

Bar

The Cocktail Recommendation Standard

Five steps for the guest who says "surprise me". Two questions about taste find the right drink faster than a tour of the menu, and guests enjoy being asked.

Who	When	You need
Bartenders, and bar waiters who take orders	Whenever a guest is unsure, asks for a suggestion or says "surprise me"	The menu, the specs, one drink you can describe in each taste family

Measured by No more than two questions asked · Three drinks suggested at most · The guest's choice noted in the profile

1 Ask two questions

Ask about taste, never about knowledge. One question on the style (long and fresh, or short and strong), one on flavour (bitter, sour, sweet or smoky). Then stop asking and start suggesting.

"Something long and fresh, or short and strong? And do you like bitter, or more citrus?"

Common mistake Asking which spirit the guest prefers. Many guests do not know, and now they feel tested.

2 Suggest three

Suggest two or three drinks from the menu that fit both answers, at similar prices, in one sentence each. Say how each one tastes and feels in the mouth, not which brands are in it.

"The Bergamot Spritz is bright and a little bitter. The Paloma is sharper, with grapefruit and salt."

Common mistake Reading out the whole section. By the fifth drink the guest has forgotten the first and orders a gin and tonic.

3 Hear the no

If the guest hesitates at a word (smoky, sweet, egg white), drop that direction at once and offer one change. The words a guest turns down tell you more than the ones they agree to.

"No smoke, then. The Old Cuban has the same warmth, with mint and lime instead."

Common mistake Defending your own favourite after the guest has hesitated. They order it to be polite and leave half.

4 Off the menu

If nothing on the list fits, build a drink to the guest's taste from a classic, with five ingredients at most and in the same price range. Write what you made on the ticket so it can be repeated.

"A Daiquiri, less sugar, a splash of grapefruit. On the ticket as 'Mrs Park's Daiquiri'."

Common mistake Inventing a twelve-ingredient drink to impress. Nobody can make it again, and the guest asks for it tomorrow.

5 Remember it

When the guest likes the drink, write it in the profile with any change to the spec. On the next visit, offer it by name before handing over the menu, so the conversation starts where it ended.

"Mr Okonjo, room 618: likes bitter, no egg white. Old Cuban, less sugar. Offer it first."

Common mistake Keeping it in your own memory. The guest comes back on your night off and starts again from nothing.

From What They Say to What You Pour

Six things guests say when they are unsure, the one question that narrows it, and where to start. Put drinks from your own list in the third column.

The guest says	Ask next	Start from
"Something refreshing."	"Long and fizzy, or short and sharp?"	Collins, Paloma, Spritz
"Nothing sweet."	"Bitter, or dry and clean?"	Negroni, Martini, Americano
"Something strong."	"Smooth, or with an edge?"	Old Fashioned, Manhattan, Sazerac
"I usually drink wine."	"White or red, usually?"	French 75, Bamboo, Americano
"No alcohol, please."	"Fruity, or a little bitter?"	The alcohol-free section
"Surprise me."	"Anything you don't like?"	The house signature

How to use this with your team

Brief one row a day at the pre-shift meeting, with one bartender playing the guest. The bar manager listens to three recommendations a night and checks that no more than two questions were asked.

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