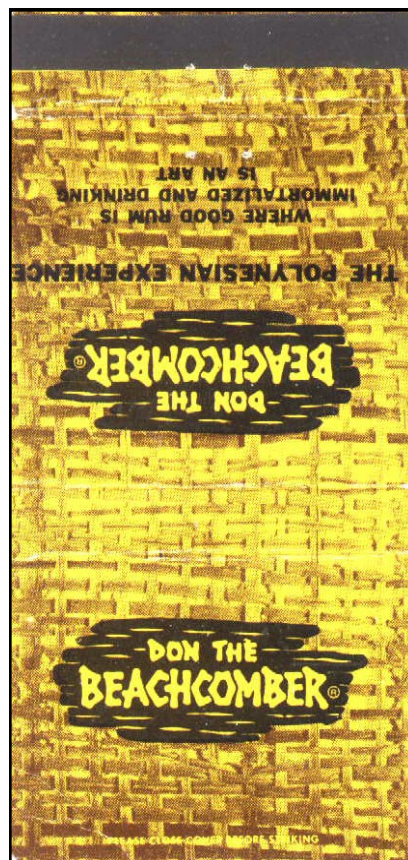


Don The

Donn Beach, a.k.a. Don the Beachcomber, was born Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt about 1907 and is the acknowledged founding father of tiki restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. All of the many so-called "Polynesian" restaurants and watering holes that enjoyed nearly three decades of great popularity are directly descended from what he first created. After a few years of being universally called Don the Beachcomber because of his original bar and restaurant, Gantt legally changed his name to Donn Beach (Donn with 2 "N's").

Gantt was a former bootlegger, albeit a youthful one, and a New Orleans native who moved to Hollywood in the 1930s to mix potent rum cocktails under fake palm trees. Gantt first opened a bar called "Don's Beachcomber" in 1933 on McFadden Place, and then, across the street, the first Don the Beachcomber restaurant. He mixed potent rum cocktails in his tropically decorated bar. This was such an escape from everyday life that it quickly gained popularity. At Don the Beachcomber the customers ate what seemed like wonderfully exotic cuisines for the time. In actuality, they were mostly standard Cantonese dishes served with flair and imagination. The first pupu platter was probably served there, according to Jennifer Trainer Thompson, writing in "The Great Tiki Drink Book" (Ten Speed, 2002). His Zombie cocktail (a rum drink for which Thompson says Gantt never gave away the recipe) was served at the 1939 New York World's Fair. He also was known for creating the popular drink, "Tahitian Rum Punch".

Tiki restaurants enjoyed a tremendous burst of fad popularity in the 1940s and 50s and there were several Don the Beachcomber restaurants across the country. Victor J. Bergeron opened a competing version called Trader Vic's in the late 1930s in the San Francisco Bay Area and the two men were



Beachcomber

amicable rivals for many years thereafter. Each of them claimed to have created the Mai Tai, yet another rum and fruit-juice cocktail that is still popular today -- "maitai" is the Tahitian word for "good." The Trader claimed to have invented it in 1944, the Beachcomber in 1933. At the peak of Bergeron's success in the 1960s or 70s there were more Trader Vic's around the world than Don the Beachcombers, but both of them were well-known figures. Gantt left home in 1926 and traveled around the world on his own, scouring many of the islands of the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and the rest of the world. As the originator of Polynesian style restaurants, Donn Beach served in the U.S. Army in World War II as an operator of officer rest-and-recreation centers. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star while setting up rest camps for combat weary airman of the 12th and 15th Air Forces in Capri, Nice, Cannes, the French Riviera, Venice, the Lido and Sorrento at the order of his longtime friend, Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle.

When World War II ended, Beach returned to the states and settled in Waikiki, where he opened his second Polynesian Village, the first being at his home in Encino, California where he often entertained many of his Hollywood pals, the stars and starlets of the silver screen. He was the originator of the International Market Place in Honolulu, and for a number of years had his office up in the limbs of the enormous banyan tree in the center of the market place. He later built an elaborate houseboat, the *Marama*, as a prototype for what he hoped would be floating housing in Hawaii but failed to get the local zoning authorities to make the necessary rulings in his favor. He eventually shipped the houseboat to the island of Moorea, just across from Tahiti, and he lived there in retirement for a number of years before a succession of hurricanes destroyed the *Marama*. He died in 1989. [courtesy of http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_the_Beachcomber]

