



Barrel-aged, craft made

BY BEN IRWIN

Tucked away west of Davis down Highway 128 in charming downtown Winters sits Preserve, a restaurant and bar whose staff and owners pride themselves on locally-sourced ingredients.

Although keeping local ingredients through the winter can prove difficult, Preserve's bar is stocked for the season. Bar and front-of-house manager Curtis Withnell says the secret lies in its name.

"The entirety behind Preserve is when you have an abundance and find a way to have no waste and preserve them for use year round," he says. "Same concept with the bar and our cocktails. Most of them are cocktails we have created in-house using preserves."

Withnell says jams, jellies, shrubs and even gastriques—currently a rosemary blackberry gastrique—go into Preserve's carefully crafted cocktails. When winter comes around, he says champagne cocktails for the holidays and spicy warmer drinks for the weather are on the menu.

"You have the spices, nutmeg, clove, anise," Withnell says. "Local we do a lot with figs ... Once I get those in, I typically make a jam out of it right away and we will use the jam in a cocktail as well."

Jams and jellies aside, the Preserve team also specializes in barrel-aged cocktails behind the bar.

"The idea behind that is taking some of your classic cocktails, and aging them together," Withnell says, "so instead of just aging your base spirit, you age all of the ingredients so they blend nicely and you get this nice oak finish to it."

He says that now that they have the recipes dialed in, they use 20-liter oak barrels to age cocktails for as long as nine weeks. Each barrel is used no more than three times to ensure a proper oak finish.

The Vieux Carré—French for "old square" and the original name for the French Quarter in New Orleans—is Preserve's take on a New Orleans classic cocktail, and Withnell's personal barrel-aged favorite.

"I love the flavors that are in there," he says. "You do have a bit of sweetness, but none of it comes from a sugar. There's no simple syrup, no demerara, nothing added to it. It's going to be the sweet vermouth that we chose ... that is going to give you some of the spices and the sweetness, but the oak on the finish helps it tame down so it doesn't have that lingering sugar bite in the back."

The boozy Vieux Carré—a blend of rye bourbon, sweet vermouth, herbal liqueur, cognac, Angostura and Peychaud's bitters—is served in a chilled coupe glass, no ice needed. Garnished with a lemon twist, many sweet and spicy sips reveal a fresh dark cherry at the bottom of the glass.

Preserve brings local flavor from behind the bar year-round with jams and jellies, barrel-aged blends, an Old-Fashioned to die for—made with Savage and Cooke Bourbon bottled at Muir Island—and a team dedicated to their craft.

"We like to make drinks that I can give you the exact recipe, but you will never be able to find it anywhere else, because not a lot of bars are going to have jalapeño jelly behind the bar," Withnell says. "We take a lot of pride and we have a lot of fun." □

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