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The Sip – Floral-infused cocktails are blooming at Machine: Engineered Dining & Drink

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Blossoming flowers are a long-awaited sign of spring and summer. The craft cocktail program at Machine: Engineered Dining & Drink ensures you don't just smell the roses — you drink them, too.

Don't let the establishment's name fool you — “Machine” sounds far from anything botanical or verdant — but flower-power is in full effect here. From the moment you enter the restaurant you'll think you're in a flower shop. And, in fact, you are! Its main bar shares space with a full-scale florist that is incorporated into the experience.

“It's the first of its kind floral campaign/initiative [within a restaurant],” said co-owner Brian Galati. “Guests have the option to build their own bouquets tableside. ... Afterwards, it's clipped to their table for them to enjoy during dinner and then take home.”

With a bar brimming with flowers, beverage director Aneka Saxon doesn't have to look far for inspiration for her craft cocktails, which draw heavily from botanicals.

Saxon enthused there are “endless pros” for using floral elements in cocktails whether in flavor or appearance. “One, they're gorgeous. They always bring in an element of beauty. ... When people smell flowers they have really emotional responses, memories, and that's important to play on.”



The “Caged & Infused” cocktail, for example, is an adaptation of the classic Aviation cocktail. Saxon’s version incorporates Japanese Roku gin, which is distilled with notes of yuzu and cherry blossom. She infuses the gin with butterfly pea flower (often used in tea) and adds house-made lemongrass simple syrup along with the traditional ingredients of maraschino liqueur and lemon juice.

The drink is topped with an intricate, “laced” dome (they call it a cage) of violet-flavored spun sugar, which has made the drink quite popular on Instagram. Patrons are given a small gold hammer to “smash the cage.” (I’m told no one has yet to shatter the elegant coupe glass which holds the beverage.)

“The candy element brings evolution of flavors. The drink gets slightly sweeter as it melts,” said Saxon. “I like the idea of experiencing change while you’re drinking a single beverage.”

Another drink that evolves as you sip is the “Ice Sage” — featuring a frozen cube of flowers, blackberry juice, sage tea and honey that slowly melts in a mixture of Dolin Blanc and Dolin Dry vermouth and soda water.

“Inspired by Legends” is a take on a Negroni, made with mezcal. Garnished with a rose petal, diners are given a vial to add drops of rose water to the petal.



“The more aromatic the better. Something what gets overlooked a lot in cocktails is the smell,” said Saxon. “You can only taste sweet, sour, salty, umami and bitter, but your nose is where you get all the intricacies of flavor.”

The hope for Galati is that the cocktails’ interactive elements are read less as kitsch and more as “all the senses getting activated.” In a saturated dining scene, he wants “to implant a memory for a while” so customers don’t forget their experience at Machine. The innovative craft cocktail program is one key component of that goal.

As for the restaurant’s name, Machine refers to all the different components in the restaurant that work together seamlessly, like gears in a machine.

Galati said the restaurant’s philosophy of pushing beyond the expected through their version of “engineering” — where multiple iterations of food and beverages are required before making the menu — paired with the ambiance and unique in-house florist hopefully make for a sublime customer experience.

While perhaps not as immersive as Machine’s concept, many local bars and restaurants are integrating seasonal floral cocktails on their menus.

At The Darling in West Loop (905 W. Randolph), try “The Secret Garden” made with Ketel Botanicals Vodka, lime juice, St. George raspberry brandy, Sapin liqueur, grapefruit soda and edible hibiscus flower.

At the Duck Inn in Bridgeport (2701 S. Eleanor), try the “War of the Roses” with black rosehip bitters, vodka, sparkling Malbec, lemon and egg white.

At downtown’s Z Bar (108 E. Superior), try the “Cherry Blossom” with Haku vodka or Roku gin, Mancino sakura vermouth, hopped grapefruit bitters and preserved sakura.

Machine: Engineered Dining & Drink is located at 1846 W. Division Street. For more information call (773) 276-7422 or visit www.dinemachine.com