

Capitol Ideas

Washington, DC's bar scene is vibrant and noteworthy, and these trendsetters prove that politics is far from the only game in town

by Kelly A. Magyarics



PHOTO: LEN DEPAS

Beer Specialist Bill Catron serves up some Belgian brews at Brasserie Beck.

Politics as usual in DC? Not so fast! The District's power players don't all work on the Hill. Bar owners and mixologists are shaking it up with a focus on fresh ingredients, chef collaboration, and quality foreign brews.

Strictly Belgian

At casual downtown **Brasserie Beck**, it's all about the beer. Strictly Belgian selections reign at the lively bar, which evokes the atmosphere of a bustling train station. The choices alone are impressive: 18 brews on tap, and an additional 135 in the bottle.

But beyond the lengthy list of hard-to-find suds, Beck's unique draw is also the presence of Beer Specialist Bill Catron, a self-proclaimed "beer geek" knighted last year by the Belgian government. His passion is infectious, as he enthusiastically answers questions and offers suggestions. Catron's favorite part of the job comes when a wine lover trades stemware for a stein. "Beer has so much more diversity than wine, with more immense flavors, body and complexity," he believes.

Serving sophisticated foreign beers translates to a slightly more grown-up clientele; patrons' ages here range from 27 to 45. Although some bottles, like the 750 ml. Guldenburg, don't appear to be conducive to sipping when it's standing room only, Catron assures that all selections move equally, with

Bavik and Hoegaarden the most popular on tap. The bar is currently ramping up its cocktail program, which has a penchant for old-school drinks like the Rob Roy.

1101 K St. NW; 202-408-1717

Pub Grub

Bringing the trend of the gastropub to Northern Virginia, Arlington's **EatBar** boasts an ever-changing menu and a dynamic beverage program to match. A large selection of affordable food and drink options—including 75 wines by the glass and cheese and

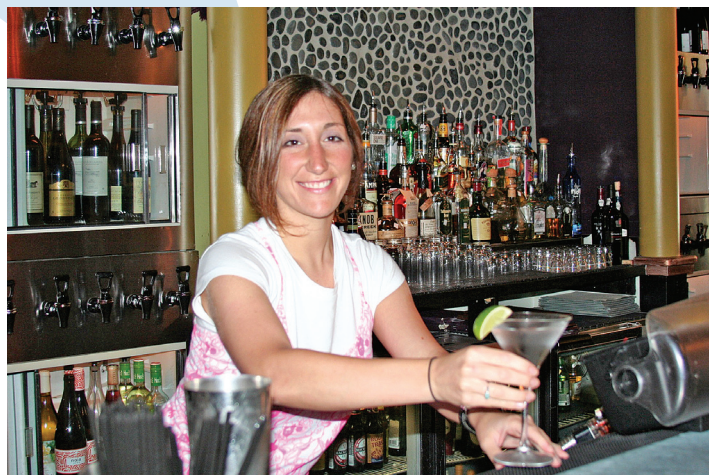


PHOTO: AMBER PFALZ

Bartender Morgan Pankiewicz mixes it up at Arlington's neighborhood gastropub EatBar.

charcuterie platters—appeals to the sophisticated neighborhood bar crowd. EatBar's vibe is comfortable yet sumptuous, with cozy booths and dramatic cathedral-style lighting. "We get the *Sex and the City* crowd wanting to try the hippest new wines, as well as the knowledgeable foodies who visit to try our chef's latest creations," says Manager

Bartender Joe Brown of DC's Penn Quarter hotspot The Source.



Rodney Salinas.

Mixologist Gina Chersevani has a large following of local aficionados, and her beverages are unique and inspired. Most popular right now is Gnome's Water: Hendrick's gin, lavender and cucumber. And her funky and festive take on the Champagne cocktail replaces a bitters-soaked sugar cube with candied horseradish and horseradish syrup. Salinas often witnesses Chersevani "in the back kitchen mixing her latest concoctions alongside the chefs, who help her with the formulas and garnishes."

2761 Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA; 703-778-9951

The Puck Stops Here

Wolfgang Puck's DC outpost, **The Source**, is connected to the recently launched Newseum in the District's Penn Quarter. Far from being a mere waiting room for a table upstairs, the first floor bar and lounge is a destination in itself. "On any given night you can have a group of congressmen or lobbyists and a group of ladies celebrating a bachelorette party next to each other," says Restaurant Director Page Tofighi.

To appeal to a bar crowd that Tofighi views as increasingly discerning and focused on fresh ingredients, the bar offers both "Classics" and "Specialty" drinks menus. Traditional favorites like the Aviation, Sazerac, Negroni and Sidecar are served alongside more modern libations such as the spiced rum-based Ginger Mojito. The top-selling Asian Pear Drop Martini demonstrates the synergy between the kitchen and bar. "The chef is instrumental in providing the mixologist with the freshest ingredients. It's much better to use fresh pear purée than pear syrup." A

well-conceived small plates menu focuses on high-quality sharable dishes including Puck's signature pizzas.

575 Pennsylvania Ave. NW; 202-637-6100

Spy vs. Spy

Adjacent to the popular International Spy Museum, **Zola's** vibe is sleek and mysterious (think lots of red and black, plaques with cyrillic codes and clandestine spy holes). But the high-energy bar, which attracts a diverse and eclectic crowd of politicians, business leaders, celebrities and vibrant imbibers of all ages, has both style and substance. Director of Operations Ralph Rosenberg states Zola's cocktail mantra as "straightforward American, with three to four components elegantly and simply presented with the finest ingredients we can find."

Mixologists use super-premium spirits, as well as mixers like Fever-Tree tonic and club soda, all shaken and poured in front of guests. Zola's most popular (and namesake) drink introduced white cranberry juice to the market, which appeals to a wider audience than its pink Cosmopolitan counterpart. Last year the restaurant sold 25,000 of them.

The latest concoction on the menu is the Zohito, Zola's fresh take on the Mojito, substituting halved kumquats and housemade Kaffir lime syrup for lime wedges. The I.R.S. Raspberry, a tax-time addition made with Maker's Mark and raspberry-green tea soda, has proven to be so popular Rosenberg has placed it on the permanent menu. Guests can nibble from a menu divided into "I Feel Like Sharing," "It's All Mine," and the quirky "TV Dinners" served on compartmented trays.

800 F St. NW; 202-654-0999 ■■



PHOTO: STAR RESTAURANT GROUP

Zola's Director of Operations, Ralph Rosenberg.