

Merlin Griffiths: shaking things up this Christmas

The *First Dates* bartender discusses the hit dating show, top tipples and his latest cocktail kit. **Words: Anna Evdokimou**



MERLIN GRIFFITHS

Merlin Griffiths — the kind, unassuming man behind the bar on hit TV show *First Dates* — began his relationship with bartending in 1996, when he started as a barback at The Doghouse on Wardour Street. Now, alongside running his own pub, he appears on the Channel 4 series, providing hopeful daters with a respite from their nerves through heartwarming advice and flavourful drinks.

We spoke to the bar star about his recently released cocktail-making kit, and how we can recreate his signature tipples at home.

Which drinks do you tend to make the most on *First Dates*?

Firstly, we get daters from all walks of life, so we have to be ready for a huge variety of drinks. Sometimes a dater will throw down a 'surprise me' challenge, and those moments are fun. But more often they'll stick to what they know. There's enough nerves surrounding the date itself without needing to drink anything outside of their comfort zone.

Is that disappointing?

I'd rather our daters were happy and relaxed, and ready for their date. If that means they just have a beer, wine or orange juice, so be it. Their happiness is my happiness.

What is your favourite cocktail to make?

My personal favourites at Christmas would certainly be either a port cobbler or a Scotch mist variant with vanilla syrup and a quality single malt. And yes, you can mix with top-shelf whisky!

How can festive cocktails be made at home?

Rather than simply layering everything with cinnamon, ginger and orange, I recommend indulging in festive colours, textures and luxury spirits. Think more along the lines of using sparkling wines, or meads that have a low alcoholic strength. Don't feel constrained by the need to make everything Christmas-spiced, or cream liqueur-based. It's your Christmas,

so celebrate with your favourite tipples, whether alcoholic or not.

What made you decide to create your own cocktail kit?

Over the years I've seen a rise in cocktail shakers and tools available in homeware sections, which is a good thing. But what bothered me was their quality compared to some of the pans and utensils sold for cooking. There seemed to be a lack of high-quality, professional-level equipment. A cocktail shaker that leaks or freezes shut takes much of the enjoyment out of making drinks at home.

So, I decided to team up with British steel manufacturer Bonzer to rectify this. The result is a professional bar kit that, like a quality cast iron pan, will last you a very long time. This is the exact same kit I use myself, and, with this, you'll be able to enjoy making drinks for your friends and family. It also makes a perfect gift for any cocktail aficionados or frequent party hosts in your life.

MERLIN'S FESTIVE COCKTAILS

Lemon & Ginger Mule (non-alcoholic)

75ml cold lemon & ginger tea
20ml honey syrup (two parts honey dissolved into one part boiling water)
Juice of half a lime
One dash of orange bitters
Ginger beer to top

Fill three quarters of a highball glass with ice, add all except the ginger beer and use your barspoon to stir briefly. Top with a little more ice and the ginger beer. Garnish with some slices of ginger.

Merlin's Florodora

40ml London Dry Gin
Six fresh raspberries
Juice of half a lime
Optional dash of Angostura bitters
Ginger ale

Add the gin, raspberries, lime juice and bitters to the small half of the shaker. Fill with ice and shake well. Strain into a highball glass full of ice. Finish with ginger ale, give it a quick swirl and garnish with the lime shell and a raspberry. merlingriffiths.com

Have a merry MuscleFood Christmas

The season to eat, drink and be merry is almost here, and what better way to do all that than with MuscleFood's sensational Christmas range? From handy hampers to gorgeous joints, MuscleFood has everything you need to create a festive feast that will make your taste buds jingle with joy

When it comes to turkeys, MuscleFood is all about quality. The company carefully sources birds from trusted farms, ensuring they're reared with care and expertise. Whether you're after a whole turkey or a juicy turkey butterfly, the stunning range has you covered.

Not a fan of turkey? No problem. The range of beef roasts will have you grazing happily. MuscleFood selects only the finest cuts of beef, guaranteeing tender and juicy mouthfuls. From beef topside to sizzling sirloin, these beef roasts are poised and ready to steal the show.



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from reputable suppliers that value quality.

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