

Paint, Drink, and Be Merry at Paint Drops Paint Bar



The last time I sat facing an easel with a paintbrush in hand was 10 years before I was legally able to hold a glass of wine in the other. Thanks to Paint Drops paint bar in Pawtucket, however, I was able to fill my hands with one of each and still walk away with a surprisingly decent piece of artwork. I think I may have found my new favorite pastime.

Paint bars have been sweeping the nation in recent years, first as designated “Wine and Paint Nights” held once a month inside bars and wineries, and progressing into independent studios where every day is devoted to painting for the imbibed and ambitious. Even little Rhode Island has its share of establishments rising to meet the occasion. One of the newest is located on Mineral Spring Ave, nestled inside an old mill-looking building with green trim, across from a “Save” supermarket (this is an important detail, particularly if one decides half-way through paint night that one would like to buy saltine crackers). Added bonus: There’s plenty of free parking.

I asked my friend Jen to accompany me, thinking it’d be fun to say “The Jens are painting Rhode Island red! (and pink and purple and blue!)” I did not realize she was a pro, with five paintings under her belt

from various bars around New England. I felt incredibly underqualified to be sitting next to her— but, as I learned from my evening, no prior experience is necessary in order to produce a painting worthy of display.

There was a small crowd that evening, four women, and I was still “hanging over” (in the words of my friend’s grandfather) from an unexpected Sunday night outing. This was particularly upsetting because Paint Drops is a B.Y.O.B.(ottle) studio, and I could have really reveled in the fact that most paint bars offer only *one* included glass of wine, and I had the potential to drink four. I instead spent the night sipping a chardonnay while nursing a bottle of Aquafina, but the possibility to have an inexpensive boozy night is there.

I was surprised by the intimacy of the venue. Ana Maria, the owner and our instructor that night, was so relaxed and welcoming, we felt we could make ourselves at home. We were given aprons to protect our clothing, and prior to our arrival, she set up stations with easels, brushes, and paint-drop dotted plates filled with vibrant colors. And for those of you who don’t carry a corkscrew in your purse, you need not have a moment of panic at the liquor store like I did, frantically swapping out a corked bottle for a screw-top, because cups, wine keys, bottle openers, and straws are available for use. The other two women painting with us even brought crackers and dip, and seeing their supply ignited within me a strong desire for my own crackers. (Ana was kind enough to direct me to the shopping center and encouraged me to run out while we waited for our first layer of paint to dry. “Honestly, it’s no problem! We can’t paint until the background dries anyway.”)

Our goal that night was to paint a flamingo. Before we began, Ana gave us an encouraging introduction that assured us we need not be Picasso in order to produce a wonderful piece of art. “There is no such thing as a mistake,” she said. “People are sometimes too timid to paint because they’re afraid of making mistakes, but there is no right or wrong here. The goal is not to make a piece of artwork that looks identical to mine — that’d be impossible. It’s to create your own interpretation, something that is you.” She offered recommendations as she painted, primarily in regard to layering and the progression from painting the background to plumage to the neck to eyes to highlights, but the instruction was not as rigid as I expected. She didn’t paint one stroke and wait for us to copy it before moving on. As a perfectionist, I like to know exactly what the teacher is doing and how, so this lack of detailed guidance made me anxious. But by the end of the evening, I learned I could create my own path and still arrive at something that looked like a flamingo. And that did, in fact, make me feel proud.

In my moments of pause, I admired artwork around the room from previous nights’ events, and I wanted to paint them ALL. I felt inspired. I felt *artistic*. Similar to a runner’s high, there must be a painter’s high that comes from seeing the work of one’s hands on the canvas, because I left feeling very happy and accomplished. The wine, which might be the draw for some, was simply an added bonus.

Paint Drops: 560 Mineral Spring Ave, Pawtucket, RI

Visit paintdropsri.com to reserve a spot and view the calendar of scheduled paintings.