

# Esquire

## FRIED CHICKEN WITH A MARTINI IS THE HIGH-LOW MEAL YOU NEED TO TRY NOW

As soon as possible. Don't forget the pan gravy!

**PLUS:** *Your Martini's Dilution Problem, Solved*

By **Josh Ozersky** on December 5, 2014



**Sometimes—and by sometimes I mean all the time**—a man wants to sit down to a fried chicken and martinis dinner party. For this to happen, though, you need to have great fried chicken, and you need to have cold martinis, and you need some other guys. This confluence happened to me recently, and I hope it can happen to you. And soon.

The key, of course, is the chicken. Fried chicken is a hard thing to make well, but it's also one of the few dishes that can, and usually is, made better at home than in restaurants.

Adam Sappington, of The Country Cat in Portland, did the honors, and as he always does, he fried the chicken in a large cast-iron pan filled with beef tallow. I don't know anybody else who does that, and I don't know why. Beef tallow is readily available from your butcher, it's cheap, and as a frying element it cooks much hotter and cleaner than lard. Which isn't to say you can't add lard—why not? Certainly by the end of the first batch of chicken pieces, the pan will have plenty of chicken fat, or shmaltz as we say in French, in there as well. That is no match for Sean Brock's famous five-fat chicken, but it has the added benefit of burning hotter, which cooks the chicken faster, a good thing for all concerned. Adam also uses boneless thighs, which avoids the necessity of eating dry white meat, and more importantly, of having all the plates littered with bones.

No chicken and martinis party can be complete without martinis, and Sappington's are made with an exact proportion of four parts Aviation gin to no parts vermouth, served with a twist. "It has to be extra cold, though," he says.

Why gin though?

"Something magic happens between gin and chicken," he explains. "Basically gin plays the part of the acid in the whole meal. It cuts through all the fat and cleans out your palate."

And, obviously, it gets you bombed. So intoxicated was I after a couple of these non-cocktails that I impudently called out to the chef, after he had served the chicken, "Hey! Where's my pan gravy?"

It was an obnoxious thing to say, especially from across the room. But the pan gravy, made by adding flour and milk a little bit at a time to the greasy debris left in the pan, really makes the fried chicken, and gave that gin something to really cut through.