


 A full-page photograph of Ricardo Gracia, a 90-year-old man with white hair and a mustache, smiling. He is wearing a patterned short-sleeved shirt and white trousers, leaning on a white balcony railing. He is holding a whole pineapple in his left hand. The background shows a tropical beach with palm trees and the ocean under a blue sky with clouds.

ricardo gracia

Spaniard Ricardo Gracia worked as a bar manager in Puerto Rico back in 1954, when a coconut-cutters' union strike prompted him to pour a popular concoction of rum, cream of coconut, and crushed ice into pineapples instead of coconuts. He made the fruit and its juice part of the blend, he says, and the piña colada

was born. While fellow bartender Ramon "Monchito" Marrero gets widespread credit for inventing the renowned drink, Ricardo stands by his claim and still serves his frothy brew to guests and golf greats at Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra, Florida.

Blended, Not Stirred: "Blend all of the ingredients until you reach the consistency of a thick milk shake, and not a moment sooner—it's not a frozen sorbet. It should be creamy, creamy, creamy. Also, it should be served in a hollowed-out pineapple, not a glass."

Celebrity Status: "Many famous people loved this drink: Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner, Sammy Davis Jr., Errol Flynn, Esther Williams, Louis Armstrong."

His Other Claim to Fame: "I created the Gibson in 1944 while working in Puerto Rico. I substituted cocktail onions for traditional olives in tennis great Althea Gibson's martini order. From then on, I referred to the mix of vodka and dry vermouth as a Gibson. She loved it."

Behind the Bar: "I'm mostly retired now, though I work occasionally around special holidays or events."

His Secret Ingredient: "The secret to my longevity is lots of love shared with my wife, Ondina, and a piña colada once a week. Virgin, that is." 🍹

Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa; 800/457-4653 or sawgrassmarriott.com

This 90-year-old bartender says a coconut shortage inspired the invention of the world-famous piña colada.

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