

## Coca-Cola

For almost 125 years, the secrecy surrounding the recipe for Coca-Cola has been one of the world's great marketing ploys. As the story goes, the fizzy drink's famous "Merchandise 7X" flavorings have remained unchanged since they were concocted in 1886. Today, the recipe is entrusted only to two Coke executives, neither of whom can travel on the same plane for fear that the secret will go down with them.

Now, one of America's most celebrated radio broadcasters claims to have discovered the Coke secret. Ira Glass, presenter of the public radio institution "This American Life", says he has tracked down a copy of the recipe, the original of which is still supposedly held in a burglar-proof vault in the Sun Trust Bank in Atlanta, Georgia.

The formula was created by John Pemberton, an Atlanta chemist and former Confederate army officer who crafted cough medicines and other concoctions in his spare time. In 1887, he sold the recipe to a businessman, Asa Griggs, who immediately placed it for safekeeping, in the then Georgia Trust Bank.

Glass came across the recipe that he believes is the secret formula in a back issue of Pemberton's local paper, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, while he was researching an entirely different story. Tucked away on an inside page of the 8th February 1979 edition, he stumbled on an article that claimed to have uncovered the closely guarded 7X formula.

The column was based on information found in an old leather-bound notebook that belonged to Pemberton's best friend and fellow Atlanta chemist, RR Evans. Glass was intrigued and, after some digging, found that the notebook had been handed down the generations until it reached a chemist in Georgia called Everett Beal, whose widow still possesses it.

The rediscovered recipe includes extract of coca leaves, caffeine, plenty of sugar (it specifies 30 unidentified units thought to be pounds), lime juice, vanilla and caramel. Into that syrup, the all-important 7X flavorings are added: alcohol and six oils – orange, lemon, nutmeg, coriander, neroli and cinnamon. The formula is strikingly similar to the recipe deduced by Mark Pendergrast who wrote a history of the drink in 1993 called *For God, Country & Coca-Cola*.

Coke's secret recipe is, in fact, part mythology. Contrary to the mystique surrounding it, the soda has changed substantially over time. Cocaine, a legal stimulant in Pemberton's day, was removed from the drink in 1904 after mounting public unease about the drug. Extract of coca leaves is still used but only after the cocaine has been removed.

In 1980, the company replaced sugar, squeezed from beet and cane, with the cheaper high-fructose corn sweetener that has become ubiquitous in American food and drink. Coke purists were not impressed.

Despite such occasional controversies, one element has remained constant: Coke's commitment to keeping its own secret. Speculation about the recipe has been a popular talking point for more than a century, proving good for business. True to form, the company has treated the "This American Life" story with the disdain that has marked its commercial strategy since the 19th century.

"Many third parties have tried to crack our secret formula. Try as they might, they've been unsuccessful", Coca-Cola's Kerry Tressler said.