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NY LUNCH BOX

Letting Flavors Come Up From Down Under

Restaurant With Michelin Star Is Shaking Up Its Cocktail Menu

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The Musket Room's garden *Steve Remich for The Wall Street Journal*

[The Musket Room](#) serves New Zealand cuisine with an impeccable presentation, adding a bit of whimsy with touches, such as edible flowers. And it is shaking things up with a revamped cocktail menu.

"More than anything, New Zealand cuisine is about seasonality," says chef and owner Matt Lambert, who tends an herb garden out back. "Knowing where things come from and letting your ingredients shine, that's what New Zealand cooking is all about."

The herbs make it into the cocktails as well as the dishes. Start with the Greenstone (\$13), a mix of mescal, lemon grass shrub, lemon and coriander, served with a garnish of mint from the garden.

The drink ("by far our most popular cocktail," says Mr. Lambert) pairs well with the cold smoked scallops, the restaurant's signature appetizer. The scallops (\$15) play well off the smoky mescal in the Greenstone and are accompanied by black garlic, Asian pears and cucumber. The dish is served under a dome that releases Manouka wood smoke at the table.

The DD Smash (\$13) is pure summer, blending



Herbs from the Musket Room's garden make it into drinks, such as the Greenstone. *Steve Remich for The Wall Street Journal*



Herbs from the garden also are used in dishes, such as the New Zealand red deer with flavors of gin. *Steve Remich for The Wall Street Journal*

rum, watermelon, lime, Thai chili and basil, while the Desert Road (\$13) offers a refreshing twist on a margarita, mixing tequila, lime, Salers Aperitif and bell pepper with a smoked paprika rim. Palates looking for something sweeter will enjoy the Mana Island Tea (\$14), a combination of Maker's Mark bourbon, Oolong tea, Atsby Vermouth and lemon, served with a Fernet Branca floater and garnished with lemon and mint.

The cocktail menu's make-your-own-soda section lets everyone play bartender. Choose a seasonal shrub flavor, a soda and, if desired, a spirit (\$13, or \$6 nonalcoholic). "Our most popular soda combination is the lemongrass shrub with ginger beer," Mr. Lambert says. New Zealand wines and beers round out the drinks selection.

Dishes at the Musket Room are plated as works of art and though the portions are dainty, every mouthful is bursting with seemingly dozens of flavors. The gazpacho (\$13) is a creamy take on the summer soup, and the quail appetizer (\$16) features roasted breast meat and a braised, then fried leg, and is served with bread sauce, roasted onions and cherries that are also done two ways, roasted and pickled.

The New Zealand red deer with flavors of gin (\$33) is inspired by Mr. Lambert's memories of growing up near a deer farm. The meat is sourced from New Zealand and cooked sous-vide, then pan-seared for a brown crust, and served with a juniper meringue, cilantro puree, roasted fennel and licorice jus.

When it comes to desserts, Mr. Lambert says every New Zealand restaurant has to have a Pavlova, named after Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, on the menu. The meringue-based dessert is a favorite back home. The Musket Room's light and refreshing version is made with a cylinder of meringue filled with berries and passion-fruit curd (\$13).

Mr. Lambert moved to the U.S. with the goal of earning a Michelin star one day. The Musket Room did so last year, just four months after opening, leaving him "stunned and honored," he said. "I don't think many people have seen me cry, but I'll happily admit I cried like a baby speaking to the staff that night."

—Jana Zabkova

[The Musket Room](#), 265 Elizabeth St. between Houston and Prince streets; bar opens daily at 5 p.m.; (212) 219-0764, DOH grade: A

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