



**SLOW BURN:** A golden-age feel permeates The Gibson and its cocktails, like the Pousse Café.

## Shake it Up!

*The Gibson's couture cocktails are causing a retro-chic revolution*

| By Kelly A. Magyarics | Photography by Greg Powers and Audrey Crewe |

Blame it on a few decadent twists, but somehow I managed to become intoxicated even before my first sip. It began with a nondescript door marked “2009,” gathered force when a doorman whisked us from noisy U Street to a cozy booth and started buzzing when my cocktail arrived.

The Gibson is a throwback to the golden age of bartending—a venue for savoring a couture cocktail, not merely guzzling a cold one. Reservations at this 48-seat drinking den are essential and rewarded with brilliantly crafted pre-Prohibition concoctions that are not the work of a moment. The rum-and-Coke set may ask what’s taking so damn long for a drink. My advice: Consider the Pousse Café, a four-layer libation of Campari, yellow chartreuse, green chartreuse and brandy—and chill out.

The Gibson’s vibe is a mix of masculinity and sexiness. Gorgeous details like the paisley-embossed leather-topped bar and checkered ceiling hint (along with orange peels flaming, cinnamon charring and shakers swishing) at the sensations awaiting you in the glass.

If you happen to visit on a Wednesday or Saturday—when mixologist Derek Brown is shaking the rocks—you’ve struck liquid gold. The self-proclaimed “cocktail geek” left his post last year as sommelier at Komi to focus on his speakeasy obsession. His cocktail list serves as a springboard for off-the-menu requests. “We pride ourselves on asking guests what they want, and are happy to make them something entirely new,” he says. “That’s what bartending

is all about. Not ‘look at my fancy drink list.’” Brown encourages experimental cocktailers to entrust their palates to the stars behind the bar, who include Jon Harris (formerly of Vegetate), Tiffany Short (formerly of PS 7’s) and Brendan Murphy (formerly of Tallula and EatBar).

As for signatures, the Salad Days Sour is a hit. Celery-infused Macchu Pisco, lemon juice and celery bitters deliver freshness, topped off by a thick layer of frothy egg white. If you consider garnishes afterthoughts, prepare to rethink that philosophy after viewing the tight carrot curl, and aromatic burnt cinnamon sprinkled stick-straight across the foam-topped dazzler.

The Tequila Orchard, one of a few listed drinks served on the rocks, nails its combo of smoky, spicy, bitter and fruity notes. Partida Reposado tequila is mixed with organic apple juice, lime, the Bitter Truth aromatic bitters, and Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur. Martini junkies will inhale its precursor, the classic Martinez. Peel away its complex layers of Old Tom gin, sweet vermouth, maraschino liqueur and orange bitters, and you’ll wonder why you ever made such a fuss about the pedestrian gin and vermouth combo. The Gibson’s sublime Sazerac does the Big Easy proud. Old Overholt rye packs a punch, and Peychaud’s bitters and an absinthe-rinsed glass add aromatics.

Just how did The Gibson get so cool? Credit über-DJ Eric Hilton of Thievery Corporation, who owns the bar (as well as the bistro Marvin, next door). This spring, The Gibson will expand

### Cocktail Avenue

Classic sips get a modern twist on 14th Street

#### CORK

**DRINK:** Piper Cub **DETAILS:** Tom Brown’s version of the classic Aviation cocktail replaces gin with amontillado sherry, mixed with maraschino liqueur and crème de violette. Spiced lemonade and a star anise garnish add depth. \$10. 1720 14th St., NW, 202.265.2675, corkdc.com.

#### BAR PILAR

**DRINK:** Ti Punch **DETAILS:** Punch is back! Adam Bernbach uses Neisson rum agricole blanc, lime juice and house-made falernum, that distinctive almond, ginger and lime syrup no tropical tippie can be without. \$11. 1833 14th St., NW, 202.265.1751, barpillar.com.

#### POLICY

**DRINK:** Libertini **DETAILS:** This herbaceous twist on the mango caipirinha combines mango purée, cachaça, Bombay Sapphire, rosemary-infused syrup and white cranberry juice, garnished with a fragrant rosemary stem. \$12. 1904 14th St., NW, policydc.com.

with a patio, garden and second bar, and will serve a limited menu. In the back room, you’ll find an exotic absinthe fountain that might well become DC’s hottest re-fueling station.

Time travel is a stretch, but this glowing retro bar, where classic cocktails take on modern brilliance, is a back-to-the-future marvel. ■

*The Gibson, 2009 14th St., NW, 202.232.2156.*

*Open nightly, call to reserve a table.*



Salad Days Sour