

A NEW ITALIAN CONCEPT
AT A CLASSIC HOTEL, A
SEXY AL FRESCO OPTION,
AND A CHEF SHIFT AT A
SUDS HUB DRAW BUZZ



The D'Zerac cocktail at Via Sophia contains apple brandy, absinthe, amaro, and mandarin liqueur.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HAMILTON HOTEL.

A Smoldering Summer in D.C.

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

An Art Deco landmark, the Hamilton Hotel has hosted countless inaugural balls and served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's War Room during World War II. Recently, a friend and I showed up for something decidedly more casual: drinks and dinner at Via Sophia, the modern Italian restaurant that opened when the hotel completed a sleek renovation this past spring.

The D'Zerac cocktail was a solid starter, with Chapman Apple Brandy, Amaro delle Sirene from local distiller Don Ciccio & Figli, mandarin liqueur, and absinthe. The wine list, meanwhile, ran deep with Italian options—from Gavi to accompany hamachi crudo with summer strawberries, tomatoes, asparagus, and almonds to Pinot Nero for pairing with whole branzino for two, which came wrapped in parchment paper with fennel and potatoes. On the way out, we peeked into Society, the hotel's new 14-seat cocktail bar. Its low-lit, library-esque interior—inspired by architect Jules-Henri de Sibour, who designed the hotel in 1922—beckoned, and we promised ourselves to book a cozy table soon.

Speaking of sexy spots to sip a cocktail, Hazel in the Shaw neighborhood plans to run a fun menu on its sofa-filled side patio until the weather turns. Dubbed Hazelito, the promotion features cocktails from Spirits Manager Nick Farrell and

chef Robert Curtis. I started with a White Negroni made with gin, Fino Sherry, and locally produced Capitoline Vermouth; it made such an impression that I procured the recipe and declared it my new house cocktail. (But I couldn't give short shrift to the Jungle Bird riff Turkish Jungle Penguin, either.) Nibbles included addictive crispy pork rinds that got their tang from powdered malt vinegar. And though it was hard to choose between six kinds of tacos, we could easily have reordered the sumac- and onion-topped smoked lamb, whose tortillas were slathered with Aleppo pepper aioli.

It'd been more than a hot second since I'd visited D.C. beer mecca Birch & Barley, which boasts a selection of 555 brews curated by sudsy wunderkind Greg Engert. The venue found a new chef late last year in Jarrad Silver, whose travels to Israel have influenced dishes like baked oysters with harissa butter and roasted garlic breadcrumbs as well as Rohan duck breast with green hummus and Marcona almonds. And though the staff is as well versed as ever in recommending a draft or bottle to accompany your dinner, the description of the Huckleberry Fin on the cocktail list, including the term "botanical dust," was enough to make me order the Ford's Gin, Averna, and huckleberry concoction. I can't wait to return soon to order another round. ■■

PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS



Hazel's pork rinds are dusted with malt-vinegar powder.

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