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Whether Tart or Sweet, Ways to Drink to Romance

By VALERIE PETERSON

AS a prelude to a formal dinner or as the centerpiece of a casual Valentine's Day date, a well-executed cocktail made of sensuous ingredients, symbolically fecund fruits or a fabled aphrodisiac can bring a bit of romantic lore to the table. Several area restaurants offer one or more of these myth-infused concoctions, with an atmosphere to match.

Basil was a key to potency in ancient love spells. It's also essential to the Grand Strawberry, one of the inventive elixirs available at 42 at the Ritz-Carlton in White Plains, where it can be enjoyed in the dining area, in the throbbing bar or in the more sedate lounge. If you can tear your eyes away from the vast, panoramic vistas, you'll notice those green flecks in your drink, which add herbaceous interest to a luscious, house-made purée of strawberry spiked with [vodka](#) and Grand Marnier liqueur.

The martini glass is dressed with a tang of balsamic vinegar reduction, which, along with fresh lime juice, complements the fruit and balances the sweetness. Balanced, too, is the 42 version of a Champagne cocktail (\$15), in which that most romantic of wines maintains its signature dryness with a restrained addition of white peach purée and the delicately fragrant St. Germain, a liqueur made from elderflowers.

The iconic Valentine's Day flower is the centerpiece of 42's gorgeous Coming Up Roses. In it, red petals are muddled with rose syrup, fresh lime juice and raspberry vodka, and topped with Jacquart Brut rosé, a pink Champagne. At \$15, the rose-fragranced, petal-swirled nectar looks and tastes almost as decadent as paying the Valentine's Day mark-up for a dozen long-stems.

42 at the Ritz Carlton, 1 Renaissance Square, White Plains, (914) 761-4242; 42therestaurant.com.

For a dose of passion — in the form of passion fruit — try one of the adapted drinks at the sleek, blond, Japanese restaurant Koo in Rye. The exotic juice distinguishes a margarita with a sweet counterpoint to its typical lime tartness, and heightens the tropical punch of the Mai Tai, made potent with both dark and light rums.

Koo, 17 Purdy Avenue, Rye, (914) 921-9888; koorestaurant.com.

If a hint of the wild is what you're going for, the Cuba-inspired décor and Latin rhythms at Belle Havana in Yonkers generate a sophisticated, sultry heat. It's easy to get distracted by the Tres Puercos flatbreads, topped with bacon, roasted Berkshire pork chunks and Spanish sausage. But put your lips to the sugary, Valentine-red rim of Stella's Mambo King — sparkling Champagne, raspberry vodka and Chambord raspberry liqueur — and you'll soon have your groove back.

Belle Havana, 35 Main Street, Yonkers, (914) 969-1006; bellehavana.com.

For more sedate seduction, the precise potions at the Farmhouse at Bedford Post will elevate your chemical romance. The Honey and Heather (\$15) evokes an age when honey was given to newlyweds to increase fertility (the word "honeymoon" derives from the practice). Bärenjäger honey liqueur is perfectly blended with Johnny Walker Black, lightened with a dry riesling wine and brightened with a hint of lemon; the result is a tonic that's velvety on the tongue and irresistible to the tastebuds.

If your date suddenly seems irresistible, you might be giving credit to the Farmhouse's amber-lighted ambience or the cozy fireplace — but it could be the Poached [Pear](#) (\$12) that's causing that rosy glow. Dry English gin and [pear](#) nectar are partnered with Ricard Pastis de Marseille, the anise-flavored aperitif, for a quaff that's redolent of licorice — a scent that some think has aphrodisiac qualities, especially for women.

The pomegranate also seems to hold special attraction for women. In Greek mythology, Hades used the prodigiously seeded symbol of fertility to trick Persephone into being his consort, and some even theorize that it was this temptation, not the apple, that seduced Eve. It's not surprising, then, that the Post Sparkler (\$14) should be so alluring. The pretty, tart, fruit-covered pips are muddled and combined with Eric Bordelet sparkling, hard apple cider, and the drink is made brilliantly complex with the dark undertones of Madeira wine.

The Farmhouse at Bedford Post, 954 Old Post Road, Bedford, (914) 234-7800;
thebedfordpostinn.com.

At the Half Moon in Dobbs Ferry, the cheerful and accommodating bartender shakes up a bright Pamapolitan (\$11), a combination of pomegranate-flavored Pama liqueur, Ketel One Citron, lime juice and simple syrup. Served icy cold and garnished with a sliver of lemon peel, it gives off a [Sex and the City](#) vibe. Guys might prefer to fortify their nerves with a cold shot of vodka accompanied by raw oysters, which are rich in zinc (one of the minerals required for the production of testosterone).

But if the evening calls for something a bit more lighthearted, sink into one of the couches by the striking, copper-chimneyed fireplace and ask for a South Beach Sangria (\$10), which tastes like a fizzy flirtation for the mouth. It's muddled à la minute with fresh lemon, lime, oranges and

strawberries, and splashes of brandy, peach schnapps, rum and simple syrup, then topped with Champagne, a method that highlights the individual, distinct flavors more than in a traditional, macerated-fruit sangria. If a time-honored Champagne indulgence is what you prefer, the Kir Royale (\$10) combines sparkling wine with crème de cassis, the French black-currant liqueur.

And what's more time-honored at Valentine's Day than [chocolate](#)? The Aztecs believed that their version of hot chocolate increased a man's stamina and made women less inhibited, and there's some scientific evidence of the treat's mood-enhancing properties. Test the theory with the Half Moon's Chocolate Martini (\$10), made with dark crème de cacao, Bailey's Irish Cream liqueur and Stolichnitski Vanil vodka (vanilla, too, was thought to be an erotic stimulant — Madame de Pompadour, mistress to King Louis XV, consumed it for that reason). Served up in a glass that's marbled with house-made chocolate syrup, the “dessertini” is garnished with a chocolate cigarette, a sweet conclusion to a romantic rendezvous.

Half Moon, 1 High Street, Dobbs Ferry, (914) 693-4130; harvest2000.com.

Valerie Peterson is the author of “Peterson's Holiday Helper,” a book of cocktail recipes and holiday humor (Clarkson Potter, 2008).

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