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Heavy Metal Meets Kebabs, Blue Margaritas and Cristal at Wellington's New Red-Tinted Dive Bar, Humdinger



Photo: Jacob Pietras

It's all about highbrow-lowbrow at the new venue from the team behind some of the capital's most well-known venues including Puffin, Golding's Free Dive and Shepherd Restaurant. Slide into a booth, order a Rob Zombie cocktail or some champagne and dip into some Spam nuggets with spicy pineapple salsa.

Words by SASHA BORISSENKO · Updated on 22 Nov 2022 · Published on 14 Nov 2022



It could be the Mötley Crüe bellowing through a jukebox, unabashedly gaudy cocktails like pina coladas, the red-drenched lighting or tables topped with bowls of Spam nuggets, but Wellington's new bar Humdinger is a fun thwack to the senses.

It's from a trio of the capital's hospitality heavyweights, all of whom run existing venues (some together, some separately): Sean Golding (Golding's Free Dive, Shepherd Restaurant, Concord, The Intrepid Hotel), Shepherd Elliot (Leeds Street Bakery, Shepherd Restaurant, Concord) and Hannah Wells (Puffin).

The ethos behind Humdinger is simple, Golding tells *Broadsheet*. "I love heavy metal and I love bars. We wanted a place that we were into, so we built this place for ourselves."

The venue is on the corner of Ghuznee Street and Victoria Street, with some of Wellington's best independent stores, cafes and bars only metres away, including Service Depot, Kaukau, Sully's, Caughley, coffee spot Customs and wine bar Ascot.

Having secured the lease, Golding (a former set designer) redid the fit-out himself, stripping away the previous venue's orange walls to create dark wooden wall panelling and booths. Seating 60 inside and 16 outside, the space is now smothered in dark red – red lighting, red floors and red seats.

The bar stools, chandelier, and billiard lamp shades were sourced from Trade Me and, adding to the Americana and heavy metal vibe, there are lightning bolt cut-outs along the bar and skulls plastered on most surfaces.

Co-founder Wells says that her other venue, wine bar Puffin, aims to take away the gatekeeping nature of wine by making it fun and accessible, and they wanted to do the same with cocktails at Humdinger.

"'Top 100' bars tend to be very polished and feel almost inaccessible; mixology almost seems like a magic trick," adds Golding. "What they do is incredible, but it becomes quite difficult for people to enjoy a Manhattan or Martini without knowing how or what they're asking for."

There are more than 15 cocktails on the menu, which all have their own personality but stay true to their roots. The Margarita Thatcher has tequila, triple sec and lime juice, just like the classic – but the addition of blue curacao makes it bright blue. It's bordering on tacky, she says, but also looks incredible in the glass.

“We liked the juxtaposition of having cocktails that are precise and pretty, and heavy metal that’s grungy, dirty and loud,” says Wells. “They’re similar, as there’s the extremities of the music and the extremities of the flavours. It’s such a mash-up of stuff but the best way is if people come in and experience it. It weirdly works.”

There’s a Rob Zombie with dark and white rum, lime and pineapple juice and grenadine – and classics such as a Sidecar, a Caipirinha and Negroni.

Food-wise, there’s a restaurant within the venue called Turnspit which does kebabs filled with lamb, chicken or onion falafel fritters; Leed Street Bakery flatbreads with toppings such as feta, hot honey, pine nut and mint, and cheeky sides including the aforementioned Spam nuggets with spicy pineapple salsa.

Given the team’s culinary expertise from their other restaurants, it’s about being irreverent but still exceptional, says Golding. “You can’t hide behind a gimmick or a theme.”

And, if you’re in the mood, you can order a bottle of Cristal to go with your kebab.

“Again, it’s that mix of highbrow-lowbrow and stripping stuff back to make mind-blowing food with fresh ingredients,” says Golding. “Plus, everyone loves kebabs, right?!”

Humdinger

89 Ghuznee Street, Te Aro, Wellington

Hours

Tue to Sun 12pm–1am

uptheghuzz.co.nz

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