

BOTTLE SERVICE

Cider Revolution

The couple behind Oakland's Redfield Cider Bar and Bottle Shop are ushering in the next beverage boom.

BY ALEJANDRA SARAGOZA

Walking along Oakland's bustling College Avenue, it's easy to overlook the small, nondescript glass door with the word REDFIELD scrawled across it. So try not to blink; if you do, you could miss a chance to taste the new frontier.

As soon as you step into Redfield Cider Bar and Bottle Shop, you know you've stumbled upon something special. The light-filled haven beckons with its sleek yet relaxed interior featuring gleaming wood tables, cozy nooks alongside modern artwork, touches of greenery, and best of all, several shelves brimming with more than 130 bottles of artisanal hard ciders from around the globe. Even more can be found toward the back of the bar, with its rotating lineup of 10 ciders on draft, all available by the glass or in four-ounce tasters.

But the ciders poured at this unconventional watering hole aren't anything like the mainstream brews you typically see in supermarkets and liquor stores. From a yeast-fermented dry cider crafted in Sonoma County, to a jammy Washington state cider bursting with black currant, to a funky champagne-style cider from the Asturias region of Spain, the options at Redfield are a far cry from the sweet, one-dimensional ciders to which consumers have grown accustomed.

Indeed, the world of cider is vast—nearly as varied as that of wine—and Redfield's passionate founders, Olivia Maki and Mike Reis, are on a mission to show imbibers how diverse and exciting the beverage can be.



To create the cozy space, Mike Reis built all the stools himself and used reclaimed wood as shelving.



Reis and Olivia Maki named the bar after a tart, astringent apple varietal.



Cider is available by the glass, on tap, or in a tasting flight.



Redfield currently offers educational classes and will soon launch a monthly Cider Club.

SWEET BEGINNINGS

Maki and Reis, both 31, are as laid-back as their bar, and their love for the beverage—and for each other—started six years ago. The couple met while collaborating on a beer dinner for the 18 Reasons cooking school—the nonprofit arm of San Francisco’s Bi-Rite Market. At the time, Maki was managing events and educational programs for Bi-Rite, and Reis was the beverage director for the brewpubs Monk’s Kettle and the now-shuttered Abbot’s Cellar. Reis, an Advanced Cicerone (essentially, a beer sommelier), had recently become involved in the cider industry and introduced the drink to Maki, who was immediately smitten.

“Before I met Mike, I had never taken cider seriously, and I was really blown away by how nuanced it could be,” Maki says. “Then we just started nerding out and became obsessed with cider. We went in deep.”

Maki and Reis visited cideries throughout the United States and across Europe, broadening their understanding of the beverage and learning how complex it could taste when crafted with care, time, and high-quality ingredients. They even taught themselves how to make cider and started pressing apples in their Berkeley backyard. In 2017, the couple got married, fittingly, in an apple orchard in Mendocino.

Shortly after tying the knot, the pair got an idea: open the bar and shop they’d spent years searching for. “We realized it was tough to get access to a lot of the cider we wanted to drink,” says Reis. “So we thought maybe we should ... give ourselves better access to cider—and give the Bay Area access to stuff that would be hard to find elsewhere.”

GOING HARD-CORE

The newlyweds soon found their ideal space in Rockridge in a former women’s athletic shop that they transformed into an impressive cider

salon. It opened to the public in January.

“We wanted to make this a place where people could get stuff they’ve never seen before, and try a bunch of things side by side while learning about cider,” Reis explains.

Education is an important component of Redfield; the owners have made it their mission to teach customers about the beverage—and, in the process, potentially convert beer and wine drinkers into cider sippers. Many of the shop’s ciders represent an exciting crossover between light beer and robust wines, and Redfield offers a wide variety of options nuanced enough to spark interest among even the most serious beer or wine snobs.

PRESSING FORWARD

Since its debut, Redfield has maintained a steady, loyal following, but Maki and Reis know they have some work ahead of them. Though the number of cidemakers across the country has increased 600 percent since 2011 and the industry has grown nearly 8 percent annually for the last five years, cider still hasn’t caught on in the mainstream.

“When I started my career, craft beer ... wasn’t as big as it is now, and I really liked that there was this mission to get the word out and get people to appreciate it,” Reis says. “Cider is still kind of invisible, so I’m attracted to that underdog aspect of it and trying to put attention on all the great producers that are under-recognized.”

Even though Reis and Maki have big ambitions, they know cider is unlikely to become as popular as craft beer and wine—and that’s perfectly OK with them. At the end of the day, they’re content being known as a great local bar that also happens to be an ideal place to explore cider. redfieldcider.com.

► Learn expert cider-pairing tips at diablomag.com.



Thirsty for More?

Check out these other local cider spots for further sipping.

Crooked City Cider

Despite a delayed debut, this Oakland-based cidery opened the doors to its Jack London Square taproom in February, pouring 25-plus ciders along with an assortment of craft brews. crookedcitycidertaphouse.com.

Far West Cider Co.

In-the-know locals flock to this converted ship factory on the Richmond waterfront to savor award-winning ciders crafted from California-grown apples—and to admire the gorgeous views of the San Francisco skyline. farwestcider.com.