

FOOD/DRINK/MORE

COMPLIMENTARY

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BAR



ALEX BLACK AND RHETT WILLIAMS NIGHTINGALE

Behind its impressive brick façade, there is genuine chemistry percolating in Chef David Hawksworth's new restaurant, Nightingale.

It's not just the allure of a spectacularly refurbished heritage building, with its sweeping vaulted ceilings, blond wood and myriad birdcages, but also the people working within its walls.

Two of those are head bartenders, Alex (pronounced Alec) Black and Rhett Williams. Their domain is anchored to the restaurant's east wall; it is a monumental bar, bringing to mind a magician's apothecary. Your mouth will water as your eyes roam across its unusual and conventional vessels filled with endless shades of liquids.

The duo themselves are also somewhat unconventional – you would never suspect they had not worked together prior to the opening of Nightingale. Perhaps, due to some of their shared interests – both were drummers, both write about cocktails, and both are admittedly pragmatic and analytical.

Winnipeg-born Black has been involved in hospitality for 15 years. Most recently, he worked behind the wood for the

Williams' science background and Black's lengthy bar experience create a dynamic partnership.

Donnelly Group and Glowbar Group, as well as at Boulevard and the Vancouver Club. However, it was his time working with Cooper Tardivel, head bartender at Hawksworth, which cemented his position at its new sister restaurant Nightingale.

Williams, a rare breed of born-and-raised Vancouverite, came into bartending via a slightly more circuitous route. He studied chemistry at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, and, among other things, worked in music and film. His fascination with cocktails and their history led him to start a blog called And One More For The Road. His enthusiasm and knowledge got him a job at Gastown's Pourhouse and at Main Street's The Shameful Tiki Room.

His landing at Nightingale was, again, thanks to Tardivel. Williams describes a serendipitous situation where, while sitting at the bar at Hawksworth, he fell into a conversation with the head bartender that led to this incredible new opportunity.

Unbelievably, Black and Williams met for the first time at their initial staff meeting, months before Nightingale's official opening, in May 2016. "I was surprised at how well we jelled," Black says. "We're both very opinionated," Williams finishes the sentence, laughing.

They have, in fact, formed what you could call a chemical bond. Williams' science background and Black's lengthy bar experience create a dynamic partnership. There is no ego between them; they truly are two guys having fun.

Nightingale's cocktail menu is tight, with less than a dozen options. Speed is of utmost importance for the entire team behind the bar, as is trying to keep each drink's ingredients to a minimum. The list is meant to complement the chef's menu – fewer ingredients, but high quality. Additionally, they are attempting to build lower-alcohol drinks, meant to stimulate the appetite and be enjoyed with your meal.

The food menu is quite broad, with oodles of choices, so they wanted to keep the cocktails focused, to avoid overwhelming guests.

Perhaps the best way to get the duo excited is to ask about their on-tap concoction, called the Market Cocktail. It is a sort



WORD OF MOUTH

1½ oz (45 ml) Absolut Vodka
½ oz (15 ml) Averna
½ oz (15 ml) Honey Syrup*
¼ oz (7 ml) lime juice
3 dashes apple cider vinegar

Stir ingredients with ice in a shaker glass. Shake and strain over ice in a rocks glass.

* Combine equal parts honey and water on the stove and warm at low heat while stirring until the honey dissolves. Can be refrigerated for several days.

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of tonic-flavoured gin, infused with assorted botanicals, coffee and carbon dioxide for bubbles.

"I think it's delicious. Really unique, great value, and I haven't heard of anyone in the city doing something this complex, so it's pretty exciting," Williams enthuses.

To contain and deliver the mixture, the bar had to be set up with a special high-pressure cooling dispensary unit. The two reminisce about practice blending sessions in Black's kitchen prior to opening.

Admittedly, the list has evolved from the onset; tweaks are to be expected, but the two have been handed a carte blanche. "The program we have now is very different from the one we'll have a year from now," Black stresses. "We've been given a lot of rope to play, or hang ourselves, with. Even if we disagree, it all comes down to the guests. What is the benefit for the guests?"

Their mandate of simplicity also means they aren't trying to reinvent the wheel – they both agree, anything you come up with can be boiled back to the classics. Every element added to a cocktail has the ability to make or break it. "They [bartenders] think they are trying to tame a wild beast – sometimes you just have to say no," Williams says.

There are elements of both men on their list. Black's fondness for artisanal mescal, what he calls, "the most terroir-specific spirit there is available," shows itself, as does Williams' affection for modifiers, such as the incomparable Chartreuse.

Together, Alex Black and Rhett Williams bring a singular energy and intellect to the wood at Nightingale – the possibilities of what they will conjure up are worth keeping tabs on.

Nightingale
1017 West Hastings Street
Vancouver



LOS SIETE MISTERIOS DOBA-YEJ MEZCAL
Mexico \$54.99/518836
This mescal offers citrus, agave and smoky aromas along with a slight herbaceousness. Herbal and floral notes prevail on the full, creamy palate, leaving a subtly sweet finish.



THE WICKER MAN

1½ oz (45 ml) Los Siete Misterios Doba-Yej Mezcal
¼ oz (22 ml) Amaro Montenegro
½ oz (15 ml) Okanagan Spirits Poiré Williams
¼ oz (7 ml) Grand Marnier
1 dash cardamom bitters
1-in (2.5 cm) piece flamed orange peel*

Stir ingredients, except for orange peel, in a shaker glass with ice. Shake and strain into coupe glass. Flame an orange peel for garnish.

* To flame peel, using a small flame, heat the skin of the peel for a few seconds. Then squeeze the oil into the drink.

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AMARO MONTENEGRO
Italy \$36.49/40404
Made using more than 40 herbs, citrus and spices, this amber spirit offers aromas of orange peel, coriander and vanilla that lead to a bittersweet, botanical palate.



ABSOLUT VODKA
Sweden \$23.99/10056
Made using winter wheat and water from the Swedish town of Åhus, this popular vodka is clean, full-bodied and smooth, with hints of grain, dried fruit and black pepper spice.



AVERNA AMARO SICILIANO
Italy \$18.99/556572
This popular Italian liqueur is still produced from the original 1868 recipe. Intense herbs, citrus, orange rind and spice notes walk the fine line between bitter and sweet.



OKANAGAN SPIRITS RASPBERRY
Canada \$21.99/79627/35 ml
Made from 100 percent BC raspberries, this liqueur is brimming with sweet, ripe raspberry flavours. With balanced acidity and a long, aromatic finish, it will add serious flair to any cocktail.



EL DORADO 15 YEAR OLD SPECIAL RESERVE
Guyana \$55.99/329797
A fantastic cognac-like rum, offering caramel, candied orange and dark chocolate aromas to go with a rounded, full-bodied palate loaded with grilled pineapple and oakley flavours.



ST. SPIRITO

1 oz (30 ml) El Dorado 15 Year Guyana Demerara Rum
1 oz (30 ml) Averna Amaro
½ oz (15 ml) Okanagan Spirits Framboise (Raspberry Liqueur)
¼ oz (22 ml) lime juice
¼ oz (7 ml) simple syrup
2 dashes Angostura Bitters
1-in (2.5 cm) piece orange peel

Stir ingredients, except for orange peel, in a shaker glass with ice. Shake and strain into a cocktail coupe glass filled with ice. Twist orange peel over the top of the drink to express the oils.

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Prices do not include taxes

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hawksworth communications

NIGHTINGALE
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