

My Darling, Clementine: A night out at Providence's new cocktail bar



Fumo Bianco

Only days before bidding adieu to 2022, this former *Motif* writer sought out a new cocktail bar in the heart of Providence, secretly joining with friends in her beloved city for one more night on the town. One could say it was a clandestine affair at Clementine Cocktail Bar: elegant, intimate, memorable - just like the drinks themselves.

It's been a year since I left Rhode Island, but as soon as I looked at the address for Clementine, I did the most Rhode Island thing possible and said, "Oh, it's where birch used to be." I still remember when birch opened my inaugural year of moving into the city, a hallowed empty space that closed during the pandemic and now reopened almost exactly two years later. Although the space looks strikingly similar - a horseshoe-shaped bar extending through the middle of the room with barstools around it - the red brick wall has since been painted white and is now adorned with vibrant art pieces. A golden dandelion chandelier, like a bursting firework, hangs from the ceiling, and at the time of our visit, Christmas wreaths and small sparkling trees added splashes of holiday cheer.



Morning Dew

My husband and I arrived at 4:30pm on a Thursday, trying to beat the crowds, and we were told that by this time the day before, the bar had been completely full. Given its proximity to Trinity Rep, it's the perfect place for pre-show cocktails and snacks. Thankfully, on this night, we still had our choice of seats.

Two of our friends had already arrived and were waiting for us at the corner end of the bar, having just made their acquaintance with **Christian Cantaragiu**, the general manager who would be serving us that evening. Originally from Moldova, Christian has an internationally acclaimed bartending background, having worked from London to Los Angeles, and the menu he's curated is unique and sophisticated. My favorite aspect of the menu, however, is the selection of alcohol-free options. As it turns out, the owner of Clementine and former mayor of Providence, Congressman **David Cicilline**, has something in common with my husband - both do not drink. It's nice to visit a cocktail bar where my husband does not feel out of place.

For the first round, our two friends ordered the Sunset Limited, described on the menu as "citrusy/tropical/bittersweet," and containing the bar's homonymous ingredient, clementine juice. (The bar is actually named for Cicilline's great-grandmother, Clementine.) This non-alcoholic option, made with cherry and tomato syrup, offers a well-balanced sweetness and a beautiful orange-zest garnish. However, if you follow the lead of my friend Morgan, who asked for this mocktail to be made with vodka, this turns into a high class version of jungle juice and is dangerously drinkable. "This tastes like straight juice," she said, "which is how I like my alcohol."

My husband, Rob, started with the Morning Dew, a nonalcoholic option made with homemade honeydew and bay leaf marmalade. Although entirely green in color, its presentation reminded me of a

Bird of Paradise flower, with fresh bay leaves as its crest and a slice of honeydew for its beak. It was refreshing with a distinct taste of melon, like a honeydew-infused lemonade. I decided to rock the tropical boat with the Fumo Bianco, described by Christian as a “White Negroni,” with a white peppercorn infused vermouth and “roasted red pepper washed mezcal.” I wasn’t sure what the latter meant until I saw the garnish – a dehydrated roasted red pepper that had been sliced into a thin sheet. The red pepper had first been soaked in mezcal, the same red peppers that had infused the alcohol, so that the drink – albeit smoky – also had a hint of sweetness. As one who likes both negronis and mezcal, I was delightfully impressed.

We debated ordering a second round – it was hard to leave the warm and intimate atmosphere, so we stayed for another. Rob opted for the Pear Bellini this time, a flamingo-red mixture of prickly pear cordial and nonalcoholic prosecco, served in a tulip-shaped flute glass with a dehydrated pear garnish. Elegant and bright, this was certainly fruitier and sweeter than the first.

Again, I went the hard opposite and ordered the Sea Gibson. “You know this is basically a gin martini?” Christian asked, perhaps as a warning because I’d ordered two very boozy drinks in a row. “Sure!” I said, having not known that, but choosing to go with it anyway. I found this drink incredibly intriguing. Described on the menu as “salty and vegetal,” it was, indeed, both. I like my martinis dirty, and that’s what this was—except instead of olive brine, they used a sea asparagus concentrate. If the state of Rhode Island had a martini, I think it would be this one. The sea asparagus garnish was a delicious bonus.

By the time we checked our watches, the evening had caught up to us and we couldn’t stay for tapas, but they had a little something for everyone – from charcuterie and cheese to house-cut fries with harissa mayo. There’s always next time.

As soon as I’m back in the little big city of Providence for another clandestine meeting, I will be sure to call on Clementine’s.

Clementine Cocktail Bar
200 Washington St, PVD
@clementinecocktailbar
clementinecocktailbar.com