



# BAR TOURS, BABICKA STYLE

There's not a corner of London you won't find a talented bartender putting this wormwood vodka to interesting use. Just to be sure, though, we set out to visit as many as we could in a single April night



**B**abička Original Wormwood Vodka is starting to gain a foothold in the UK, and in London in particular.

From Old Street to Kensal Rise, via Mayfair and Fitzrovia, this wormwood vodka is making its way into some great bars, and into some truly fine cocktails.

Underground speakeasy establishment Nightjar, just off Old Street roundabout, was as good a place as any to start. With Marian Beke behind the bar, we were guaranteed not only a delicious drink, but a beautiful one too.

Served in an assortment of punch glasses, Beke's drink, the Nightjar Barrel Punch, arrived with a dark chocolate spoon and mini Oreo. The drink paired Babička with no less than four different milks (almond, rice, soya and evaporated), vanilla maple syrup and spices, garnished with dried nutmeg. This was creamy, as you'd expect, but remained quite light and drinkable, with Babička's character really shining through.

'I love that you can still taste the

wormwood...' said Alex Clarke, the brand's founder – and if there's anyone who knows about tasting wormwood, it's him.

Next stop Mayfair, for a quick visit to Ni Ju San, Hakkasan's bar on St James's Street. We were greeted by Kris Lach, who refreshed the team with a slew of Grapefruit Vodka Collins', one of the twists-on-a-classic that characterise the bar's bijou list. With Babička, fresh grapefruit and the very trendy yuzu sake, this was a bright, fresh drink, lent a herbaceous,

## IT'S A VODKA THAT CLEARLY HAS MANY FACES, EQUALLY AT HOME IN A HOTEL LOUNGE OR PARTY BAR

wormwood character by the vodka.

Special mention should be made of the welcome drink served in small quantities at Ni Ju San, the Velvet Haiku. This ingenious drink combined sake, velvet falernum, green tea, cucumber and prosecco.

A quick stroll across the road took us to

William's Bar and Bistro at the St James's Hotel and Club, where they take their Babička seriously. An entire page of this comfortable hotel bar's list is dedicated to the wormwood vodka, with four featured cocktails. We were greeted by Janoszc XXXX and Milos Rydl, who got to work making a selection of these.

Favourites among the group were the Spicy Babička Martini and Babička's Garden Secret. The former combined the vodka with chilli syrup, Passoa liqueur and passion fruit juice, for an off-beat drink with a kick. The Garden Secret was a complex number, with lemon juice, agave syrup, red currant, tonic and Peychaud's bitters, all working together to enhance the wormwood flavours in the vodka.

Fitzrovia was next, to cosy and very cool underground cocktail spot, The Lucky Pig. Head bartender Dren Lala was at the ready to create the Babička drink from the 'Experimental' part of their list, a Granny Smash. But first, a reminder of

what Babička tastes like neat, in the form of a round of shots for all present. The brand's not new to this kind of serve, and performed admirably, gentle, but with really fascinating herbal notes.

The Granny Smash incorporates Babička with Aperol, grapefruit juice, mint, lime and orange bitters, a creation by Olly Hornby-Smith, the man behind the Lucky Pig's cocktail list. Refreshing, not very common and, as Lala put it, 'one of your five a day, too'.

## Frontier taverns

Not to forget about West London, Montgomery Place was our next stop, for a taste of the Lady Itch Swizzle, a creation by Fabio La Pietra, but made tonight by Debora Cicero. With Babička in a starring role, each of the ingredients related nicely to it. Dry vermouth has clear associations with wormwood (and gets its name from the German word wermut – meaning both wormwood and vermouth, depending on context), while the house Montgomery Bitters contain absinthe

– yet more wormwood. The drink also included fresh tarragon, lemon zest, and zero-calorie sweetener, stevia.

And finally, miles from where we'd begun, but at one of Babička's earliest London accounts, we pulled up to that irrepressible little bar, The Shop NW10 in Kensal Rise. Imogen Elliot was ready to help us, in a bar heaving with off-duty bartenders. The Witches Brew, served in an old milk bottle, was a fun cocktail to finish off the night, playing on Babička's ability to mix so well with fruit juices – it combined lime juice, passion fruit, blackcurrant and dry sparkling wine.

Like the wormwood that acts as an ingredient in this vodka, absinthe or vermouth, Babička clearly has many faces, and is equally at home in a hotel lounge or party bar, in a herbal drink, milk punch or fruity fun cocktail. And there's no doubt more to discover about what it's capable of. Perhaps more nights out on the town are in order...

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## BABICKA BARS

### NIGHTJAR

129 City Road, Old Street, EC1V 1JB; 020 7253 4101; [barnightjar.com](https://barnightjar.com)

### NI JU SAN BY HAKKASAN

23 St James's Street, SW1A 1HA; PR CONFIRMING PREFERRED DETAILS

### WILLIAM'S BAR AND BISTRO, ST JAMES'S HOTEL AND CLUB

7-8 Park Place, SW1A 1LS; 020 7316 1615; [stjameshotelandclub.com](https://stjameshotelandclub.com)

### THE LUCKY PIG

5-6 Clipstone Street, W1W 6BB; 020 7436 0035; [theluckypig.co.uk](https://theluckypig.co.uk)

### MONTGOMERY PLACE

31 Kensington Park Road, W11 2EU; 020 7792 3921; [montgomeryplace.co.uk](https://montgomeryplace.co.uk)

### THE SHOP NW10

75 Chamberlayne Road, NW10 3ND; 020 8969 9399 [theshopnw10.com](https://theshopnw10.com)