

LIVING

SoHo's Roman and Williams Store Now Has an Intimate Speakeasy Bar

BY DEVORAH LEV-TOV

November 20, 2023



Photo: Gentl & Hyers

Last week, design team Roman and Williams debuted yet another super-special immersive experience in their New York City store, Roman and Williams Guild. After unveiling La Mercerie in 2018, the popular French restaurant where you can purchase the dishware after dining on it, the just-opened Guild Bar offers a craft cocktail and Champagne experience where drinks are poured into some of the most spectacular and rare glassware you can drink out of—and then purchase.

When Roman and Williams founders Stephen Alesch and Robin Standefer



opened the Soho store and restaurant in 2018, the idea was always to give people a way to be able to test out the serveware before buying. “What we discovered over the past five years is that people like to eat and shop and drink and shop in the store, and the concept for the restaurant was always that the dishware you ate off you could bring home,” says Standefer. “It was something that was fun, but it’s also connected to the Guild being like a home. And that was always sort of a fundamental guiding principle of the whole place.”

ELEVATE THE SEASON WITH YOGUE

The miniscule bar—it has just five seats and a narrow marble counter—is tucked into a secluded alcove where the back of the restaurant meets the front of the store. While the bar, furnishings, and lighting are striking, the real centerpiece is the moody, hand-painted mural of a moonlit landscape by artist Dean Barger that wraps around the entire back wall. It foments a seductive and slightly spooky atmosphere—no small feat when technically you’re perched inside a retail outlet.



The other stunning showpiece at the bar is the collection of glassware, which Alesch and Standefer spent years researching while stocking their store. Through the years, staff had received requests from customers to try out the expensive glassware in the same way they can the dishes at La Mercerie, but at the restaurant, it was too difficult to serve drinks in fragile, hand-wash-only glasses that could possibly break in a busy restaurant setting.

“The biggest idea was for people to be able to experience this artisanal glassware and to also try the drinks from the glassware, which is sort of part of the fetish of a bar anyway,” says Standefer, who adds that the way you hold a glass when you drink out of it is different than the way you would hold it to look at in a store. “And to learn about who the artists are and what and how they make something.”



Photo: Gentil & Hyers



Photo: Gentil & Hyers

As opposed to most bars that might use glassware inspired by the drink (if they even think about the glassware at all), Standefer and Alesch presented their favorite glasses—from heritage brands to young, up-and-coming artists—to La Mercerie’s director Aaron Thorp, who then devised a cocktail menu inspired by the glassware. The result is a tight menu of inventive drinks with surprising combinations, all served in some of the most incredible works of art you’ve ever seen.

There is also a selection of wines and rare Champagnes. If you order some wine, you’ll get to choose your glass or flute from several unique options. Even the liquor on display is carefully chosen based on looks, like hard-to-find bottles that Thorp has collected, including a vintage Voiron Chartreuse from the 1960s.

As for the mixed drinks, each of the eight cocktails is served in a different handmade glass, with the menu displaying a paragraph about the glass artisan alongside each drink description.

The impossibly thin coupe glass made by J. & L. Lobmeyr, a six-generation

family-owned glassmaker in Vienna, is the receptacle for the Guild Bar Martini, made with three gins and two vermouths. It's served with a generous helping of olives piled inside the gorgeous Lobmeyr Candy Dish III, with a curvaceous silver pick by Georg Jensen alongside. That's right: you can pile in as many olives in your martini as you like.



If you order the Phosphorescence, you'll be presented with a tall goblet with a bubbly green stem that brings to mind Murano glass, but is actually made by a Korean artist named Hyunsung Cho, who is represented by Guild Gallery. "Cho is a young guy from Seoul who looked at a Veronese painting from the 14th century, and said, 'That is just the most beautiful object.' He never went to Murano, and in Korea, he started to experiment with making sort-of Murano-style glass objects. What a strange, meta story!" recounts Standefer.



Photo: Gentil & Hyers

Inside the one-of-a-kind glass is a bright red drink made from fino and amontillado sherry, vermouth, and Campari that has been infused with Szechuan peppercorns. Here, presentation is as important as taste (but worry not: the taste is delicious). "The process was to think about what would look best in the glass," says Thorp. "We tried brown spirits that didn't work, we tried others that were just fine, but the color of the Campari really sings [against the green stem]."

The evocatively named Persistence of Memory is served in a sculptural and angular highball glass with a smaller matching shot glass alongside, both by Japanese glassblower Keiko Lee. The drink, which includes mezcal, lime, shiso, and soda, is "like a marriage of a Japanese highball and ranch water, but we wanted to elevate it," says Thorp. "So instead of using a more common mezcal we use one of the best rare mezcals you could ever taste," which is also served

straight up in the smaller glass on the side.



Photo: Gentl & Hyers



Photo: Gentl & Hyers

“We want to let the glass drive the spirit, drive the idea,” says Standefer. “And then, it’s all about how you touch it, and use it, and the ritual and action of it.”