohol. So instead of leaving you to open a room-temperature 30 rack of light beer, we took the morning off of work to head over to [Alembic Bar](#) on San Francisco's Haight Street.

In the early morning light of the bar, we chatted with bar manager Larry Piaskowy, who mixed us up an apple brandy holiday punch in two convenient serving sizes — for a romantic holiday happy hour *à deux*, or for a group of 15 to 25 of your closest friends and family (but more like 12 if they really like to hit the hooch).



Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, Larry learned how to cook with his grandmother and her sisters, making cookies and pierogis every Christmas. “From a young age, I was raised to be very social, so I always loved the holidays,” says Piaskowy. “Every year, we’d have a Christmas party at my mom’s tiny house, cramming 60 or 70 people in there.” Read: he’s more than familiar with the large-batch cocktail.

Piaskowy moved to California about 15 years ago to cook, working in San Francisco kitchens and running his own food company for a while. But Alembic is the only place he’s ever officially tended bar. About three years ago, Piaskowy was looking for some additional part-time work and wound up in Alembic’s tent at Outside Lands. “We’d hire you as a bartender any day; they told me. I don’t think they knew I’d say, ‘How about tomorrow?’”



Alembic, which is owned by the [Magnolia Brewery](#) family, turned out to be a pretty ideal work environment for Piaskowy.

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“I never feel like I have a battle to fight if I have an idea that requires a little extra time or buying the better ingredients,” he says. “Dave [McLean, the Magnolia owner] supports that all the way. He’s also really focused on Alembic being casual and approachable — he wants someone to come in off the street and feel like this is their neighborhood bar that they can come back to more than once a year. That attitude is really important to me. Because in the end, as much as I’ve spent decades in kitchens and now learning about spirits and all this crazy fancy stuff, if I can’t share it with people, it’s kind of pointless. It’s just

food and drinks. If people can’t access it, I’m wasting my time. The technique and the details and the processes of making a drink perfectly every time are for me, but talking with a customer, getting their likes and dislikes, and picking the perfect drink for them is what I really love. What makes me happy is what I do for other people.”



With 20 years of experience as a professional chef under his belt, Piaskowy dreams up new cocktail recipes slightly differently than most bartenders. “I approach these flavors differently because I haven’t been around them that much,” he says. “I’m not locked into the ‘this is the way it’s been done for 20 years’ mentality. The chef’s perspective is slightly different. It isn’t necessarily better or worse — it’s just different.”

So when he set out to create a holiday punch for Huckberry, Piaskowy considered the flavors he wants around Christmastime. It all starts with Apple Jack, a 100-proof apple brandy from [Laird & Company](#) that’s at once fruity and dry.

**Fun Fact:** with commercial distilling License #1, Laird is the oldest-operating family distillery in the United States.



“I think that sweet cocktails get very cloying,” says Piaskowy. “This drier Apple Jack means that you can relax and drink it over time without having those flavors sit on your palate.”

And the fruity-yet-dry theme continues. “Citrus is a very holiday flavor,” he says. “But instead of going with a heavy orange juice, I thought a dry curaçao would bring some nice citrusy flavor; a lot of orange liqueurs have a lot of sweetness to them, but this one’s really dry. Walnuts are another winter theme, so I added in nocino, an Italian green walnut liqueur. To bring in some bright spiciness, something that wakes up the palate, I have this [Cannella](#) cinnamon cordial, made right here in San Francisco. And to compliment that warm baking spice, I added in these Orleans bitters, which have a really anis-forward flavor.”

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Mix it all together, top it off with a splash of dry sparkling wine, and you've got an excellent wintery cocktail, dubbed "Clarence's Wings." ("Creating recipes I do in my sleep," says Piaskowy. "Naming cocktails? Now that's hard.")

Whether you're making it for you and your significant other or a room full of in-laws, it's fruity, subtly spicy, boozy, and not too sweet. It might just be the most perfect cocktail that Piaskowy's made yet. [H]



### CLARENCE'S WINGS

SERVES: 1 PERSON

*Ingredients*

1.5 OZ. <i>Louis's Bonded Apple Brandy</i>	3/4 OZ. <i>Lemon juice</i>	1/2 OZ. <i>Simple syrup</i>
1/4 OZ. <i>Picape Fennel Dry Cynaroo</i>	1/4 OZ. <i>Nocino</i>	1/4 OZ. <i>Cannella cinnamon cordial</i>
2 dashes <i>Scapppy's Orleans bitters</i>	1 oz. <i>Dry sparkling wine</i>	<i>Lemon wheel</i>

*Steps*

- Combine all ingredients but the sparkling wine and lemon slice in a shaker. Tip from Larry Piaskowy, bar manager at Alembic: "Build your cocktail from your least expensive ingredient on up. That way if you mess up, you're throwing out a few dashes of bitters and not your precious booze." To make the simple syrup, combine a 1:1 ratio by weight of water and sugar; try eight ounces of each.
- Shake vigorously for 30 seconds.
- Strain into a rocks glass, add ice, and top with the sparkling wine (think a dry prosecco or cava) and a lemon wheel.



This large-batch cocktail would only serve 10 of Liv Combe's friends. She's the Senior Editor at Huckberry in San Francisco.



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