



The New Guard

IN WHICH WE VISIT THE D.C. OUTPOST OF A RENOWNED NEW YORK COCKTAIL BAR AND THE POPULAR HONG KONG-INSPIRED HOT SPOT NEXT DOOR

When craft cocktail bar Columbia

Room closed early last year, it left quite a hole in Washington, D.C.'s beverage scene. The award-winning establishment run by renowned bartender, sommelier, and author Derek Brown, which snagged the award for Best American Cocktail Bar at the 2017 Tales of the Cocktail Spirited Awards, offered several unique experiences for guests, including a punch garden, spirits library, and prix-fixe tasting.

It was only fitting, then, that the concept that assumed the beloved space was one that actually inspired Brown, whose visits to New York City's Death & Co factored into his decision to launch a successful series of bars and pop-ups in the District. (He's since taken up positive psychology and is focused on creating and promoting low- and no-proof beverages.)

A few months ago, I met a writer friend at Death & Co's fourth location in Shaw's historic Blagden Alley. I walked upstairs past the lush garden bar and into a place that looked completely different, with a white marble-topped sunken bar amid resplendent jewel tones and matte gold. But I was happy to see that the team had preserved the iconic mosaic that formerly spanned the length of the Columbia Room's backbar.

On the menu, cocktails are grouped into categories that could double as dating-profile descriptions, such as "Bright & Confident" and "Boozy & Honest." I like to think I'm more of an "Elegant & Timeless" gal, so I opted for the Damia, an absinthe-tinged Martini riff that picked up a vegetal note from heirloom-tomato water and sweetness from crème de fraise. As my companion and I noshed on coconut-oil popcorn and Aleppo-spiced bar nuts, we reminisced about all the fun evenings we had spent in the D.C. institution that preceded Death & Co over the years. But maybe death is indeed a new beginning.

PHOTO: KELLY MAGVARICS



The Damia at Death & Co is a Martini variant with heirloom-tomato water, crème de fraise, and absinthe.

Later that evening, we met up with another friend at Tiger Fork just a few steps from Death & Co. The menu at the contemporary Cantonese restaurant highlights modern takes on Hong Kong street food and globally inspired Chinese dishes, all meant to be shared. But first, we wanted drinks. Among beverage director Ian Fletcher's options is a selection of concoctions inspired by traditional Chinese medicine, so potent that no more than two are recommended per guest. Tired? The 8 O'Clock Light Show should perk you up, made with rum, orange, yuzu, cacao, kola nut, astragalus, ginseng, guarana seed, and cinnamon. Or calm your

anxiety with the Peruvian Chef in a Chinese Kitchen, a pisco-based sipper with melon liqueur, lime, orange, goji berry, valerian root, kava kava, and lavender. Not that I needed any amorous help since I was in the throes of a new love affair, but my friend teasingly suggested the In the Mood for Love, in which a mixture of mezcal, yuzu, miso, honey, and Bittermens Hellfire Habanero Shrub gets an aphrodisiac boost from yin yang huo, red ginseng, passionflower, muira puama, and cardamom. Oh, l'amour!

For dinner, we had crispy fish in tender bao garnished with spicy mayo and pickled vegetables; bright green dumplings stuffed with shiitake mushrooms and Chinese broccoli; sautéed green beans that gained flavor and texture from fried shallots and chili crisp; and slices of seared spiced duck breast with charred scallions, watercress, and pancakes. New executive chef Simon Lam, a first-generation Chinese American who has worked for Peter Chang and José Andrés, paid a visit to our table to get our take on his dishes. Just as at Death & Co, what's new can be nice indeed. **LT**

Mushroom dumplings at Tiger Fork.

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