

Rimmed with Pop Rocks, Iron Gate's "Lips as sweet as candy, taste is on my mind" cocktail with tequila, blood orange, Amaro Montenegro, and club soda was inspired by the golden oldie "Hooked on a Feeling."



PHOTO: KELLY MAGYARICS



The fourth drink on the Distortion menu at Columbia Room arrived atop a cloud of raspberry dry ice.

Sound Sipping

LYRICAL LIBATIONS MADE FOR VISCERAL LIQUID EXPERIENCES IN FEBRUARY

by Kelly Magyarics, DWS

PHOTO COURTESY OF IRON GATE

We can all point to songs that instantly transport us to another place and time, evoking memories both wistful and bitter of past loves. For Valentine's Day, Nick Farrell, the Spirit Manager at Iron Gate in Dupont Circle, produced a sheet music-style list of cocktails inspired by lyrics from a lineup of romantic tunes. When I went in for a preview, the bar area had been decorated to resemble a teenager's bedroom: Posters of heartthrobs from Ricky Martin to Ariana Grande flanked the walls, roses and CDs hung from the ceiling, and the playlist was like the best mixtape ever.

The Justin Timberlake lyric "Nothing I can see but you when you dance" found tangible form in an earthy and nutty drink with Virginia Highland Malt Whisky, Barr Hill Tom Cat Gin, Don Ciccio & Figli Nocino, and tahini. And while maybe 50 Cent wasn't quite as poetic when he declared "I love you like a fat kid loves cake," Farrell gave the sentiment complexity via vanilla-infused whiskey, Rinomato aperitivo, and lemon. As we sipped our drinks, Executive Chef Anthony Chittum served us arancino-like gemelli fritters and lip-tingling grilled White Stone oysters

with Calabrian chiles. As the lipstick scrawl on the backbar mirror read, "All you need is love"—that and passion-inducing, snack-paired potions.

Across town, I settled onto a stool inside Columbia Room's Tasting Room, where owner Derek Brown and his team had just released a new tasting menu; named Distortion, it featured cocktails meant to convey dissonance. An avid fan of distortion-heavy punk music, Brown wanted to see how light, color, and even sound as well as contrasting flavors could change drinkers' perceptions of a four-sip flight paired with bites from chef Johnny Spero.

One creation was inspired by the traditional cheese-spiked coffee *kaffeost* from northern Scandinavia; served in a wooden camping mug, it included vodka, espresso amaro, cream Sherry, and gooseberry jam topped with a parmesan tuile. Next, we were instructed to sip a spicy hot-chocolate riff with cocoa, milk, Port reduction, and Ancho Reyes Chile Liqueur before donning headphones emitting a low tone to see if the sound changed how we experienced the drink. (I thought it made the spice more integrated, but I was on my third drink, after all.)

Our bartender told us that the flight had indeed disoriented some guests. The last drink, however, was clean and aromatic: Gin stirred with Italicus Bergamot Liqueur, vermouth, maple, and acidified Sherry arrived atop a raspberry dry-ice "cloud" that looked and smelled downright dreamy. Meant to restore mental clarity, it was a welcome ending. ■■



Grilled White Stone oysters are spiced with Calabrian chiles at Iron Gate.

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Kelly Magyarics, DWS, is a wine, spirits, travel, and lifestyle writer in the Washington, D.C., area. She can be reached through her website, kellymagyarics.com, or on Twitter and Instagram @kmagyarics.