

Vegging Out

Boston's Great Bay and other restaurants discover the novelty of vegetable-based cocktails.

Boston's Kenmore Square is perhaps best known for its proximity to Fenway Park and the Boston Red Sox. But, aside from a flat screen TV tucked into one corner of the bar, Great Bay is not a sports bar. Instead of Fenway Franks, this chic and sophisticated seafood restaurant serves Pan Fried Lemon Sole, Bay of Fundy Monkfish and an inventive selection of cocktails.

From our seats at the bar, my date and I look across the dining room at undulating, fish-like patterns projected on the back wall and scan the bottles of wine and spirits that are back-lit with a warm amber glow. We smile at the clever names on Great Bay's cocktail list: the Slippery Mermaid (a potent Sangria), Dr. Huxtable's Ugly Sweater (a blend of Stoli Razberi, sake, fresh sour and burnt orange twist) and the Ghost of Mary

(with spicy tomato water and Ketel One Citroen; it's their best-selling cocktail), all priced at \$12. I don't really need to read the cocktail list, because I'm here to try the Beta Carrotini.

I'm intrigued and a little intimidated by a drink in which the star ingredient is carrot juice. As a vegetarian, I eat plenty of vegetables, but I've never tried them in a cocktail. Bar manager Jonathan Henson mixes New Amsterdam Gin, Cointreau and fresh squeezed carrot and orange juices, then carefully dots the drink with green herb oil before sliding my glass across the bar. It's sweet and slightly tangy, with a hint of carrot. Though skeptical, my date eventually gives in to his curiosity and takes a sip, too.

Henson explains that vegetable-based cocktails are a natural extension for the fresh-focused eatery. "We always try to use fresh, seasonal ingredients, fresh-squeezed juices and high-quality fruit, herbs and spices," he says, noting the flavor nuances of the carrots attracted him. "In the fall we usually see chantenay carrots from Vermont that have a slight hint of burgundy in their skin, but have a beautiful, sweet, orange interior."

Henson noticed the vibrant color and the "clean, earthy sweetness" of their aroma when executive chef Adam Fuller was juicing them for a purée, and he asked him for a pint of juice to experiment with. Fuller immediately suggested he add gin. "I smiled back, saying that was exactly what I was thinking," Henson recalls. "We have New Amsterdam Gin, which is a straight American gin that has very noticeable citrus notes, and I knew that was the one I wanted to use. Whenever I smell it, I think of tangerines."

Henson says he "used to drink fresh carrot juice and orange juice every morning when I was a vegetarian in college, so that is where the drink took its inspiration. It took just a little tweaking, but I got the mix down that afternoon and introduced it to our list the next day."

Around that same time, Henson decided to drop his Cucumber Cosmopolitan from the dinner cocktail list and replace it with the Beta



● Fresh-squeezed carrot and orange juices marry with New Amsterdam Gin and Cointreau in the Beta Carrotini.

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Carrotini. “The response to the drink was initially, ‘What happened to the Cucumber Cosmo? I really liked that drink!’ But *I* really like the subtle earthiness of the [Beta Carrotini], and convinced a few of my regulars to get behind [it].”

Now Henson says the Beta Carrotini has become a “favored underdog with the cocktail set.”

I ask Henson how he gets bar patrons to try it. “I simply guarantee it,” he explains. “What’s the worst that is going to happen? A guest may not like it, and I have to make them something else. I would say nine times out of 10 the response is positive, and people order another and convince a friend to try it out, too.”

Great Bay is not alone in offering vegetable cocktails. Lucy Brennan, owner and general manager of mint/820 in Portland, Ore., makes The Ruby, \$7, with beet-infused vodka and a splash of lemon-lime juice. “I was enjoying a beet salad one night and it just came to me to infuse vodka with beets!” she says. The drink

has become so popular that she says the bar infuses 10 bottles per week on average.

Other veggie cocktails can be found at Akasha Restaurant, Bar and Bakery in Culver City, Calif. The Socialite features carrot juice, ginger elixir and organic vodka for \$14, and The Akasha is a blend of 42 Below Kiwi Vodka, organic cucumber juice and Thai basil elixir, priced at \$12.

Back in Boston, Henson says he’s been experimenting with other veggie-based cocktails and just introduced a white Sangria with cucumber, lime and grapefruit juice; he hopes to add another new creation in the fall. “The most promising is a beet-based drink that uses hints of cocoa and espresso to round it out,” he says. “It is still in the experimental phase, but I think it is going to be a winner.” ●

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