

District Sips

GOING BEHIND D.C. BARS

by Kelly A. Magyarics / photos by Greg Powers

Never mind the sagging ratings that have plagued the President and Congress. These hot new venues get a resounding vote of approval from Washington, D.C. constituents and visitors alike. Next time you find yourself in the District, be sure to grab a drink at one of these innovative new spots.

Pearl Dive Oyster Palace/Black Jack

Bartending brothers Ari and Micah Wilder deal drinks at this new duo of New Orleans-inspired venues in the District's hopping 14th Street neighborhood. Downstairs at Pearl Dive, the vibe is casual seafood shack-slash-dive-bar, with portholes, a zinc-topped bar, shrimp po' boys and oysters on the half shell. Upstairs, the velvet drapes, tattooed lady backbar mural and eclectic selection of apothecary bottles on Black Jack's shelves evoke comparisons to a turn-of-the-century circus with a touch of vaudeville.

On both floors, the Wilder siblings reinvent classic drinks and create contemporary ones on two distinct cocktail menus. Their take on the Sazerac replaces the lemon peel garnish with a house made lemon gomme syrup; the smoky-sweet Cigar, with mezcal, peach bitters and lemon, is chilled with two large, smoked peach nectar-infused ice cubes, and garnished with a wrapped charcuterie "cigar."

"The inspiration behind all of our cocktails comes from seasonal availability and locally sourced fresh ingredients," the brothers explain. Pearl Dive's wine menu lists 35 seafood-focused boutique bottles, joined by a handful of draft beers and forty nostalgic and craft selections in cans.

pearldivedc.com; blackjackdc.com

Mixologists (and brothers) Ari and Micah Wilder of Pearl Dive Oyster Palace and Black Jack put the finishing touches on their refreshingly minty Frozen Cobbler, with Old Overholt Rye, Rothman Apricot Liqueur, peach and honey.

Rogue 24

This minimally lit, kitchen-in-the-round hotspot near D.C.'s Convention Center feels more like a theater than a restaurant. The playful artistry of Chef RJ Cooper's avant-garde cuisine extends to the inspired beverage program, overseen by renowned mixologist Derek Brown of the nearby Columbia Room.

Guests at one of the 52 coveted seats—including eight directly overlooking the sleek kitchen “stage”—choose either a 16- or 24-course tasting menu, with optional liquid pairings. Silky sea urchin, perched atop seaweed and an ink lava rock and garnished with briny foam, is matched by a riff on the Vermouth Cocktail, which diners “sip” via spritzes from a small metal atomizer; thinly sliced egg is wrapped around crème fraîche and topped with Ossetra caviar and gin-soaked cucumber, and served alongside a pump dispensing the genever-based Holland House cocktail.

“The lines between service, drinks and food are all blurred,” explains Brown. “The food and cocktails at Rogue 24 are all based in classic preparations but employ new textures, novel ingredients or delivery systems, so the discussion is about how we can surprise and delight the guest.” Sommelier Matthew Carroll provides synergistic wine and beer pairings, and guests sans reservations can pop in for a libation and light bites in the 14-seat salon.

rogue24.com



Mixologist Derek Brown, who oversees the cocktail program at culinary playground Rogue 24, “wants people to experience classic cocktails in a new way, and introduce guests to the best flavor combinations we, as professionals, can imagine.”

Jack Rose Dining Saloon

Whiskey aficionados should grab a stool before perusing Jack Rose's hefty bar book, which touts more than 1,400 spirits, including a large assortment of scotches, bourbons and whiskeys. The Adams Morgan bar's three levels provide three very different experiences, and the library bar, tin-stamped ceilings, vintage lighting and vest-wearing bartenders on the main floor lend a Prohibition-feel.

Beverage Director Rachel Sergi runs the cocktail program, well-rounded and not unsurprisingly whiskey-centric, with classic and whimsical spins. Her fiery Not Your Mother's Scotch Bonnet mixes Bushmill's Irish Whiskey, Combier, Dubonnet and grapefruit with a Scotch Bonnet pepper-infused syrup. The Knuckleball combines Wry Moon White Whiskey, Cocchi Americano and Pernod Absinthe, with a dash of Maldon sea salt and Fee Brothers' Aztec Chocolate Bitters.

Sergi lauds her bar team as her source of inspiration behind the stick. "They come to work each and every day ready to have fun, learn, create, question and work hard. They are instrumental in establishing the end result." In the kitchen, Chef Michael Hartzer's Caesar salad with grilled romaine pairs swimmingly with a smoky, peaty Scotch such as Laphroaig; a grilled chop of venison with salsify and a cherry Jack Rose sauce sings next to the venue's namesake cocktail. Twenty beers on tap and 70 wines partner with bar bites and entrées alike.

jackrosediningsaloon.com.



Beverage Director Rachel Sergi mixes up the bar's namesake Jack Rose cocktail, with Laird's Bonded Apple Brandy, housemade grenadine and lime. ■■