

SOPHISTICATED LIVING

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Welcome to Machine, Wicker Park's hot new restaurant on Division Street with Insta-worthy installations and a food and beverage program for discerning palates. Shown here: The Good Energy cocktail made with gin, matcha, coconut milk and peppermint tea, and topped with a coconut foam. *Photo by Sophia Mathias*

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WELCOME TO MACHINE

At Machine, Wicker Park's hot new restaurant on Division Street, the Insta-worthy installations might be geared toward millennials, but the food and beverage program is drawing a more discerning crowd.

By Lisa Shames / Photography by Sophia Mathias and Matthew Reeves

In the realm of things that naturally go together, restaurants and flower shops don't top the list. And that suits the partners behind Machine, Brian Galati and Chireal Jordan, just fine. Located on Division Street in Wicker Park, the recently opened Machine is just as serious about its food and beverage programs as it is about the florist that resides inside the space, formerly home to Taus Authentic.

Doing things differently comes naturally to Galati and Jordan, who combined their extensive nightlife industry experience to create Headquarters Beercade, a craft-beer-meets-vintage-arcade bar that opened in Lakeview in 2012, before moving to a larger location in River North. A Nashville location opened in 2017, too. "If it falls into mediocrity or something you can get somewhere else, what's the point?" says Jordan.

Which leads us back to The Florist at Machine. While Jordan says both gents share a love for flowers—"Flowers are a simple

luxury that bring joy to any moment," he says—the idea to put a floral shop *inside* the restaurant was 100 percent his business partner's. Galati's passion for petals runs deep, so much so that his Machine office is located at the far end of the restaurant's front-room bar, which is as close as one could get to the beautiful and aromatic array of colorful flowers without actually sitting in them.

Nearby, the in-house floral specialists are busy creating pretty build-your-own and ready-made bouquets for those looking to grab one on their way home or to give one to guests (a first date, perhaps?) dining in the restaurant. An on-request roving floral cart is included in the setup, too, and bouquet-building events are in the works. And rather than offer a typical happy hour special—because, well, that's not how Galati and Jordan roll—Machine's features stems accompanying each drink and is dubbed Flower Hour.

But lest you get the wrong idea, Machine is more than just the offbeat talking point The Florist offers. Chef Trevor Hoyte,



The light, bright and airy Florist side at Machine features custom-made street lamps and floor-to-ceiling windows.

who has worked at IPO and AraOn, creates food that connects to the restaurant's Midwestern roots as well as his own, which includes growing up in Barbados and living in New York. His dinner and brunch dishes are firmly grounded in the familiar before heading off in uncharted territory with some bold flavors here and eye-catching plating there. Hoyte also is a fan of giving the spotlight to ingredients typically seen in supporting roles.

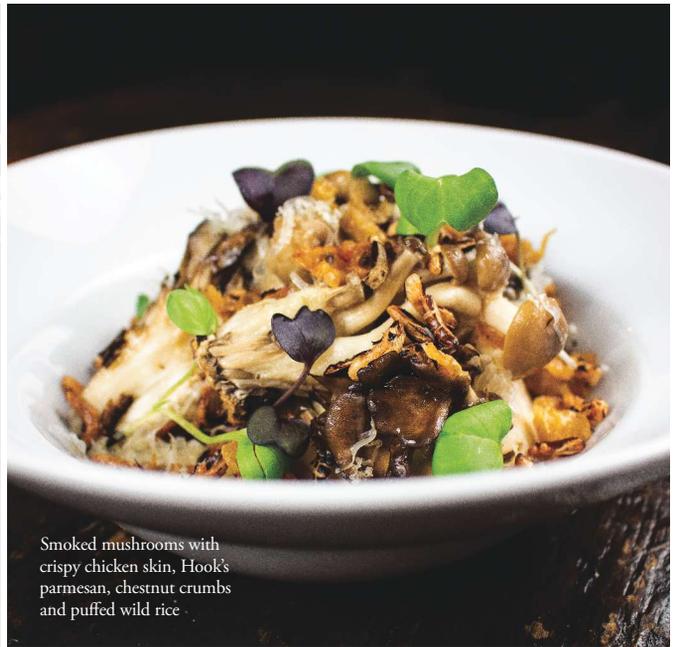
Take, for instance, the smoked mushrooms from the Shared Plates section of the menu, which also includes eight or so larger plates, a handful of sides and five desserts. It's a multilayered dish with flavors coming from not only the smoked shiitake, maitake, king trumpet and beech mushrooms, but also from roasted hazelnuts, puffed wild rice and grated Parmesan. Additional flavor and texture comes via dehydrated bits of chicken skin, which soften the longer they soak in the dish's earthy juices. A smattering of microgreens provides balance to the rich, umami-heavy dish.

Baby potatoes—always the bridesmaid and never the bride—get the recognition they deserve in the marbled potatoes and clams dish. The uber-tender tubers get gussied up with a sprinkling of bright orange trout roe and a dusting of heat-inducing togarashi. There's some surf-and-turf action going on in the small but mighty dish with the addition of the chewy-in-a-good-way clams and crunchy nuggets of guanciale.

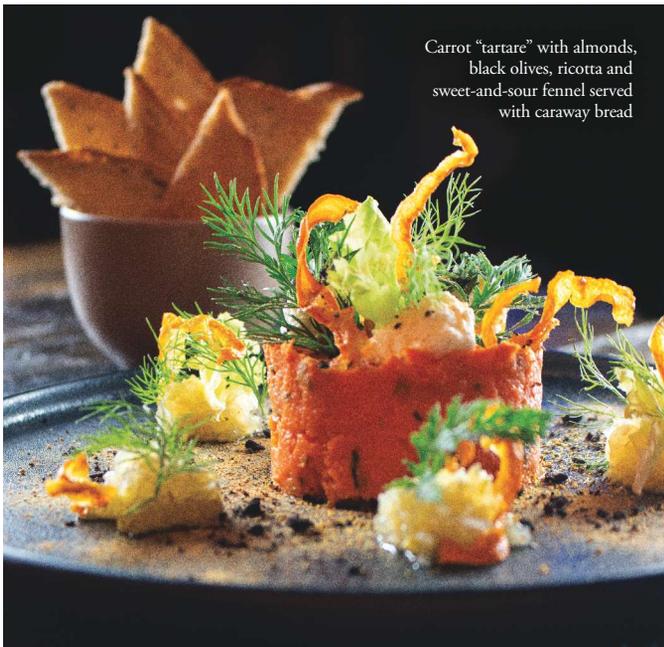
For his version of "risotto," Hoyte does away with any dairy—hence the quotation marks on the menu—and instead subs in coconut milk to mimic the signature richness for which the dish is known. Spinach and chunks of tender shrimp nudge the Arborio rice dish into main-plate status even if its menu placement does not. Furikake, the Japanese seasoning of dried fish, sesame seeds and chopped seaweed, adds a boost of flavor, although the too-small bowl in which it's served makes it difficult to give the ingredients the proper mixing they deserve.



Friends With Benefits cocktail made with aged rum, spiced pear liqueur, blackberry and lemon, and served with a pie crust rim



Smoked mushrooms with crispy chicken skin, Hook's parmesan, chestnut crumbs and puffed wild rice



Carrot "tartare" with almonds, black olives, ricotta and sweet-and-sour fennel served with caraway bread



Good Energy cocktail made with gin, matcha, coconut milk and peppermint tea, and topped with a coconut foam

From the Larger Plates section, the beef short rib has quickly become a fan favorite. The meat is cooked sous vide to impart even tenderness to the comfort-inducing cut. It's served with a brown-butter cauliflower puree and pieces of puffed beef tendon that are cooked for four hours before being frozen, dehydrated and quickly deep-fried so they puff up like chicharrón. Looking for something more traditional? Hoyte offers a half roasted chicken with Brussels sprouts. Bucatini more or less sticks to the straight and narrow path but adds a twist with crispy kale pieces and shaved egg white on top.

Machine's cocktail program from Violet Hour vet Aneka Saxon also colors outside the lines, offering drinks that often tap into culinary techniques and incorporate unusual ingredients and presentations. Of the 70 or so cocktails Saxon originally created, only 20 made the cut and were deemed unique enough to warrant

placement on Machine's menu. There's the Caged and Infused, a gin drink infused with butterfly-pea flower tea and topped with a crème de violette-flavored hard candy cage. A mini toy hammer helps to break it open. The Caged Old Fashioned takes a similar approach although with an Angostura-caramel molded sugar garnish on top.

The restaurant's floral program works its way into the cocktails, too, with frozen flowers appearing in some of the ice cubes, such as in the fortified-wine-based Ice Sage. Communal cocktails have a playful streak with vessels ranging from a giraffe pitcher to a diamond-shaped carafe. "There is an overabundance of stern and serious cocktail bars in the world," says Saxon. "I'm looking for an *experience*—either a combination of flavors and aromas that I didn't expect or some aspect that is going to cause me to stand back and be surprised and delighted."



Caged Old Fashioned cocktail made with bourbon, raw sugar and lemon oil, and topped with an Angostura caramel cage

An antique credenza, spilling over with flowers from its open drawers, greets guests as they arrive at Machine in Wicker Park.



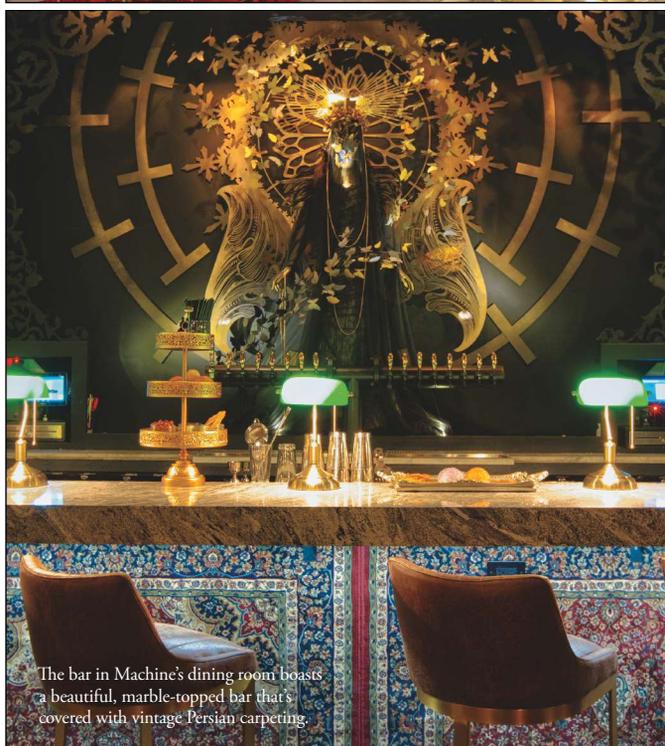
Machine's romantic, semi-private dining space features a custom amber-lit chandelier and a channel of illuminated white roses along the wall.





Caramelized lemon tart with a shortbread crust and fresh fruit

This whimsical art installation behind the bar on the Florist side of the restaurant is juxtaposed against the darker, moodier main dining room.



The bar in Machine's dining room boasts a beautiful, marble-topped bar that's covered with vintage Persian carpeting.



The Florist at Machine offers a "Build Your Own Bouquet" program (BYOBouquet) and beautiful, pre-arranged bouquets for purchase. Guests can also order flowers tableside with Machine's flower cart service.

There was a similar mindset when it came to the design of the 110-seat Machine, a process Galati and Jordan ended up taking on themselves to create their exact vision of juxtapositions for the two-room space. The front area, which includes an expansive marble-topped bar, high-top tables and the aforementioned florist shop, leans toward light with its white walls, wraparound floor-to-ceiling windows and fantastical art installation behind the bar. The main dining room favors the dark side with richly grained wood-topped tables, midnight blue chairs and subdued lighting. Large red Japanese maples add pops of color to the space. A slightly

raised semi-private room is set off with dramatic futuristic light fixtures. It is slated to be the scene of some yet-to-be-disclosed live performances in the coming months. And at any moment the 105-seat patio will make its debut, offering an equally thought-provoking, botanicals-infused aesthetic of its own.

But no matter where you sit, don't get too attached to your surroundings. "We're going to change up a lot of the design elements," says Jordan. "We can't sit idle for too long." We'd expect nothing less. **sl**

Machine, 1846 W. Division St., 312.549.8740. dinemachine.com