

Timber & Salt

At Timber & Salt (881 Middlefield Road) a cocktail is not just a drink, it is a moment in time. This is exactly what self-described cocktail nerds and Timber & Salt owners Brian Matulis and Stewart Putney had in mind when they set out to create the cocktail-forward, comfort food restaurant. Where a casual consumer might simply see a mixed drink, Matulis and Putney saw much more than liqueurs and alcohol. They peered into the soul of cocktails and saw so much more.

"There is such history behind the cocktail," said Putney, a veteran of the startup world turned private farmer and food writer. "And there is a beauty too. The bottles, the glassware, even the sounds when a drink is being made are beautiful."

How beautiful? Consider an apothecary-like wall, lined with bottles of every color, curve and size, catching the light of happy hour's fading sun. Tiny boulders of ice, just chiseled off the block, clink, clink into the shaker. An arc of gin follows, then a splash of curacao. With a flick of the wrist, the bitters are in. A couple of hard shakes, nonchalant yet precise, and a smooth rivulet of liquor swan dives into a delicately stemmed glass. Here's your Moonrise Kingdom.

The pair's choice of Redwood City as the home for Timber & Salt was rooted in a similar esthetic appreciation.

"This town and community has a great vibe, and we both liked that it has a rich history," explained Matulis, a botanist by training and mixologist by passion.

The name itself is homage to Redwood City's history: "Timber" represents the redwood mills that put the city on the map and "Salt" references the salt production that has been a feature of the bay shoreline



Brian Matulis and Stewart Putney

for a century. Murals depicting both industries painted by one of the servers decorate the restaurant's walls.

While the duo is excited about cocktails and history, attention to food is not left to chance. Matulis and Putney entrusted the culinary menu to Chef Dylan Harper.

Focusing on comfort food, hearty dishes like fried chicken, or steak and frites, grace the Timber & Salt table.

"We are cocktail focused, but we want the drinks to accentuate the food, and vice versa," explained Matulis. Consequently, small plates are a staple. This is where duck confit tacos meet Pullman Toast, a thick slab of bread with truffle burrata, roasted forest mushrooms and a poached egg.

To seal the deal of artisanal fanfare, Harper has dared to bring back the culturally dubious fondue. Adding a rustic modern twist, Harper makes his fondue with beer and cheese, serving it with apple slices and warm chunks of crusty bread.

Food and cocktail are serious craft at Timber & Salt. As Matulis creates the cocktail menu he focuses on details as specific as how many drinks are to be shaken, how many stirred. Even the proof of alcohol is considered: The owners hold that the key is to use full strength alcohols so that drinks won't be diluted by the bevy of bitters and tinctures, many of which are made in-house using herbs and produce from Putney's farm.

Despite this dedication to serious craft, there is a buoyancy in the sea of plaid-clad servers and dark corners of refurbished wood. Matulis created drinks inspired by Wes Anderson films to add a bit of playfulness.

"It all started with the Zissou, named for Bill Murray's character in *Life Aquatic*," he said. "In the film he plays this washed-up Jacques Cousteau-like character. Not only do I envision him drinking this vermouth cocktail on the deck of his ship, but Zissou was based in Port au Prince, Haiti and the cocktail uses Haitian rum."

As for the spring menu, the naming theme is still to be determined. "Maybe I will do music, something to go with the lightness of the season" he mused.

Opened in September of 2015, Timber & Salt is seven months into its year of "firsts." But in the end, the partners are taking it one day, one season at time.

Matulis summed it up simply: "We're excited to be here in Redwood City. We've got a big first year ahead of us, but it's going to be fun." **C**

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