



The Gage's Cucumber
Cobbler mixes Pimm's #1,
gin, lemon and cucumber.

Pimm and Not-So-Proper

British classic Pimm's #1 lets loose in cutting-edge Chicago cocktails

| By Michael Nagrant | Photography by Jim White |

There may be no better reward for enduring one of Chicago's hard winters than a boozy alfresco afternoon. Put away the juleps, the Daiquiris and the Margaritas, though, because there's a new sipper in the city. Long the toast of England at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships and the cornerstone of New Orleans' historic Napoleon House bar, the Pimm's #1 cocktail has landed in Chicago.

Bearing citrus, herb and bitter notes, Pimm's #1 is a tea-like, gin-based liquor that was invented in 1823 by London oyster bar owner James Pimm as a soother for upset stomachs. Pimm later brewed five other varieties based on different spirits, but only Pimm's #1, Pimm's #6 (vodka) and a variation on Pimm's #3 (brandy) called Pimm's Winter Cup are still brewed today. At local faves like English, The Gage and more, however, it's all about the número uno, which is escaping its standard lemon and cucumber mixers to splash into more daring, powerful cocktails.

The Violet Hour, which muddles Pimm's #1 with cucumber, strawberry, orange, mint and a lemon, topped off with 7-Up and a mint sprig, has one of the closer takes on the classic. "Pimm's screams summer in a very proper manner," says partner Toby Maloney. "It can be drunk when playing croquet, sitting on a veranda, having a picnic, watching a polo game

or playing a game of kickball." Chicago may not field many polo matches, but we'll happily take another Pimm's—Maloney's fruit-forward blend is smooth and refreshing—in the snug, high-backed booths of The Violet Hour, where the lights are dim, the drinks are strong and the flood of local hipsters is anything but the croquet crowd.

Better, though, is a sunny seat patioside at The Gage, faced with a chilled cucumber cobbler (lemon, cucumber and Pimm's, punched up by a shot of Hendrick's gin). English offers an even bolder riff with its strawberry-infused Pimm's cocktail, and Bar DeVille has Pimm's on hand—but maybe

the most invigorating incarnation of the drink is found at Province, where bartender Jeff Donahue uses Pimm's as a sweet foil to the cool spiciness of Bermudan ginger beer in his Pimlico Grid. "The flavors come together to almost form an 'adult' soft drink rather than a boozy cocktail," says Donahue. "For that reason I think it's the most quaffable drink on our list, and one that often surprises those who don't typically drink gin."

Craving a cocktail? Try the Violet Hour, 1520 N. Damen Ave., 773.252.1500; Bar DeVille, 701 N. Damen Ave., 312.929.2349; English, 444 N. LaSalle St., 312.222.6200; The Gage, 24 S. Michigan Ave., 312.372.4243; Province, 161 N. Jefferson St., 312.669.9900. ■

Posh Pimm's Cup (courtesy of The Violet Hour)

Ingredients: 1.5 oz. Pimm's #1; .5 oz. Tanqueray; .75 oz. freshly squeezed lime juice; .75 oz. simple syrup; 1 strawberry; 1 slice orange; 1 slice cucumber; 1 sprig mint

Garnish: 1 sprig mint; 1 slice cucumber

Instructions: Muddle fruit and cucumber in a shaker. Add mint. Add spirits, lime juice, simple syrup. Add 5 large ice cubes. Shake. Strain into a glass filled with crushed ice. Top with club soda. Stir briefly. Garnish with mint and cucumber.