

WHERE
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Politics and Potables

New spaces, seasoned places and talented faces. There has never been a better time to grab a memorable cocktail in the District.

FIOLA

Approachable and classic libations incorporating Italian flavors is how Bar Manager Jeff Faile describes the selections in his cocktail program at this 156-seat trattoria moderna. Its Penn Quarter neighborhood location, smack dab between the White House and the Capitol, means that Fiola welcomes both hip, young cocktail mavens as well as lobbyists and staffers, all bellying up to sample drinks in four categories: Aperitivi, Jeff's Choices, Light and Dark.

The multi-layered "Straight to the Top" combines Knob Creek Bourbon, Barolo Chinato, Bonal, and orange and chocolate bitters; heady-scented "Ain't That a Daisy?" mixes Milagro Tequila, house-made hibiscus cordial, lime and grapefruit. Fiola also offers 13 varieties of amaro—an obses-

by Kelly A. Magyarics / photos by Greg Powers

sion of Faile. "People assume that all amari are simply bitter, but there are so many levels of flavor there," he explains. "The fun is finding out which herb or spice from one will show up when combined with one spirit or another."

Menu standouts from award-winning chef Fabio Trabocchi include meatballs served with tomato and a sunny-side-up egg, and creamy, oozy burrata over pesto. Recently launched mixology classes challenge Trabocchi to pair his cuisine with drinks via a three-course food and cocktail experience. Faile cites his ultimate goal for guests is consistency. "As cliché as it sounds, you're only as good as the last drink you poured."

www.fioladc.com



Jeff Faile is Bar Manager at Faile in D.C.

BRABO

Robert Wiedmaier brings his Belgian roots to Alexandria in this 105-seat restaurant and bar adjacent to the Lorien Hotel and Spa, also joined by the more casual BRABO Tasting Room and gourmet market The Butcher's Block by RW.

Sommelier David Kurka heads up a cocktail program of what he describes as fun and whimsical drinks, including "A Hot Cherry Mess," with Macchu Pisco, Szechuan peppercorn-spiced syrup, house-made cherry jam and cherry bitters; and "If At First You Don't Succeed, Rye Rye Again," in which Sazerac Rye is joined by caraway syrup and Peychaud's Bitters in a Laphroaig-rinsed glass.

Kurka is also a big fan of Mezcal, used in sips like "The Day Ginger Snapped," with Domaine de Canton, ginger beer and ginger syrup. "This drink is what would happen if ginger went on a cigarette-smoking, tequila-drinking binge." Eighteen beers and 25 wines by the glass pair with popular dishes like classic mussels with white wine and garlic, and pan-seared arctic char with seafood cassoulet and braised greens. This summer, BRABO rolls out an all-tiki tippie menu.

Above all, Kurka wants guests to have fun, and relishes the chance to coax them into selecting something unusual or atypical, and enjoy it so much they order another.

www.braborestaurant.com



David Kurka.



Todd Thrasher heads up a dynamic cocktail program at Virtue Feed & Grain in Old Town Alexandria.

VIRTUE FEED & GRAIN/ SOCIETY FAIR

At PX, the sumptuous speakeasy in Old Town Alexandria, Todd Thrasher introduced the well-made cocktail to Washingtonians. Now, at two recently opened venues nearby, he finds synergy in grape and grape with innovative spins on beer- and wine-based drinks.

American tavern Virtue Feed & Grain's menu of hop-tails aims to convert brew fans to cocktail aficionados. Most popular is "What I Drink"—dark rum brightened with lemon syrup, bitters and soda and topped with Amstel Light. For "Alexandria's Finest," Thrasher mixes gin and a lemon and tarragon gastrique with wheat white beer from local Port City Brewing Company, easily sippable with crubeens (Irish-style boiled pig's feet), roasted bone marrow or shaggers pie, the kitchen's take on shepherd's pie.

Society Fair is part bakery, butcher, gourmet market, cheesemonger, coffee shop and spice bar. It also boasts a wine bar, where Thrasher grabs bottles from the cellar for "Tails from the Vine," a selection of artisanal wine-influenced libations. The savory "I Want to Eat an Onion Tart" blends Riesling, sweet onion, rum, vermouth and lemon bitters, topped with a bacon cracker. "A Pleasantly Bitter Beginning" uses Sauvignon Blanc, vodka, bay leaves, citrus vinegar, grapefruit juice and bitters. "Rather than using water as a base for cocktails, I decided to use wine since it already has flavor in it."

Not known to chase after trends, Thrasher just does what feels *right*, which has worked at all of the venues where you can find him behind the stick.

www.virtuefeedandgrain.com; www.societyfair.net ■■