

Sin City Sisters

Christina and Pamela Dylag of Velvetreen Rabbit help rejuvenate downtown Las Vegas

Though the Las Vegas cocktail and beer bar Velvetreen Rabbit takes its name from the popular children's book, the concept actually originated with Japanese author Haruki Murakami. "I read that he opened a jazz club, and being a writer, I found it inspiring to work for myself and write on the side," says Christina Dylag, who launched the venue with her older sister, Pamela, this past May.

For two years, the pair lived with their parents while saving money, experimenting with cocktail recipes and learning everything they could about the bar business. Christina had hospitality industry experience, but Pamela quit her job as a paralegal to sling drinks at Downtown Cocktail Bar. Eventually they secured a nearby space and unveiled Velvetreen Rabbit in Las Vegas' burgeoning arts district. "We got a lot of support from the city and the locals because there aren't many craft cocktail and beer bars off the Strip," Pamela says.

The venue focuses on handcrafted cocktails and boutique brews. The Dylag sisters offer a well-rounded beer list that includes a sessionable lager, a hefeweizen, a pale ale, an IPA and a darker beer, along with more offbeat labels like the Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier Märzen from Germany. Prices range from \$3 to \$9 a 12-ounce or 16-ounce draft pour and from \$6 to \$8 a 12-ounce bottle, with a few 750-ml. bottles priced at \$18.



Pamela (left) and Christina Dylag opened the craft beer-focused cocktail lounge Velvetreen Rabbit in Las Vegas' arts district in May 2013.

Meanwhile, cocktails (\$8) comprise 60 percent to 70 percent of sales at Velvetreen Rabbit, and the menu rotates seasonally. Pamela and Christina collaborate with their three bartenders to develop a drinks list that appeals to both cocktail connoisseurs and adventurous amateurs. Christina's Spaceship falls into the former category and features Old Overholt rye whiskey, Amaro CioCiaro, Fidencio Clásico mezcal, simple syrup and Angostura orange bitters, topped with a Citra hop foam. Pamela's Autumnal Ritual is slightly more approachable, comprising Dos Manos Blanco Tequila, Amaro Montenegro, lemon juice, pumpkin

spice syrup, egg white and Amargo Chunchu bitters, garnished with a flamed rosemary sprig. "I wanted to make something seasonal and serve it in a teacup," she explains.

Velvetreen Rabbit hosts DJs and bands a few nights a week. On Thursdays, the bar features free live music and a \$6 punch special, such as the recent Beetches Be Crazy, made with sage-infused Beefeater gin, beet and lemon juices, ginger syrup and soda.

Since opening Velvetreen Rabbit, Christina and Pamela have gotten great responses from customers and other bartenders. "I've grown to understand that people appreciate quality and the time that's put into something they enjoy," Christina says.



Amber Drea

Pamela And Christina Dylag's Recipes



Autumnal Ritual

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Dos Manos Blanco Tequila;
- ½ ounce Amaro Montenegro;
- ¾ ounce lemon juice;
- ¾ ounce pumpkin spice syrup¹;
- ½ ounce egg white;
- 2 dashes Amargo Chunchu bitters;
- Rosemary sprig.

RECIPE:

Shake Tequila, amaro, lemon juice, pumpkin spice syrup, egg white and bitters with ice and strain into a teacup. Garnish with a flamed rosemary sprig.

¹Bring 1 cup water to boil, stir in 1 cup turbinado sugar and simmer until dissolved. Add ½ cup organic pumpkin purée, ¼ cup maple syrup, and nutmeg, cinnamon and clove to taste. Simmer for up to 30 minutes, then double strain and cool.



Spaceship

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Old Overholt rye whiskey;
- ¾ ounce Amaro CioCiaro;
- ½ ounce Fidencio Clásico mezcal;
- ¼ ounce simple syrup;
- 1 dash Angostura Orange bitters;
- Citra hop foam²;
- Orange peel.

RECIPE:

Stir whiskey, amaro, mezcal, simple syrup and bitters with ice and strain into a cocktail glass. Top with Citra hop foam and garnish with an orange peel.

²Boil equal parts water and sugar with dried Citra hops for 20 minutes, then strain and cool. Combine 1 part Citra hop syrup, 1 part lemon juice and 2 parts egg white in a whip cream canister and charge with carbon dioxide.

PHOTOS BY JEFF GREEN