

Red + White + Blue = Green

Environmentalism Infiltrates the Nation's Capital

Despite the deluge of campaign talk last fall about change coming to Washington, I recognize that the city is slow to adopt reform. Bureaucratic red tape and the art of the filibuster are standard operating procedure here, and trends in food and drink hit the West Coast and New York City before making their way to D.C.

Area bars such as PX, Poste, EatBar and The Gibson are synonymous with the use of fresh ingredients and the art of the well-crafted cocktail, however, the concept of a totally "green" bar like those in San Francisco or Portland, Ore. is still pretty novel in our nation's capital.

But at Founding Farmers, a restaurant and bar located a few blocks from the White House, the philosophy reaches beyond the farm-to-table concept to also encompass a farm-to-back-bar mentality. As at other respected D.C. watering holes, the juices, garnishes and mixers are made from scratch, but Founding Farmers raises the bar. For one thing, 98 percent of the produce is organic, which means that the flamed orange twist in my Martinez has never met a pesticide or herbicide. And the shelves are stocked with organic spirits, including seven out of the 10 organic vodkas on the market.

"As not every distillery is on the green movement just yet, there are limitations to



A farm-to-backbar approach dictates organic produce and spirits whenever possible for executive bar chef Jon Arroyo's cocktails at Founding Farmers.

what is available," explains executive bar chef Jon Arroyo. Still, he's excited about offering high-quality spirits like Wasmund's Single Malt Whiskey from Virginia, a small batch sustainable spirit produced using cherry wood and apple wood chips sourced from the distiller's own trees.

The suds, along with the whites and reds, are green, too. "Every wine by the glass is sustainable, organic or biodynamic," says Arroyo, and bottle offerings are purchased from small purveyors and small batch producers. Especially appealing to me is the Yellow + Blue Malbec, an organic wine packaged in a 750 milliliter TetraPak — a portable container I like to refer to as a juice box for grownups. It weighs less than a bottle, which means less greenhouse gases are emitted during transportation [yellow and blue make — you get the idea]. It's sold for \$8 a glass, \$12 for a glass and a half and \$24 for the "bottle."

Why is Founding Farmers seeing green? "We saw the possibilities and

potential of our green bar and were able to tap into a younger, business savvy, 'green conscious' consumer," says Arroyo. To market the environmental emphasis, the wait staff undergoes ongoing training. Servers and bartenders in turn educate guests on Founding Farmers' "triple green approach," which involves a primer on sustainability, LEED standards (theirs is the first D.C. restaurant to achieve certification in the LEED program, the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings) and the venue's Certified Green Restaurant status.

Founding Farmers' dedication to the farm fresh approach is undisputed, but begs the question whether D.C. patrons demand — or even expect — this attention to green details at the bar, especially considering that similar locations are hard to come by in the District. Arroyo reminds me that the green movement started out west and has slowly been making its way east, also noting that you don't need to be a "tree-hugging" environmentalist to appreciate what's happening at Founding Farmers' bar.

"It's not about idealism but about a universal enjoyable experience," he says.

Case in point: the Organic Cucumber Delight — made with Square One Organic Vodka, cucumbers and cantaloupe, priced at \$12 — is the top-selling cocktail. While not necessarily more sophisticated than other drinks on the menu, says Arroyo, it's light, approachable and delicious. Admittedly, I don't usually gravitate towards the pricey organic section at my local market. But I am partial to any drink with refreshing cucumber, and, after all, a tasty drink is a tasty drink. **NCB**

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