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Like “The Dude,” Jeff Bridges’ dissolute bowler in the 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*, I have always felt a personal connection to the White Russian. It was the go-to tittle for my grandmother—the same woman who daintily claimed she got tipsy “just smelling a drink” during a Prohibition-era first date with my grandfather. And it’s a point of pride that, in my 20s, I knocked back an unspecified number of White Russians with her at a bar mitzvah, resulting in a family kick line. Oh, the power of that trashy mix of vodka, coffee liqueur, and cream. While it doesn’t have speakeasy roots or a fashionably bitter edge, bartenders have taken a shine to the drink lately, updating it with artisan coffee liqueurs (see tasting notes at SAVEUR.COM/HOLIDAYDRINKS) and infused syrups. But even with these high-minded tweaks, it remains an easy-drinking libation. The “Russian” refers to vodka, and the Black Russian was created in 1949, with just vodka and coffee liqueur. It’s unclear when dairy entered the picture. Cocktail historian David Wondrich cites 1961’s *The Diners’ Club Drink Book*, which mentions two vodka-and-Kahlua drinks, one with cream. But most experts point to the mid-1960s for the White Russian’s official debut. That’s surely when its popularity hit its stride, spilling over into the sweet-tooth ’70s. Today, the White Russian abides, albeit in delicious new incarnations. —Kara Newman

The Dude

The Wallflower in Manhattan pours this drink named for the hero in *The Big Lebowski*. Shake 1 1/2 oz. cognac, 3/4 oz. chilled coffee, 1/2 oz. each Demerara sugar, heavy cream, and ruby port, 4 dashes Angostura bitters, and 1 egg in a shaker. Add ice; shake. Strain into glass. Makes 1 cocktail.



In Praise of the White Russian

Coffee, cream, and vodka drinks we’re not ashamed to love



Espresso Martini

Vanilla liqueur perfumes this drink from New York’s Dear Irving bar. Combine 1 1/2 oz. vodka, 1 oz. cold-brew coffee, and 3/4 oz. each coffee and vanilla liqueurs in an ice-filled shaker. Shake; strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Top with 1/4 c. heavy cream and dust with cocoa powder. Makes 1 cocktail.



White Nun

San Francisco’s Tosca Cafe serves this warm drink. Bring 3/4 oz. heavy cream, 3/4 oz. whole milk, and 1 tsp. coffee syrup to a simmer in a 1-qt. saucepan; remove from heat. Add 1 oz. coffee liqueur and 1/2 oz. brandy; pour into a mug. Add 1/4 oz. cream to pan; whisk over medium until frothy. Pour over drink. Makes 1 cocktail.



Ozark Speedball

This citrusy coffee cocktail comes from Portland, Oregon’s House Spirits. Stir 1 oz. each chilled coffee, coffee liqueur, and white whiskey in an ice-filled shaker. Strain into a chilled old-fashioned glass. Top with 1/4 c. heavy cream and a dash of Angostura bitters; garnish with 4 drops orange oil. Makes 1 cocktail.

Roast
fresh Ham
p. 68

Make
an 8-Hour
Bread
It’s Really Worth
p. 93

Go
Iceland for
the Cookie
p. 84