



by Marci Symington

Recreating a 19th-century New Orleans street scene indoors, Grey Hen Rx serves the city's classic cocktails.



Shaking Up the Cocktail Hour

PHOTOS: GRACE STUFKOSKY

In March, Rich Furnari and Jason Asher of Phoenix-based Barter & Shake Creative Hospitality reopened Century Grand after a six-month closure. Like many in the industry, they were faced with making major modifications to their business model during the pandemic: The result was to move their award-winning tiki-inspired bar, UnderTow, into the building where Platform 18 and Grey Hen Rx already resided—thereby uniting three cocktail programs under one roof.

Reservations are highly recommended for the unique 90-minute guest experiences offered at each of the three concepts. Furnari and Asher worked with local artists, audiovisual

BARTER & SHAKE CREATIVE HOSPITALITY UNITES ITS TRANSPORTIVE BAR CONCEPTS UNDER ONE ROOF

as possible . . . when you go on a ride and feel fully immersed.”

The vision for Platform 18 involves the creation of the transcontinental railroad. Its decor imagines the private train car of one Hollis Cottley Pennington, a fictional railroad tycoon and bootlegger: The “windows” are TV screens projecting videos that make guests feel as though they’re traveling through the Rockies in the wintertime, while the bartenders, dressed as conductors, pour welcome glasses of Champagne. The chapters of the

cocktail book, titled *The Man Behind the Curtain*, contain the story of Pennington, along with over 45 Prohibition-themed drinks that tie into the storyline with names like Wake the Conductor, Pennington Peaks, and Linen Closet.

Grey Hen Rx draws inspiration from 19th-century New Orleans, the bustling port town that was then a hub of apothecaries and coffee shops, the precursors to the cocktail bar; it was also home to the Sazerac, often referred to as America’s first cocktail. Guests can be seated in the pharmacy-like barroom or the adjoining courtyard, designed to look like a patio set beneath oak trees dripping with Spanish moss. Asher, an award-winning mixologist, developed the menu to showcase high-quality bourbons and other whiskeys in drinks such as the Vieux Carré and the Golden Apple as well as his experiments with nonalcoholic spirits, sorbets, and ice creams.

UnderTow is a nautical-themed bar whose name is a play on words, referencing both the undertow of the ocean and the original location in the oil-changing bay of a former auto garage. The new space retains the charm of the original with a menu relating the tale of Captain John Mallory, a time-traveling spice trader. There are 52 seats in an interior designed to resemble the belly of a clipper ship, with “portholes” screening film footage of rainstorms and pirate battles on the high seas. Exotic and tropical drinks are the specialty here, with classics like the Mai Tai and Planter’s Punch supplementing original creations featuring rare rums, such as the Song of Sycorax with St. George California Agricole.

Seeing the demand for cocktail experiences in the broader Phoenix area, Furnari and Asher have signed a lease to open a second UnderTow location at retail and dining destination Epicenter at Agritopia in Gilbert. Their imagination is limitless, and I, for one, am excited to see what they come up with next. **LD**



Prohibition-themed drinks evoke the heyday of train travel at Platform 18.

companies, and contractors such as architect Wesley James of design firm LINE LAB to create settings that transport guests to another place and time, while Furnari collaborated with industry friends (including Fox Restaurant Concepts beverage director Mat Snapp) to compose fictional narratives loosely based in history to weave through the cocktail menus. Explains Barter & Shake director of marketing and PR Kailee Asher, “They wanted [the experience] to be as close to Disneyland



UnderTow’s interior is designed to resemble the belly of a clipper ship.