by Serena Maria Daniels

Metro Detroit has always been home to classic dive bars and sports pubs. Ah, the Old Miami, the Two Way Inn, Paycheck’s. Heck, just explore Hamtramck. It might be where the dive bar was born. Lately though, the area has seen a growing number of microbreweries, distilleries, craft cocktail lounges, wine bars and speakeasies take root — all of which are helping to redefine the region as a prime destination for food and drink connoisseurs as well as the regular Joes who are just looking for a night filled with great brews, good conversation and a solid social scene.
Metro Detroit is certainly not immune to the culinary cocktail craze. Here’s some of our spots with the most creative mixologists and their drinks of art. Sugar House in Detroit was an early adopter of the craft cocktail. Set in a dark and cozy slot, complete with hunter’s lodge decor and mustachioed barkeeps, Sugar House has a Wild West saloon feel. The Skip on Library Street downtown is a year-round outdoor bar set in The Belt alleyway. Exquisite murals set the tone for this more casual sister bar to Standby, specializing in frozen concoctions.

You’ll have to look hard to find The Oakland Art Novelty Co. because there’s not much in the way of signage for this Ferndale speakeasy. Upholstered lounge seating and expertly crafted drinks make for an intimate night out. Make the trek to Clinton Township’s J.Baldwin’s, too. Martinis are served in a glass made of ice.

Other Craft Cocktail Lounges

Bad Luck Bar, Buhl Bar, Chartreuse, The Keep, Vivio’s Food & Spirits (for the bloody marys) in Detroit • Public House in Ferndale • Mabel Gray in Hazel Park
To keep this section somewhat contained, the breweries listed here actually brew what they serve on-site. This is just a taste (pun intended) of what downtown Detroit and its surrounding communities have to offer in the handcrafted beer department. It'll get you started.

First, we have Atwater Brewery’s Detroit Tap House. In 2015, this veteran Rivertown brewery reopened as a more robust beer garden and tap house. It’s great for group gatherings and has a full menu of bar bites. Trivia nights and board games liven things up. (Atwater’s also got a unique Grosse Pointe Park location called Atwater in the Park that’s housed in a former church.) Also try MotorCity Brewing Works in Midtown. A satellite location is slated to open soon on Livernois on Detroit’s Avenue of Fashion.

When exploring outside downtown proper, Griffin Claw Brewing Co. should be at the top of your list. Situated in a relatively quiet corner of Birmingham, this sprawling gastro pub offers lounge-y indoor and outdoor seating and more than a dozen seasonal beers on tap. In Plymouth, you’ll find Liberty Street Brewing Co. The small bar area of the tasting room can fill up pretty quickly, but its variety of small-batch craft beers makes a visit worthwhile, even if you end up in standing room only. Falling Down Beer Co. in Warren is an unassuming space that looks like it could have been a fast-food joint at one point, but what it lacks in aesthetics is made up for in its beer (and food) selection. And at Canton Brew Works in Canton, the beer is the obvious star, but it’s well complemented by an unpretentious staff and atmosphere, too.

Other Breweries and Brew Pubs

Batch Brewing Co., Brew Detroit, Detroit Beer Co., HopCat, Jolly Pumpkin, Traffic Jam & Snug in Detroit • Dearborn Brewing in Dearborn • The Stand Bistro in Birmingham • The Root in White Lake Township • Dragonmead Microbrewery in Warren • Bastone Brewery, Roak, Royal Oak Brewery in Royal Oak • Rochester Mills Beer Co. in Rochester • Witch’s Hat Brewing in South Lyon • Woodward Avenue Brewers in Ferndale
DETROIT DISTILLERIES

The definition of a distillery: a place where liquor is manufactured. Here are some of Detroit’s best places that manufacture and serve it at the same address.

Valentine Vodka in Ferndale oozes atmosphere, with a tasting room of exposed brick, high-top seating and dim lighting. The drink menu features a mix of classic and unusual cocktails.

In the city, Detroit City Distillery is set in a low-lit former slaughterhouse in Eastern Market. The casual bartenders utilize the micro-distillery’s spirits, house-made syrups, bitters and juices to create Prohibition-inspired cocktails.

In Detroit’s Corktown, Two James Spirits offers up no frills or pretension, just finely crafted cocktails made from behind the horseshoe-shaped concrete bar in the tasting room of the first distillery to hit Detroit since Prohibition. Rusted Crow recently opened a Detroit outpost with a full menu. Its original Dearborn Heights spot, with vintage whiskey barrels, Edison light fixtures and dark wood-framed windows, is known for its inventive cocktails.

Other Detroit Liquor Landmarks

Our Detroit Vodka, Thomas Magee’s Sporting House Whiskey Bar, The Whiskey Parlor in Detroit
Wineries and Wine Bars in Detroit

Michigan boasts some 100 wineries. Who knew? Metro Detroit is clearly one of the state’s areas capitalizing on what’s coming off the vines. If you’re with a large group, Filipo Marc Winery in Clinton Township offers private tasting sessions in which friendly staff will give guests a robust tutorial on how to truly enjoy the variety of vinos on hand.

The laid-back bartenders at MotorCity Wine in Detroit will help you figure out the wine that best fits your personality. The location features a sprawling patio and a regular rotation of DJs, jazz and funk sets. Also in Detroit, the garden-level wine bar and restaurant Vertical Detroit makes use of rich colors and textures to give the space a polished, yet inviting, feel. More than 70 reds, whites and sparkling wines are offered by the glass, plus you can expect a full fine-dining experience.

Brix Wine & Charcuterie Boutique in West Village is a new wine bar and bottle shop occupying a space in a rehabbed bank building. It features a bar area, an intimate chef’s table and charcuterie.

While the kids are out enjoying the fun farm at Westview Orchards in Washington Township, try to sneak away for a moment to sample some of the wine at its winery. Selections are available in tastings or by the glass. Classes are also available.

Search out the Cellar 59 Wine Bar at The Mall at Partridge Creek when you need a break from shopping. It’s next to the MJR Theatre. Wine, beer and hors d’oeuvres are available. Other eateries in metro Detroit with impressive wine lists include Wine Dotte Bistro in Wyandotte, Iridescence in Detroit and The Royce Detroit in Grand Circus Park.

Meaderies

A mead is fermented with three basic ingredients: honey, yeast and water. Not really a beer and certainly not a wine in the traditional sense, it is its very own class of alcoholic beverage. Metro Detroit has a few meaderies where you can imbibe.

B Nektar Taproom is tucked away in an industrial park in Ferndale. Find a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere with board games and popular flights so you can try a variety of meads and ciders. Schramm’s is also in Ferndale. A helpful staff will guide you through the different types of mead. The small
space offers an outdoor patio, great for summertime relaxing. Kuhnhenn Brewing Co. in Warren gives beer and mead lovers ample room to try out the vast variety of brews. Its newer Clinton Township Taproom boasts a kitchen and full menu.
Drinking Tours

A well-rounded taste for the city’s bar scene can be had in many ways.

Motor City Brew Tours gives tours by bus, bike and on foot in downtown and Midtown Detroit, Royal Oak, Pontiac and even outside the metro area. Detroit Experience Factory also has a number of bar-hopping tours — including the Taste of Detroit Tour — on its 2017 schedule, as does The Detroit Bus Company, which hosts its guided Drunks of Antiquity: The Historic Bar Tour most Friday and Saturday evenings. Learn more about wine at tasting events at Detroit’s House of Pure Vin. Master sommelier Claudia Tyagi introduces guests to wines made in Michigan and elsewhere.

For a group experience, a number of pedal pub companies are popping up all over downtown, including Michigan Pedaler. Participants climb aboard and help keep the contraptions moving with a designated guide. In some cases, guests can bring their own drinks. All make bar stops along the trip.

Don’t Forget the Appetizers

Batch Brewing Co. in Detroit for fresh-made chicharrones and small-batch, handcrafted brews • Roast in the Westin Book Cadillac hotel in Detroit for the best gourmet burger and happy hour drinks after 4 p.m. weekdays • Chartreuse Kitchen and Cocktails in Detroit for well-blended, sweet cocktails and the twice-cooked egg • Wright & Co. (above) in Detroit for a house cocktail and phenomenal small plates • Firebird Tavern in Greektown for world-class Manhattans and the fried gyro appetizer

Read more about Detroit restaurants.