



Photos: Courtesy of Brian Liu



Mid City's Gibson Bar Stirs Up Some Excitement for Cocktail Lovers

BY MARK F. JOHNSON

Take it from a native, Washington is more and more a cosmopolitan town! There's a new hot restaurant or bar opening up practically every week in DC. How many times have you walked down U Street or 14th Street in NW, or a street in Adams Morgan or over near the Convention Center and noticed a sign, window or a host beckoning you into a new cocktail lounge?

So on my first time at the Gibson bar, which looks like a defunct warehouse that got swept in from a waterfront, I felt like I was going in search of a really good cocktail on the down low. It made me think back to the Depression-era 1930s when I imagine you had to creep into a speakeasy to get your sip on.

But that whole 1930's speakeasy revival thing is part of what works for the Gibson Bar, located ironically at 2009 14th St. NW. The other part of what works can be called cocktail bliss!

The building is unmarked. The windows are covered and grated. There is a doorbell, but every time I've gone, the door has been unlocked. Once inside, a host/doorman awaits you in a dark hallway. Once he decides that you can go in, he opens the door to a dark, sumptuous, almost decadent experience. You get the feeling that you "got in" to one of the best private parties in town, and you kind of feel privileged like you do when the host of the club du jour picks you out of the line and grants you permission to party your ass off inside!

The place feels rich and plush with several Art Deco-style accoutrements scattered about. The fairly narrow space is a bit consuming because it is so dark and because of the heaviness of wood. Perhaps they are just painted black, but the bar seems to be made of ebony as well as the tables and banquettes.

There is very low light, which adds to a certain romantic quality, and candles flicker at every table and also on the bar. The low light makes it hard to read the cocktail menu, and it also makes it difficult to see who else may

be inside. This, too, adds to the mystery and the appeal. It stirs up a sense of anticipation way before you even order a drink.

Speaking of Drinks ...

Aside from at least a dozen cocktails listed on the menu as well as certain wines, the bartenders can make a number of other drinks, too, including perhaps the martini that shares its name with the bar, although word on the street is that the Gibson bar is not named for its famous martini namesake.

The specially made drinks are pretty good in their own right, though they may cost a little more than most other bars. Drinks range in price from about \$8 to \$16, and the menu seems to change often. No matter when you go though, you're likely to encounter the aroma of flaming fruit, as twists are torched to achieve their full flavor. Pretty much every sense is appeased at the Gibson.

On my most recent visit, I ordered a rum daiquiri served on the rocks in a tumbler. I love the taste of rum, but this drink made me realize that, at most bars you get what I would call rum-lite. This Gibson cocktail was strong and smooth. It sat on the throat for a while, and when it was finally gone, it left a pleasant memory.

My friend, Ethan, introduced me to a cocktail called a Dark and Stormy on this visit. As I learned the ingredients of this drink, Gosling Bermuda rum and ginger beer, I figured I would like it. After all, it contains rum and ginger beer, and both please me. He tasted my rum daiquiri and I his Dark and Stormy, and on the next round, we switched. This drink, which has now become one of my five faves, was best at Gibson's. I've tried to replicate the taste at other bars, and it's been a sour experience. Even the coloring at the Gibson was rich and strong.

A Gibson cocktail really is a treat, and the owners of this establishment seem confident that the appeal of this place hinges on the fact that the bar is

now a “well-known secret,” that it can be really hard to get a table, especially on the weekends, and that what the bartenders do with alcohol is akin to what top chefs do at the city’s best restaurants.

Once you’ve had a drink here, you might begin to see good cocktail making as an art. I did.

Time for a Visit

The Gibson Bar is not exactly new. It has been around for over a year. Bartenders say the busiest nights are Wednesday through Saturday. Reservations are strongly recommended for the weekend. Otherwise you’re likely to be among the folks who stand around outside hoping to get a table. I’ve gone only on Sunday nights when most alcohol aficionados apparently are sobering up for Monday morning, and it’s much easier to get seated.

One could even mistake the place for a side entrance to Marvin, the restaurant-shrine to Marvin Gaye located next door. The look and feel of the Gibson and the proximity to Marvin is no accident. Both places are owned by some of the same people. They seem to like to keep a bit of mystery by avoiding the spotlight, allowing their establishments to shine for themselves. Both spots have quickly become destinations for food and drink in Mid City. Of course Marvin has a bar, too, and very often, especially on the weekend, one has to wait to get a drink there as well, but the drinks don’t seem to be nearly as hand-crafted there. The music is as smooth as the cocktails at Gibson. Reggae, chill-out, bossa nova and some old soul, round out the soundtrack. DC’s own Thievery Corporation, a musical group that came on the scene back in the ‘90s, have an ownership stake in the place as well.

Even if you see a speakeasy as a gimmick in the era of Change, enjoy Gibson Bar for the very appealing place that it is and for the smooth way they rock a cocktail.

Contact *The Gibson* at 202-232-2156 or visit thegibsondc.com. ★



Diners and their dogs enjoy Taylor Gourmet Deli’s new location and breezy space. Photo: Amanda Abrams

Taylor Gourmet Deli Arrives in Mount Vernon

BY AMANDA ABRAMS

The owners of Taylor Gourmet Deli weren’t planning on opening a second restaurant in Northwest DC – they had enough work on their hands with their first restaurant on H Street NE. But a can’t-refuse offer from a Mount Vernon landlord changed their mind, and it looks like their new shop is going to do just fine.

“We don’t have a penny to our pockets,” said Taylor owner David Mazza, explaining why opening another location was the last thing on his and co-owner Casey Patten’s minds. Plus, they’d just established the H Street deli in November and, despite almost immediate popularity with the public, were still working out the glitches.

But a couple of representatives of Edens and Avant, the real estate company that owns the new CityVista development at Fifth and K streets NW, began aggressively courting the duo.

“They were one of the first tenants we went after when we bought the shopping center,” said Brady Pate, a development associate at Edens and Avant. “We saw that they were exactly what we wanted for the project. They’re small but will gen-

erate traffic of a tenant twice their size.”

The company made Mazza and Patten a generous offer in tenant improvement funds – that’s the money restaurateurs pay to retrofit the kitchen, bathrooms and mechanical systems to their specifications – which the two guys couldn’t refuse. It allowed them to design the Mount Vernon restaurant with an industrial look similar to the H Street location.

After a “soft launch” party with local bloggers that helped get the word out, the restaurant opened Oct. 16. The response has already been “absolutely phenomenal,” according to Mazza, who said there’s a line out the door most weekdays. “It’s a different demographic [from H Street],” he mused. “Over there, it’s folks from the Senate or families with young kids. [In Mount Vernon] it’s very business-oriented, more about the power lunch.”

Taylor Gourmet Deli is located at 1116 H St. NE (202-684-7001) and 475 K St. NW (202-289-8001). Visit www.taylorgourmet.com for more information. ★