

LOS ALTOS

French art, custom cocktails are the focus of new Los Altos speakeasy The Grotto

The cozy lounge is located in the basement of Cetrella in downtown



by **Adrienne Mitchel**

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Bartender Roberto Canales prepares The Toboggan, a mezcal- and tequila-based cocktail, at The Grotto beneath Cetrella in Los Altos (\$18). Photo by Seeger Gray.

Speakeasies are few and far between along the Peninsula. The newest is in what many would consider an unlikely place – the sleepy town of Los Altos.

“We want to wake them up,” said M’hamed Bahet, owner of The Grotto.

Located in the basement of his restaurant Cetrella, The Grotto aims to transport its patrons to anywhere they can imagine. Expect smooth jazz and a cocktail program inspired by Henri Matisse “Jazz” prints, which are displayed like a gallery along the walls of the room. The cocktail menu is merely a suggestion, however, as bartenders will make custom-drinks based on personal preferences and requests.

“If you had a drink in London, and you don’t remember it, but you remember the taste, then you give them that information, they could create that,” Bahet said.



Framed Henri Matisse “Jazz” prints decorate the walls of The Grotto. Photos on table are arranged for a private birthday party. Photo by Seeger Gray.

The Grotto's bar program, developed by Sergei Remniakov, features 10 cocktails (\$18) and three nonalcoholic cocktails (\$12). The bar offerings are original and separate from upstairs Cetrella and features drinks such as The Toboggan, with mezcal, tequila reposado, Amaro Averna, fernet, housemade winter cordial and walnut bitters. The Aerialist, a rum-based cocktail with coconut, pineapple, grenadine and lime, is named after Matisse's "Jazz" print "The Codomas."

French and Californian wines are offered by the glass (\$22-\$45) and bottle (\$90-\$600). The Grotto does not have taps, but it does offer bottled beer (\$9-\$15).



Potato croquettes with fontina cheese and agrodolce sauce (\$16) at The Grotto in downtown Los Altos. Photo by Seeger Gray.

A small snack menu offers late-night bites such as duck fat fries with harissa aioli; potato croquettes with fontina cheese and agrodolce sauce; and lamb meatballs with oregano-lemon pesto, manchego cheese and crispy garlic (\$11-\$21).

The Grotto seats about 30, with bar, booth and table seating. The concrete floor, brick walls, tin ceiling and vibrant pops of blue and yellow from the hand-painted bar create a retro yet modern feel. The ambiance is

inspired by Bahet's wife, a Los Altos native who has extensive experience working in the art business, he said.



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Bahet is considering updating both The Grotto's cocktail program and art every six months, as the two work in tandem. He also plans to eventually introduce reservation-only jazz nights with live saxophone and guitar. The Grotto is also available for buyouts and private parties.

"My goal is to give people peace of mind," Bahet said. "Here you can forget about your day, problems and imagine yourself that you could be anywhere in the world."



Attendees of a private birthday party talk near the bar at The Grotto Speakeasy under Cetrella in Los Altos on Nov. 1. Photo by Seeger Gray.

The Grotto, 160 State St., Los Altos; 650-948-0400, Instagram: [***@cetrellalosalto***](#). Open Tuesday to Thursday from 5 p.m. to midnight and Friday and Saturday from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.

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