



## Malört: The Redemption of a Revered and Reviled Spirit

**Josh Noel**

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While some bars in Chicago have served Jeppson's Malört for nearly a century, in the past two decades, the bitter, wormwood-derived botanical spirit found new life as both a niche favorite and an ironic countercultural drink. That fascinating story is revealed in *Chicago Tribune* beverage writer Josh Noel's enjoyable history book *Malört*.

As Noel chronicles, Malört's continued existence owes to a series of serendipitous events. Classified as medicinal, the liquor remained in production during Prohibition due to a legal loophole. When its distributor, George Brode, sold his portfolio in the 1950s, Malört was the sole brand he retained. Brode went to great lengths to market the bitter drink (as shown in sample ads) as a so-called "real man's" beverage for those who "quittheirbellyachin'." And in recent decades, Brode's former secretary and romantic partner, Pat Gabelick, who took over the brand after his death, learned that it had taken on a new audience, inspiring parody social media accounts and bootleg merchandise. Herein, interviews with Gabelick and the fans who made the drink popular expand the story.

A Chicago-specific cult favorite among bartenders meets a wider audience in *Malört*, an entertaining, well-reported, unlikely success tale.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September / October 2024)

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