



DRINKS | COCKTAILS

Is The Paper Plane the Cocktail of 2025?

BY EMMA RIVA

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Food52 called the Paper Plane as “the cocktail of 2025.” But for the average bargoer, it might not yet be a staple, or a drink you’ve even heard of at all. Something to remember about cocktails is that compared to the 6000-year history of wine or the 13,000-year history of beer, cocktails are pretty new. Most modern cocktails come from the 1800s. The word itself only first appeared in *The Balance and Columbian Repository*, an upstate New York newspaper, in 1806. Though the concept of a mixed drink existed, it had never gotten a singular definition. According to the *Columbian Repository*, a cocktail was “stimulating liquor, composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water, and bitters.” The inventive craft cocktail we know today only truly took off during the Prohibition Era, when bartenders disguised bad bootleg liquor other mixing ingredients.

So, Just What is the Paper Plane Cocktail?

By the time Prohibition ended in 1933, you had cocktails like the Martini, the Manhattan, and the Old Fashioned. It puts it in perspective that things we think of now as ubiquitous only became popular in our parents’ or grandparents’ lifetimes. The Paper Plane, this trendy recent addition, came into being at The Violet Hour in Chicago in 2008. That’s right, this cocktail would not even be old enough to drink alcohol if it were a person.

So, what is it? The Paper Plane has equal parts bourbon, Amaro **Nonino**, Aperol, and lemon juice. It’s a take on a Bourbon Sour. Its original inventor, Sam Ross, named it after the hit early-aughts M.I.A. song “Paper Planes.” He originally used Campari, but found that it didn’t balance well with the other parts of the cocktail. One of the ways this cocktail made a splash is that because of its popularity, main bars began to stock Amaro **Nonino**—Elisabetta **Nonino** of the **Nonino** brand said that “Thanks to Sam Ross, now Amaro **Nonino** is a must-have in any cocktail bar.” We also have Ross to thank for the Penicillin, by the way.

Why is it Popular?

The Paper Plane is easy to make for bartenders because it’s equal parts of each ingredient. Its rise in popularity maybe reflects a move away from sugary cocktails and towards more booze-forward craft cocktails. The beverage industry is a world of extremes, so perhaps as a reaction the move towards non-alcoholic drinks, people who do drink are going whole-hog on alcohol heavy drinks.

But a Paper Plane is a way to enjoy the smokiness of bourbon without the no-frills whiskey-on-the-rocks approach to ordering, either. The Aperol spritz and the espresso martini had a moment in 2024, so a few days into 2025 it remains to be seen whether the Paper Plane will really take off. Bartender Hannah McKee of Con Alma made a version of it for our Four Calling Birds cocktail that combined it with an Aviation for a fun spin on Ross's original recipe. If you're looking to spruce up your typical bar order, give a Paper Plane a try yourself with our Paper Plane Cocktail.

Story by Emma Riva

Photography by Laura Petrilla