



EDWINA PICKLES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

IN YOUR FACE The Tiki cocktail, and all that goes with it, at the Zeta bar in Australia.

You Can't See It to Believe It

By JONATHAN MILES

SYDNEY, Australia

ALL I did, as usual, was order a drink. Which only partly explains why I found myself here, seated in a cordoned-off side room at Zeta, a plush, dusky, high-ceiling downtown night spot — holding a booze-filled pineapple and wearing a blindfold along with headphones hooked to a specially programmed iPod.

All the while, someone was spraying my face with what smelled like Hawaiian Tropic suntan oil.

Ladies and gentlemen, meet the world's most elaborate cocktail garnish. The Tiki, the drink I ordered, is one of four sensory cocktails to make their debut this month at Zeta. They join au courant classics like a Ping Pong and Clover Club on the deliciously freewheeling cocktail menu, which also features a martini served on a bed of smoldering tea leaves and a bourbon-and-Coke “ice cream cone” forged in liquid nitrogen.

TIKI SENSORY COLADA

Adapted from Zeta in Sydney, Australia.

- 1 1/2 ounces Appleton Estate Reserve rum
- 1/3 ounce coconut liqueur
- 2 ounces unsweetened coconut milk
- 3 ounces pineapple juice
- 1/3 ounce simple syrup

Combine the ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake vigorously, then pour into a hollow pineapple or a tall glass and serve with a straw.

Yield: 1 serving

The sensory cocktails work like this: order the daiquiri, and you're tucked into a semi-private spot where you sip your drink blindfolded while listening to 18 minutes of Cuban music on an iPod. All the while, a waitress spritzes you with a cigar mist made by simmering crumbled cigars in water and simple syrup.

The idea, said Grant Collins, Zeta's consulting mixologist, is “to heighten the link between the drink and the experience. Listening to the music makes your mind drift, and the blindfold heightens your sense of smell.” And the smoky mist? It's a sensory trick to make you think you're in Havana. Blind and piercingly alone, but still, you know, in Havana.

Mr. Collins cribbed his inspiration from Heston Blumenthal, the chef of the Fat Duck, a restaurant near London. That's where Mr. Blumenthal created a seafood dish served with an iPod loaded with ambient ocean sounds.

Besides the Tiki, Zeta offers a sea breeze, with Blumenthalian wave sounds and a sea spray that leaves salt on one's lips, and a martini equipped with a 1950s Rat Pack soundtrack. That last one is designed to evoke New York City, the capital of the cocktail experience — but where the virtual cocktail hasn't arrived.

The question, Mr. Collins said, is whether all this makes your drink taste better.

For this drinker, the answer was, eh, not so much. I'm not sure that I even registered tasting it, overwhelmed as I was by the lab-rat sensations of being sequestered and sensitized, not to mention spritzed. Then again, meditation isn't my bag — not even cocktail meditation.

“You have to almost will yourself to be transported,” Mr. Collins advised. “For us, it's about creating the right environment for that to happen.” To that end, Mr. Collins toyed with using a heat lamp, to replicate the warmth of the tropical sun. But that idea was dropped. “Too many danger points,” he said.