

How Bloody Can You Get?

TASTE-TESTING EUGENE'S BLOODY MARYS by Vanessa Salvia

The Bloody Mary, that quintessential tomato and vodka drink, is no longer considered just a hangover corrective. When well garnished with vegetables and perhaps a shrimp (and even a hamburger, as I found at one Junction City spot), it's a darn good approximation of a soup and salad — virtuous enough to provide some vitamins while smoothing out any roughness of the day.

A classic Bloody Mary comes with a celery stalk, a pickled green bean and, perhaps, a dill pickle spear and an olive or two. Given today's farm-to-table sensibility and cocktail experimentation, you'll have to look far and wide to find this side-salad combo. After trekking to nine local establishments on my quest, I found only one, at The Cannery, that provided the pickled green bean.

The Cannery's bartender asked me how spicy I wanted my drink, and I went with "spicy-spicy," which was a mistake. The Cannery infuses Sobieski vodka with jalapeño and habanero. Overall, it was tasty, but I couldn't make peace with the level of heat. The sweet, pickled-pepper garnish and the ice water chaser provided the only relief.

The Barn Light crafted a Bloody Mary using a flotilla of ingredients. Sea salt, cayenne, Old Bay seasoning, lime juice, Sriracha, Worcestershire, Tabasco and horseradish went into the jalapeño-infused Monopolowa vodka and top-secret tomato juice blend, along with a float of espresso stout. For garnish, they went the nontraditional route with a slice of maple bourbon-glazed bacon. The bacon was certainly delicious, but in the future I'll save the meat for my bourbon cocktails. I really missed the pickled tidbits.

Lucky Noodle wins for the freshest, crispest celery. I was offered a choice of the regular or the spicier Hail Mary; in the interest of science, I ordered one of each. Made with jalapeño basil vodka, the Hail Mary was noticeably spicier and slightly more herbal. Simply garnished with lime, celery and olives, it was tasty but perhaps a bit spendy at \$8 for the regular and \$9 for the Hail Mary.

Jackalope's drink was tasty but nothing special, though it did come with a nice cherry pepper. At High Street Café, a generous pour of Fleischmann's vodka sank to the bottom of the house-made tomato mixture and melted ice, though the pickled garlic garnish was a nice addition. To be fair, the bartender told me she is not normally a drink maker.

The Pour House surprised me with a pickled carrot garnish, though its drink had too much horseradish and too much olive juice, lending it an inescapable bitter edge.

For a Bloody Mary along with a delicious breakfast, it's hard to beat Brails, whether you're hungover or not. There were two other stand-outs: Horsehead and The Rodeo Steakhouse in Junction City. Horsehead bartender Kelly Wilson expertly combined A.1., Worcestershire, celery salt, cayenne, Sriracha, olive juice, vodka and tomato juice. Before serving me and my companion, he taste-tested each one and garnished them with umbrellas. They were delicious.

The Rodeo Steakhouse was the winner for the most creative garnish. Its tasty drink comes in a quart-size Mason jar along with olives, lemon, lime, celery, slices of smoky cheese, slices of pepper jack cheese, a grilled shrimp and a hamburger slider. Totally worth the drive to get this delicious "soup and sandwich" combo for only \$9.99.

As I embarked upon this quest and chronicled my taste-testings on Facebook, I was given many suggestions of "must-try" drinks I just couldn't get to. A last-minute Facebook throwdown from The Davis will likely kick off part two of the Bloody Mary Diaries. ■



RODEO STEAKHOUSE WINS

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