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Have a Cup of Cheer at Rustic Tavern

By A.K. Carroll



Photo A.K. Carroll

Burl Ives sang it best: "Have a holly jolly Christmas, it's the best time of the year. I don't know if there'll be snow, but have a cup of cheer." Here in Lamorinda, chances for a snow are scarce, but opportunities for cheer abound in bistros, bars and restaurants. This week make a slight diversion from the hunt for happy hour in order to sip on some seasonal cocktails and share a cozy moment in Lafayette's Rustic Tavern.

The holiday season - that festive sweet spot between Thanksgiving and New Year's - brings moments of merriment, bouts of busyness and an abundance of excuses to meet up for a drink. With a sparkling new libations menu featuring seasonal flavors and festive cocktails, Rustic Tavern is ready to accommodate for any occasion, and in a setting that invites you to sit back and sip slowly.

Intentional simplicity marks the menu and the

atmosphere at Rustic Tavern. Small details like the polished reclaimed wood, fresh cut flowers, flickering tea lights and parchment paper menus create an overall artisanal ambiance. Arrive just after sunset for dimly-lit drinking (and dining) that is cozy and romantic. Take your pick of seats from the dozen bar stools, plentiful two tops, family-sized table or space-heated outdoor options. Then make your libation selection.

Designed by newcomer and front of the house manager AJ Verzosa, Rustic Tavern's fresh seasonal cocktail selections range from merry drinks to serious swills. The bright fuchsia Blood Moon Margartia looks (and tastes) like a party in a tumbler. Made with fresh-squeezed blood orange juice, lime, solerno and tequila blanco, this lush pick-me-up is served with a slice orange and a chile salt rim that provides just the right balance of sweet, sour and spicy. Meanwhile, the Pear and Spice and everything iced provides more subtle sipping option in which notes of clove and rosemary muddle with sweet pear puree and botanical gin. For the wine enthusiast who has a hankering for something special, there's the singular Grape Stomp Martini - a vodka-based beverage crafted with lemon, St. Germain and a reduction of Concord grapes, making for a jammy burgundy martini that dares you to describe it without using the term "tannic." More serious swillers may opt for the straight-forward flavors of the refashioned old fashioned, made with Bulleit bourbon bitters, muddled orange and a smoked maple syrup that gives depth to a classic.

For the less complicated crowd, Rustic Tavern also offers a rotation of four draft beers (including the Racer 5 IPA, Trumer Pils, and an 8 Bridges brown ale), as well as standard well drinks and plentiful wine options, all of which are discounted during their 2:30 to 5 p.m. happy hour, which runs Tuesday through Friday afternoons. Drafts are priced at \$3 each, with house wines and wells going for \$5.

Whether it's a holiday drink, a catch up with an old friend or an afternoon escape while the family is in town, with its new selection of seasonal cocktails, happy hour options and charming twinkle lights, Rustic Tavern has your cup of cheer covered.

Rustic Tavern

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