

Teaquation: Tea Cocktails

Mercedes Mapua, owner of Teaquation, located at 1036 El Camino Real, is on a mission to change the way people drink. Creator of the “tea cocktail,” Mapua uses the principles of mixology to shake and stir freshly pureed fruit juices with iced teas. The result is a rainbow of flavorful drinks that are fresh and clean, something Mapua hopes will help people break up with Boba.

“I used to drink a ton of Boba (milky tea with tapioca pearls, also known as Bubble Tea), but then I realized that I didn’t know what was in Boba, outside of a lot of sugar and calories. And I always ordered the same thing. I was bored.”

As she spoke, a flight of her tea cocktails arrived. Drinks with names like King-slayer, Man of Steel, and Fifty Shades of Pink created a chorus line of color and intrigue on the table. The creations, sometimes two or three fruity colors layered in one glass, were as decorated as they were vibrantly hued. Each rim was adorned with a slice of fruit, an herb sprig, or a cinnamon stick. Some, like the Orange and Black, were also topped with a decadent, house-made coconut whip. It is hard to imagine ever being bored at Teaquation.

“The key is that here, you know what goes into your drink,” said Mapua. “We use green tea and make all of our fruit purees in-house, except for our blackberry and mango. Then, we sweeten our drinks with just a bit of honey or cane sugar. That’s it.”

Tea, fruit and a touch of sweetness may be the building blocks, but for Mapua, Teaquation is also about the science behind each drink. “I have a great respect for the principles of mixology. I like to play on



Mercedes Mapua

them to balance sweet, sour, and bitter. It heightens the flavors.” Before she could play with the principles though, she had to learn them. To do that, Mapua took lessons from Redwood City mixologist and LV Mar bartender, Eusebio Pozos. These lessons helped solidify her love for mixology equations, leading to the shop’s name: “tea” plus “equation” equals “Teaquation”.

Mapua’s mixology training is also the secret behind multi-layered drinks like the cake-inspired Lucky Break. Three distinct layers - green from matcha tea, white from creamy white chocolate, and yellow from mango puree - all miraculously float, one on top of the other. The crisp lines are disturbed only by the assault of a straw and vigorous stir.

But Teaquation is not just about the principles of mixology; there is a creative element, too. When preparing the inaugural menu for January’s opening, Mapua started by dividing the drinks into two categories: “Signature” and “New Old Fashioned”.

The New Old Fashioned drinks are rich, creamy, and pay homage to the flavors and milky teas of Mapua’s childhood in the Philippines. One is the Mango Mousse, made of mango and organic milk; it is a decadent celebration of the tropical fruit.

The coconut whip-topped Gold Digger is another tropical inspiration. A bright, goldenrod yellow, it is made of pineapple and calamansi, a key lime-like fruit native to the Pacific Islands. The flavors are bold and transportive, as if each drink should be served with a passport stamp.

For the Signature side of the menu, Mapua was inspired by her favorite cocktails and own experimentation. Some of that

experimentation is with the green teas that Mapua uses as a base for the drinks.

Take for example, Butterfly Pea Tea. A green tea by definition, but in color, it is bright blue. When mixed with citrus, Butterfly Pea turns into a deep, elegant purple. Mapua capitalized on this reaction when creating The Joker, which is half purple and half yellow. Muddled with basil and accented with a sprig, the bright, garden fresh flavor is a stark contrast to the drink’s bold look. “I was just playing around, feeling inspired by the Basil Gimlet cocktail, and now it’s one of our most popular drinks,” Mapua explained.

Having left a career in the tech industry to open Teaquation, Mapua’s mission to change the way people drink is not without risk. She is taking a stance against sugary mystery drinks and offering an alternative, no small feat considering the cult following that Boba enjoys. But Mapua is not backing down from the challenge. “Our drinks, they’re fun they’re good for the soul,” she said with a smile. Looking around her shop with nary an empty seat in sight, it seems that Mapua just might be on to something. **C**