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DRINK

Sober curious cocktails

BY STEPH RODRIGUEZ / stephr@newsreview.com

Sacramento has a long history with booze. In the mid-1800s, a brewery and distillery operated at Sutter's Fort and catered to thirsty gold miners. There were also times when patrons could buy buckets of beer from Old Ironsides to-go, or when martini-fueled business lunches were the norm. Some historic bars even have secret trap doors where alcohol was quickly hidden during the days of Prohibition.

Now, one thing is for certain: There isn't a shortage of craft breweries and cocktail bars in the farm-to-fork capital.

However, there is a growing trend of men and women who seek the social aspects of being at a bar, sans alcohol. Elevated "mocktails" are becoming more popular, but sometimes those zero-alcohol beverages can be sickeningly sweet.

For those who are taking a 30-day breather from booze or who are kicking cocktails altogether, there are a few bars in town that shake up refreshing and visually appealing sippers.

One place is The Snug in Midtown where bartender Britta Currie created the Sober Spritz. "It's an ounce-and-a-half of Seedlip Herbal, one ounce of pineapple gum syrup, three quarters of an ounce of lime juice, and we use this really cool stuff called Sera. It's a nonalcoholic amaro soda," she said. "I top it with about six ounces of that in a wine glass with some cucumber ribbons and a mint sprig."

Currie said she recently took a break from drinking and having options such as amaro soda or herbal distillates such as Seedlip's rosemary, thyme and sugar-snap pea blend really hit the spot.

The Snug's close neighbor, Iron Horse Tavern, has six mocktails on its drink menu, including the Guava

Have It with guava puree, lemon and orange juice, lemon-lime soda and simple syrup. It's garnished with a yellow flower and lemon slice, but it's a definite sipper as it is very sweet. Still, it looks pretty and it feels like you're holding a cocktail in your hand.

That's what Gabriel Aiello, co-owner of Burly Beverages, believes is important for most folks—that the mocktail doesn't just look like a glass of juice with a twist of lime.

"When people go out they don't just want a seltzer water with bitters and lime. They want something that's made like a cocktail. They want something that's made with the same attention and technique that craft cocktails are made with in the shaker that feels less like juice or kombucha or soda and something that feels more like the cocktails that they've come to appreciate," he said.

Burly Beverages specializes in craft soda and shrub syrups that are carried in many bars throughout Sacramento, including Red Rabbit Kitchen & Bar on J Street, where Colleen Smalley and other bartenders create concoctions on the fly known as The Daily Squeeze. One Wednesday afternoon, Smalley was busy squeezing batches of oranges before making a refreshing passion fruit-based mocktail that was sweet, effervescent and well-balanced.

"I always start by asking people if they want juicy or tart, or if they want something sweet," Smalley said. "Sacramento is a pretty boozy place, and I feel like a lot of us have grown up a little bit and we have a lot of friends that are pregnant or maybe they're doing sober January. But just having a cocktail being beautiful and presentable even though it's nonalcoholic is important."

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