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## Mission: Impossible

### > How to Drink All Night and Stay (Halfway) Sober

A raucous barhop is good for the soul. But how does a man survive a night of cocktail swilling without compromising his dignity or feeling completely craptastic the next day? A team of GQ boozehounds hit the streets of New York—and eight bars in ten hours—to learn the right way to go on a bender

—> Sometimes getting drunk isn't the point. (Okay, maybe it is.) But regardless, the goal of any long-haul night out should be to have the maximum amount of fun with the minimum amount of pain. The trouble with a marathon evening of drinking—whether it's the last night of the annual sales meeting or just a spontaneous barhop—is that it often involves a stew of drinks: champagne, serious cocktails, the odd glass of wine, and a couple of late-night pints. So how do you plow through all that without feeling paralytically hellish the next day? There has to be more to it than "liquor before beer." To find out, we turned to one of New York's top bartenders, Jim Meehan of the speakeasy-style hot spot PDT. He kindly agreed to be GQ's guide on a big-city bar crawl—a scientific experiment to prove that with the proper planning, you can drink all night, heartily enjoy yourself, and still feel sharp enough to file your expense report in the morning.

**THE TEAM**

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**THE EXPERT**

**"Slim Jim" Meehan**  
a.k.a. the Tater Tot Kid (These aren't really his nicknames, but we felt our guide should have a proper mixologist's moniker.)

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**THE DOCTOR**

**John Michael McKnight, M.D.**  
an actual doctor, armed with a Breathalyzer

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**THE LOVELY LIGHTWEIGHT**

**GQ's own Sarah Goldstein**  
youthful, unaccustomed to benders, and willing (apparently) to do whatever it takes to please her editors

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**THE REPORTER**

**Adam Sachs**  
Baedeker of booze, armed with a recorder

BY *Adam Sachs*  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Bruce Hutchinson*

**6 P.M.**  
> The team assembles at the bar at **ALLEN & DELANCEY**, a plush, dark, and at this hour completely empty restaurant on the Lower East Side. Meehan scans the menu and orders light: a **FRENCH 75** (gin, champagne, lemon juice, sugar), an **APEROL SPRITZ** (Aperol, an Italian aperitif; prosecco; soda), and an **ABSINTHE DRIP** (absinthe, sugar, water).

#### RULE # 1

**Start Out Light**  
In the beginning, you're not going to have a full stomach. Meehan prescribes a drink that contains bittersweet herbal wines or spirit-based aperitifs—bitters like Campari and Cynar: "They're appetite-whetters, and the low proof ensures you don't fall off your stool after your first drinks."

**6:20 P.M.**  
> Sarah sips her French 75. Sachs drains the absinthe drip as quickly as one would a glass of orange juice and boldly, perhaps



The Starter



The Cure-All



The Slow Sipper

stupidly, follows it with a **NEGRONI** (gin, Campari, sweet vermouth).  
**7:24 P.M.**  
> Oysters are ordered and slurped, but Meehan suspects that won't be enough sustenance for the long night ahead. "Do you still have those bacon-flavored dinner rolls?" he asks the bartender. "We need a bunch of those and some butter."

#### RULE # 2

**Eat Snacks, Not Dinner**  
"There are brilliant mixologists who totally disagree with me on this," Meehan says, "but I don't recommend trying to pair cocktails with dinner. On a night out drinking, food is merely the fuel."

**8:39 P.M.**  
> At the bar at **FREEMANS**, a boisterous nearby restaurant decorated with taxidermy and hipsters, Sachs orders the appley **NEW YORK TRADING COMPANY** cocktail and the artichoke dip. Sarah veers off-path with a glass of **ROSE**. Meehan requests an artisanal French beer and is served a **PORKSLAP PALE ALE** instead. "Sometimes it's best just to play the card you're dealt," he advises.

**9:05 P.M.**  
> After a quick taxi ride west, the group shuffles down a flight of stairs to **B FLAT**, a Japanese cocktail bar in Tribeca, where the drinks are sweet and the stereo plays jazz. "We've laid down a base at the other places," Meehan says. "Now we're stepping up to the masters." The meticulous Japanese bartenders deliver two variations on the **FRENCH 75**, one with bourbon, another with Cognac; a **JACK ROSE**; a **MINT JULEP**; and

**A SHOT OF ADVICE** | *— by —*  
**KINGSLEY AMIS**

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"If you want to behave better and feel better, the only absolutely certain method is *drinking less*. But to find out how to do *that*, you will have to find a more expert expert than I shall ever be."



a standard OLD-FASHIONED. The delayed Dr. Michael finally joins the group and catches up by ordering a SAZERAC.

## RULE # 3

**Think of It as a Menu**  
Plan a night of drinking like a dinner menu. The logic is white to red with wine, light to dark with beer, white spirits before brown, dry to sweet, low alcohol to high. But logic, says Meehan, can get in the way of fun, so don't overthink it.

**9:43 P.M.**  
> "The state of the nation is strong," Meehan declares. "We've made the shift to brown spirits seamlessly, I think. Let's Breathalyze!" (Note: New York, like all other states, considers a person legally intoxicated if his blood-alcohol level is .08 percent or higher.) Meehan blows a .05 ("I had some '91 Lagavulin with lunch"). Sarah clocks in at .06; Sachs and the doctor are at a modest .04.

**10 P.M.**  
> Standing outside B Flat on Church Street in Tribeca, Dr. Michael administers the evening's first Romberg test (like the one drunk drivers take roadside). Sarah stands with her eyes closed, arms stretched in front of her, palms up. "A

## A SHOT OF ADVICE

— by —  
PETER O'TOOLE

"I've always been a drinker. I've been through every phase.... I've given up, I've drunk in moderation. Now I know I can have a little sip, and I don't want to get pissed except every now and then."

positive Romberg is when they fall over to one side," the doctor says. Sarah's arms flail a bit, but she remains upright. Pass.

## RULE # 4

**Always Be Hydrating**  
"Having a glass of water per cocktail all night long is instrumental in staying sober."

Meehan adds: "It's also a reminder that you've finished a drink, which helps you keep track of how many you've had."

**10:20 P.M.**  
> We make our way up the narrow staircase of PEGU CLUB, a revered retro cocktail bar in SoHo. Chief barman Kenta Goto serves up a modified MANHATTAN, a lighter version made with Grand Marnier that will allow the group to keep its pace.

**11:17 P.M.**  
> Outside Pegu, Meehan takes the Romberg. Dr. Michael: "That's pretty good. That's a negative Romberg!" Sachs passes, too; Dr. Feelgood heads home to

his nine-months-pregnant wife.

**11:22 P.M.**  
> In a taxi on the way to LITTLE BRANCH, a speakeasy-style bar in the West Village, Meehan makes a good point: "After five hours and twenty-two minutes of steady drinking, I'm sensing an alarming level of sobriety. At Little Branch, we'll order a RED HOOK [Punt e Mes, maraschino, rye], a GREENPOINT [rye, yellow Chartreuse, sweet vermouth, Angostura and orange bitters], and a GOLD RUSH (bourbon, lemon juice, honey)."

**11:42 P.M.**  
> Sarah: "It's like we're on a triple blind date, but I feel more comfortable with strangers after a lot of cocktails than I would otherwise." Meehan: "Please note that at eleven forty-two we were just called 'strangers.'"

## RULE # 5

**Stay Socially Engaged**  
"If you're just sitting there drinking, you'll get drunk and peak too



The Pick-Me-Up



Your Friend, the Chatty Bartender

early," Meehan says. "Talking to a bartender helps. Tell him what you've had, what you like, and leave your next drink up to him."

**11:59 P.M.**  
> The drinks are great, but the mellowness of Little Branch is causing the collective energy to flag. "We need a reviving beer!" Meehan commands. The group heads across the street to DADDY-O, a street-level non-speakeasy, where bad Black Crowes is blaring. After a round of PINTS and some shots of MEZCAL, all are reenergized.

## RULE # 6

**Take a Beer Break**  
"Sometimes you need a break from the formalities of cocktail bars. A run to a bar like Daddy-O is the perfect solution. Our options were simplified. And beer is good. Beer is refreshing."

**12:33 A.M.**  
> Sarah: "I want a hot dog!" The group takes a taxi across town to Meehan's home base, PDT.

**12:50 A.M.**  
> To enter PDT, you pick up the receiver in a telephone booth just outside the bar

and speak to the host on the other side of a door leading from a brightly lit hot-dog joint to a dark cocktail lounge. Here the group is given what might be called the FULL MEEHAN: many rounds of excellent cocktails plus Tater Tots plus several hot dogs.

**1:18 A.M.**  
> Sarah points at the bottle on the table: "Is that the worm?" Meehan: "No, that's the chicken breast. That's the fucking cash-me-out right there." A bottle of DEL MAGUEY PECHUGA, which is indeed distilled with a chicken breast, is passed around.

**2:10 A.M.**  
> Sachs blows a .09.

**2:27 A.M.**  
> Sachs to Sarah: "What have you learned?" Sarah: "Eat a lot. Without food I'd be dead."

**3:01 A.M.**  
> The group stumbles into PUCK FAIR. Meehan orders a GUINNESS, and

Sachs asks him, "What have you learned?" Meehan answers, "I learned I can drink all night." To which Sachs replies, "Without joking, I think we could go for another ten hours."

## RULE # 7

**Order Defensively**  
"If I'm on the fifth cocktail, I've lost the will to be logical," Meehan says. "This is the time to go boilermaker: a beer and a whiskey. It's actually a great move. When you've got two drinks in front of you, no one can buy you a third."

**3:10 A.M.**  
> Sarah surrenders and departs. Sachs and Meehan get another Guinness.

**4 A.M.**  
> Hailing a cab home, Meehan sums it up for Sachs: "I want you to write that this can be done. This isn't some Navy Seal mission where you usually die. This can be done."

## The Key: Light Snacks + Water



## THE BAR CRAWLER'S DON'TS

### 1 | Don't Make a Martini Your First—or Second—Order

If you're embarking on what you know is going to be a long night, don't start with an all-spirits cocktail. "A martini can knock you on your ass," Meehan says, "especially on an empty stomach." If you want to begin with a classic drink, you're better off with a top-shelf gin-and-tonic.

### 2 | Skip "Pick-Me-Ups" Like Coffee and Energy Drinks

"When you combine caffeine and alcohol on a long night of drinking, the effects of the alcohol are masked and you tend to drink more than you should," Meehan says. "Your company should be your stimulant. If you're that drunk and/or tired, it's time to go home."

### 3 | Duck When the Round of Shots Comes Around

"I don't do shots unless I absolutely have to," Meehan says. To deflect the night-ender (and morning-ruiner), he advises ordering the above-mentioned boilermaker. "You can usually get away with turning down a shot because you've got a bowl of booze in front of you."

## A SHOT OF ADVICE

— by —  
RAYMOND CHANDLER

"Alcohol is like love. The first kiss is magic, the second is intimate, the third is routine. After that you take the girl's clothes off." (from *The Long Goodbye*)