



Pedro Vigil, right, cleans up the neck of customer James Wadle at a newly opened barber shop somewhere in the vicinity of East Second Avenue and College Drive. The shop comes with a twist – or olives, depending on how you like it – just beyond an otherwise inconspicuous bookcase. /Photo by Jennaye Derge

Creating a buzz

The Bookcase and Barber offers sneak peek into the gilded age of cocktailing

by Missy Votel

Nearly 82 years ago, the Volstead Act was repealed, essentially ensuring every American the pursuit of life, liberty and a good, stiff cocktail.

Fortunately, for most of us, the 13 years leading up to the end of Prohibition in 1933 is nothing more than romantic barroom nostalgia. A time of frivolity and a debonair secret society, steeped in the sepia tones of jazz, cigar smoke and sparkling glasses of forbidden libations.

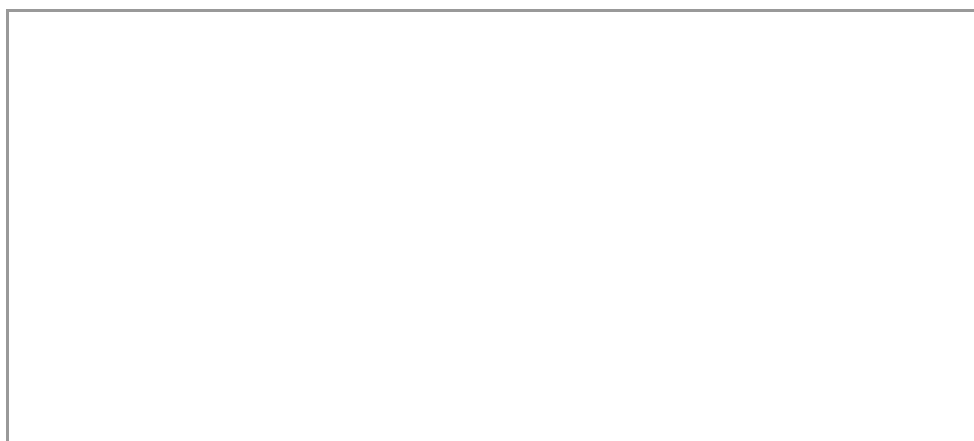
And perhaps no other entity sums up this infatuation with the elegantly rebellious nature of our forefathers and mothers than the speakeasy. Also known by the somewhat less flattering moniker “blind pig,” speakeasies have been popping up across the country in recent years as an antidote to Solo cups and anything bearing the word “pre-mixed” on its label. Think tiny, out-of-the way, exclusive nooks with constantly shifting phone numbers and passwords (one of New York’s original speakeasies, Milk & Honey, was known to change its phone number on a regular basis). Where inside, patrons quietly sip on sublime cocktails, enjoying quality over quantity, conversation over screen time and possibly, a really close shave (more on that later).

And rumor has it Durango may soon be home to such a place: its very first speakeasy – or at least the first in several decades. But you didn’t hear it here.

“It’s one thing Durango was missing,” said Thomas Gibson, who may or may not be one of the co-owners of the soon-to-open The Bookcase and the Barber. “There’s not a cooler place on the planet – the town, the location.”

And while we cannot give the establishment’s exact location, we’ll give you a hint: it’s implied somewhere in the name. Gibson and his alleged partner in crime, Beau Black, most recently of Ken & Sue’s fame, stumbled on the semi-reclusive spot, quite literally.

It began something like this. After a couple years, and admittedly several cocktails, of kicking around the idea for a speakeasy the longtime friends recently decided to go for it.



Gibson quit his job at the airport and Black turned in his chef pants after nine years at Ken & Sue's. The two secured a real estate agent and began searching for the perfect top secret, but not too top secret, location. After one particularly fruitless mission, they stood on the corner of East Second Avenue and College Drive. (If you know where that is, you're getting warmer.)

That's when, almost simultaneously, they both looked toward the soon-to-be vacated spot of The Bookcase. (Burning hot!)

"We both kind of glanced over and said, 'That's a cool place. What about that spot?'" recalled Gibson.

As luck would have it, the 32-year owner of the used book store, Ann Perkins, was entertaining ideas of starting a new chapter in her life, so to speak. They

proposed their idea to her and before they knew it, they were taking over her lease and "the rest is history," or at least is going to be, according to Gibson.

And speaking of history, the cozy alcove came with plenty of its own. The former home to Turner Automotive, the building was built in 1933 – coincidentally the same year the abomination known as Prohibition came to an end. The block is even rumored to be the starting point for Durango's storied maze of underground tunnels.

"There's a lot of history underneath here," Jenna Black, Beau's wife and main consultant, said.

For the business partners, the serendipity was uncanny – and undeniable. Taking the location as a good omen, they set about concocting a business plan for what any student of speakeasy history knows (also known in laypeople's terms as the mullet): business up front, party in the back.

"Every speakeasy has a front," said Gibson.

Black added that the adjacent speakeasy's dark windows will add to the mystique. "We want people to be able to see that there's people in there and ask, 'how do I get over there?'"

Enter the perfect accomplice and "barber" in the equation (not to mention a nice play on the mullet pun): Pedro Vigil. Visitors to 6th Street Hair Salon may know Vigil as one of the salon's young new blades. Classically trained as a barber, the 23-year-old Ignacio native has been professionally tending to locals' follicles for the last four years.

"We knew Pedro from 6th Street, and he's an extremely talented barber," said Gibson. "You can come in, get your straight razor shave, and we'll get you looking good and feeling good."

And when you want to keep that good feeling going? You casually roll on over to an otherwise inconspicuous bookcase that may not be a sliding door straight out of 1950s murder mystery. But be prepared to dig deep into those reserves from high school English. That's because the sliding bookcase that presumably leads to easier speaking will only move for those able to answer one, heretofore unknown question. (Hint: the password has nothing to do with Monty Python and the Knights Who Say Ni and everything to do with a certain American writer, and well known imbibers, who wrote something about an old man and a fish. We suppose you could mention his famous granddaughters and still get away with it.)

Alas, if you find yourself stumbling among the great literary voices of the 20th century, you will likely find yourself gaining access anyway. That's because unlike their 1920s predecessors, modern speakeasies are also in the business of, well, being in business.

"We don't want to turn people away, we'll let it slide," said Beau.

"Anyone who wants to come in, can come in," reiterated Thomas.



From left, Thomas Gibson, Pedro Vigil, and Beau and Jenna Black discuss plans for their new venture, The Bookcase and the Barber, earlier this month. Although Vigil has begun accepting clients in his barber shop, life beyond the bookcase doesn't unofficially get rolling till Dec. 5./Photo by Jennaye Derge

And that, of course, means even though they may not have a three-day beard in need of serious manscaping, women are invited and encouraged to soak up the ambience and offerings as well. Which, in addition to the period-specific décor, includes hand-crafted cocktails of the era.

“There were a lot of quality cocktails coming out at that time, and we’re hoping to reproduce that. It’s also a place where people can come and learn about the cocktail,” said Gibson, adding that the drink menus will be printed inside old books donated by Perkins. “It’s been a lot of fun.”

Right now, The bookcase and the Barber is shooting for a Sat., Dec. 5, soft opening to coincide with what, ironically enough, was the end of the traditional speakeasy era. But just because the ’20s are gone, doesn’t mean they have to be forgotten.

“Come see Pedro, get pampered and experience an old-fashioned wind down to the day,” said Beau.

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