

More Than a Blank Canvas



VEEV President Bryan Crowley and Carter Reum, co-founder of VEEV, at Herringbone in West Hollywood, CA.

Listen up, vodka drinkers: Who says the whiskey and gin craft cocktail scene gets to have all the creative swagger?

“It’s easier than you think to do something interesting,” says Carter Reum, who founded the VEEV brand with his brother, Courtney.

Doing something interesting, in this case, means tweaking the vodka itself. Because quality vodka is by definition odorless and flavorless, it’s hugely accessible but somewhat lackluster, often sidelined from the creativity of the craft community because it doesn’t stand up to the sophisticated vermouths, bitters and liqueurs that are de rigueur in today’s cocktail landscape.

“Vodka is a legitimate part of the spirits industry,” says Reum, “but a lot of people drink it because they’re not sure how to branch out.”

ENTER VEEV 2.0.

“When using vodka, you’re really starting with a blank canvas,” says Willy Shine, the ebullient NYC-based mixologist, who counts VEEV to be among his favorite spirits. “But when using VEEV 2.0, you have a great starting point and flavors to work with.”

Those flavors come from the balance of organic açai, prickly pear and acerola cherry that are infused into VEEV’s base spirit, a neutral grain distillate made from Idaho winter wheat and Rocky Mountain spring water. “All of these elements together become the blueprint of premium,” Shine says. He adds, “VEEV as a company does a lot for our industry—they are thoughtful of our planet, and they also use organic ingredients and a distillery that runs on wind power.”

VEEV originally launched in 2007, when “we were

VODKA GETS A VERSATILE MAKEOVER WITH VEEV 2.0

BY ÉVA PELCZER

PHOTOS BY CAL BINGHAM



Willy Shine calls VEEV “a great starting point” for cocktails.

thinking about better ingredients and better taste quality as a base for an alternative to vodka,” says Reum. The Brazilian açai berry was just starting to gain traction as a favored superfruit in organic-food circles, and the brothers decided on making it VEEV’s focal point, with the prickly pear and acerola cherry rounding out the flavor profile. The evolution to 70 proof in 2014 gave VEEV 2.0 the backbone it needed to be a more versatile spirit. “This was the product of listening to feedback from both the trade and our consumers,” says Reum.

Shine is hugely enthusiastic about the final product. “When evaluating VEEV 2.0 on your palate, there is a lot more going on, now that it’s 70 proof,” he says excitedly. “There is a balance of a little sweet, a touch of acidity, a hint of some spice and notes of a great distillate with a lengthy finish.”

This is language that’s usually more common in describing gin, which is made from neutral spirits that are infused with a long list of botanicals and herbs. You might think of VEEV as bridging the two worlds, and Shine delights in the fact that because of this, VEEV is a vodka alternative that “fits really well in classic gin drinks.”

“I discovered that VEEV plays well with Maraschino liqueur as well as sweet vermouth, so it sent me in the direction of the Martinez riff!” explains Shine. (See the recipe and video online at www.veevlife.com.) “I wanted

to run VEEV through some classic families and styles of cocktails,” he continues, “and in doing so, learned a ton on how versatile the spirit can be.”

For every kind of cocktail enthusiast stymied by vodka’s application to classic cocktails, VEEV has kicked that creative door wide open and is encouraging mixologists and consumers to cheat on their vodka. In their quest, you have one of the world’s most innovative bartenders leading the way.

VEEV can be subbed into cocktail recipes in “all kinds of variations,” Shine says, when you “switch the citrus, switch the bubbles, change the sweetener or infuse the sweetener, like hibiscus agave or chamomile syrup, to mention a few.”

With this approach, Shine created a series of videos on VEEV’s website that will walk you through cocktails he developed specifically for VEEV 2.0. You can even start by taking that Maraschino cue—try riffing VEEV in an Aviation, a gimlet-style drink that finishes with a floral note.

Reum knows that a simple approach has its virtues, too—one of Shine’s popular VEEV concoctions is a classic Martini with bianco vermouth. “Most of our consumers love VEEV by itself on the rocks, maybe with a lime or lemon,” says Reum. “My favorite is still the VEEV Press: a highball with tonic and soda water.”

“VEEV is already a more interesting spirit straight out of the bottle,” he continues. “So we’re saying, ‘Hey, you like Cosmopolitans, or you like Moscow Mules, try one with VEEV.’ You just introduced three new components into that flavor profile,” Reum chuckles. “The point is to have fun.” ■■



• FOOLS GOLD •

- 2 oz. VEEV 2.0
- ¾ oz. fresh squeezed lemon
- ¾ oz. water
- Half a bar spoon of house puréed beets
- 4 nickel size pieces of candied ginger