

The Roosevelt

A tall drink of southern nostalgia

John Haddad

Photos by Gabrielle Brost Hoffman

Thomas “T” Leggett is the barman at The Roosevelt in Richmond’s atmospheric Church Hill neighborhood. The restaurant was conceived as a neighborhood joint with a 1930s and ’40s vibe, and the space invokes a sense of regionalism, a philosophy popular during that era and an influence on the restaurant’s menus.

Leggett was a six-year veteran of Richmond’s Six Burner, where he tended bar while Chef Lee Gregory manned the kitchen. Both were tapped by Kendra Feather to open The Roosevelt, which was recently voted Best New Restaurant in Richmond in the inaugural Elby Awards.

The Roosevelt team is thoughtful and deliberate in their choice of products and purveyors. They serve only Virginia wines—Jefferson, Pollak, Linden, Gabriele Rause, and Barboursville are on the list. Beers come from regional producers including Virginia’s Toppers, Blue Mountain, and Hardywood. Liquors are, for the most part, of the small-batch, regional, and artisanal variety.

“Choosing to not stock some of the more popular national brands allows me to introduce customers to new products from regional producers they might otherwise not try,” says Leggett. His vodkas include Cirrus, from Richmond; Tito’s Small Batch, from Texas; and Cathead, from Mississippi. Whiskeys hail from Virginia’s Catoctin Creek and Reservoir as well as from more familiar Kentucky locales.

Leggett updates his cocktail menu seasonally. It includes such favorites as The Seersucker (bourbon, sweet tea syrup, and bitters), the Duane Allman (bourbon, vermouth, almond liqueur and peach juice), and The Roosevelt Shrub (gin, fresh blackberries and cherries, cane sugar, and Virginia apple cider vinegar.)

“I love when someone orders a second drink of something they had never had before,” says Leggett.

With the arrival of spring just around the corner, Leggett agreed to share a few recipes to welcome the new season. ♦

John Haddad is a food writer in Richmond and Vice Chair of Slow Food RVA. Find him at www.epicuriousity.net, @Epicuriousity on Twitter, or slowfoodrva.org.



Spring Tonic #3

- 1½ ounce Catoctin Creek Watershed Gin
- 1 ounce apricot-thyme shrub*
- splash Gabriele Rause Vin Gris**
- squeeze of lemon wedge
- dash of Fee Bother’s Orange Bitters
- ½ ounce rhubarb syrup ***
- tonic water

Fill highball glass with ice. Add gin, shrub, chilled white wine, lemon juice, and orange bitters. Fill rest of the way with tonic. Mix with bar spoon. Add rhubarb syrup on top and garnish with a lemon twist.

*apricot-thyme shrub: equal parts fruit, sugar and apple cider vinegar. Combine fruit and sugar first and let sugar extract juice from fruit, then add vinegar and mix to dissolve sugar. Throw in some thyme. After sitting for a day or so, press and strain out fruit solids and thyme.

**white wine: any may be substituted, preferably off-dry and un-oaked.

***rhubarb syrup: combine equal parts sugar, water, and chopped rhubarb over heat. Cook until rhubarb softens. Chill to room temperature and strain out the solids.

The Appalachian

- 2 ounce Smooth Ambler Old Scout
- 1 ounce potlikker*
- ½ ounce reduced Virginia apple cider (thickened by simmering over low heat)

Fernet Branca**
pickled ramps

Combine bourbon, potlikker, and apple cider together with ice and shake. Give your cocktail glass a Fernet Branca rinse and discard excess. Strain shaker into glass and garnish with a pickled ramp.

*potlikker: seasoned liquid that has been left over after braising greens, usually collards.

** Fernet Branca is an herby spirit from Italy, often served as a digestif.



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