

Farm-to-Cocktail at Vermilion

Laura Secker mans the bar

Pamela Hess

Photos by Nicole Bedard



It must be love when your bartender mixed drinks to pay the bills in college...but once degreed, never actually put down her shaker.

"I couldn't get away from it," says Laura Secker, the bar manager at Vermilion in Old Town Alexandria, Va. "I like to take care of people."

It's not just love of her customers. It's a love for the staff (especially restaurant manager David Hammond, to whom she is betrothed), for the company (Neighborhood Restaurant Group—see also p. 46), and for the creative, rotating monthly cocktails she crafts using what's fresh from local farms. In June it's strawberries. In July, watermelon takes center stage. In August it's peaches. Because she tunes her drinks to what is best at the farmers market, she has to wait to make

her call on September—berries, perhaps, or grapes. "That sucks for me because I'm a total type-A planner!" she laughs.

Customer often request her greatest hits—a cucumber-based Gin Sin or Here Comes the Sun, a strawberry-infused tequila with fresh rhubarb foam on top—in the middle of winter. Secker reluctantly says "no," but then adds: "It's good we don't have it because that means when we do, it's fresh and delicious." Both induce dangerously fast drinking. The former is crisp and thirst-quenching, the latter sweet and inexplicably innocent-tasting, despite the fact that it's three parts alcohol and just about no parts anything else...except for that decadent foam. ♦

Gin Sin

- 1 ½ ounces Hendrick's Gin
- 1 ½ ounces cucumber juice (puree a peeled and seeded cucumber and press through a sieve)
- ¼ ounces fresh lime juice
- ½ ounces simple syrup
- 1 ounce club soda

Add all ingredients to a shaker and shake vigorously. Serve over ice. Garnish with a lime wheel and cucumber peel.





Here Comes the Sun

1 ½ ounces strawberry infused silver tequila (Herradura is recommended)
 ¾ ounces St. Germain Elderflower Liqueur
 ½ ounces lime juice

Add ingredients to a shaker and shake vigorously. Serve on the rocks in a short glass. Top with Rhubarb Foam.

RHUBARB FOAM

2 cups water
 2 cups sugar
 4 stalks rhubarb, washed and cut in half
 2 sheets gelatin
 ½ cup warm water

Add 2 cups water, sugar and rhubarb stalks to a pot. Cook over medium heat until the sugar dissolves and rhubarb softens and turns the syrup pink. Strain syrup through a fine sieve to remove all solids. Keep warm off the burner.

Add 2 sheets gelatin to ½ cup warm water. Allow it to dissolve. Add the gelatin water to the warm syrup. Stir until dissolved. Foam syrup will keep up to a week in the refrigerator.

Add 1 cup of the foam syrup to a charger (the type that makes whipped cream, available in kitchen stores). Charge with 2 nitrous pods. Shake hard and dispense.

TO MAKE STRAWBERRY TEQUILA:

Wash, hull and quarter 3 cups fresh local strawberries. Add berries to tequila and seal. Store in a cool, dark place for two weeks. Strain tequila, discarding strawberry flesh. Keep chilled.

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