

Wilfred's Lounge, Napa's only tiki bar, is designed like a pirate ship, complete with ghosts



Julie Tremaine

Julie Tremaine, SFGATE July 1, 2022



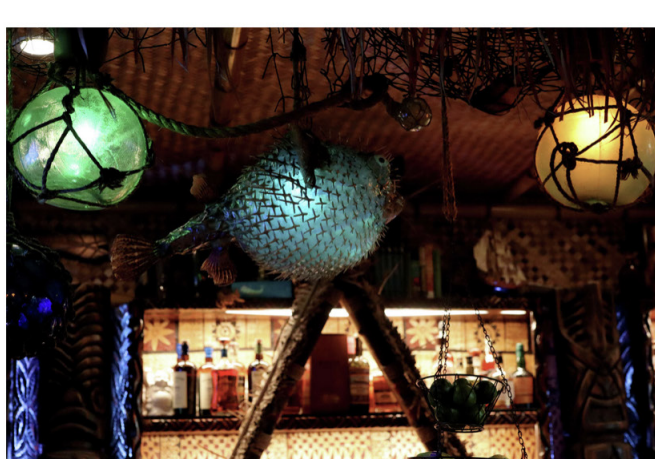
I was sitting at the bar, sipping a coconut libation, in the midst of a tropical-feeling heat wave. All of a sudden, a rainstorm erupted, thunder crashing down. Things went dark. Then, it appeared behind me: a ghost pirate, brandishing his sword, fighting for the treasure that he felt was rightfully his.

I wasn't on a tropical island, and I wasn't at Disneyland. I was in the middle of downtown Napa, at Napa Valley's only tiki bar — and I was transfixed.

Wilfred's Lounge describes itself as “a twist on tradition [that has] brought together Napa and Honolulu culture like you've never known before.”

I have to admit: I was trying hard to keep my expectations low about Wilfred's. Being the only tiki bar in Napa Valley (and all of Napa County) meant that the place wouldn't have to try all that hard — simply by virtue of being the only one, it could easily be called the best.

It turns out, Wilfred's Lounge can hold its own not just in Wine Country, but it could easily have a place in San Francisco, too. And not only because the place has some original statues from an old Trader Vic's — the general manager Daniel “Doc” Parks was beverage director at Pagan Idol and Zombie Village in SF.



— Wilfred's Lounge in Napa is a tiki bar that works surprisingly well in wine country. (Julie Tremaine/SFGATE)

The drinks are definitely tiki, and they have a serious element of mixology to them. I sat at the bar watching the bartenders crank out libation after libation: for one, they torched a sprig of rosemary for a garnish; for another, a stencil to make a W emblazoned on the top. This one comes in a conch shell that looks like mermaid's treasure, overflowing with fresh orchids. That one has a house-made coconut banana whip and dehydrated banana spears rising from its glass.

Wilfred's Lounge would be a great bar anywhere, but it really works in Napa. Wine Country already has a bewitching air about it, so when I walked in, fresh from a vineyard on a sunny afternoon, the transportive nature of a tropical-themed bar with islandy music and bright colors everywhere made sense to my vacation-mode brain. (And if I'm being honest, my pineapple fried rice — with optional added kalua pork as good as what I recently enjoyed on the North Shore of Oahu — was a refreshing departure from the steak-and-red-wine-heavy menus you'll find in most Napa restaurants.)

But on another level, the architecture just works with the landscape. The building is perched on the Napa River, and there are both downstairs and upstairs patios where you can sit by the water and take in the historic 1847 city and the hills beyond. I didn't realize it at the time, but part of why Wilfred's Lounge blends so beautifully into the Wine Country around it is because the restaurant has generations of wine-making history behind it.



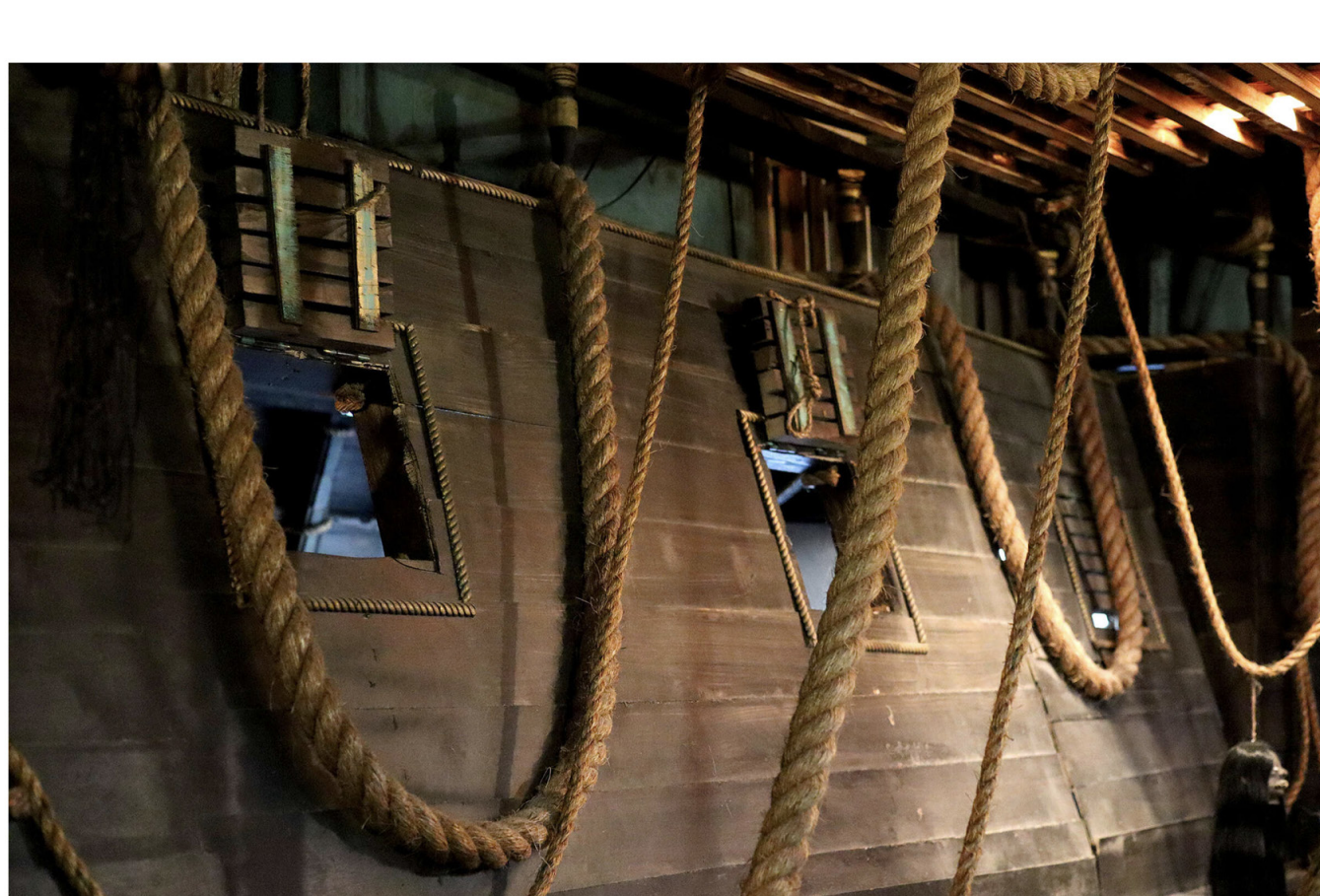
— The upstairs patio overlooks the Napa River. Julie Tremaine

Father and son duo John and Nat Komes opened Wilfred's Lounge in November 2021, naming it after a family member, Wilfred, who was born in Hawaii and whose own bar was a fixture of the Honolulu cocktail scene. Wilfred's sister Flora moved to San Francisco from Hawaii in 1929, and eventually founded Flora Springs Winery with her husband Jerry. John Komes, one of their three kids, and his son Nat now run Flora Springs and the family's other wine labels.

This new venture honors the family's Hawaii roots and wine-making legacy. They've even displayed the trunk Flora brought over to California from Hawaii, and have some of her and Jerry's furniture in the restaurant. There's real family history in the place, which gives it some heart underneath all the bamboo.

And if the place has some elements of magic to it, there's a reason for that, too. (See the aforementioned ghost pirate, who appears through a porthole and on a screen that alternates between an idyllic beach and his ghastly underwater realm, and the sudden change of climate indoors from a soft summer night to a sudden rainstorm.)

Wilfred's was designed by the same man who designed (and owns) High Roller Tiki Lounge in Solvang. It's an island-meets-Disney tiki bar in Santa Ynez Valley wine country that has elements of owner Michael Cobb's past life running the food and beverage program at Disneyland's exclusive Club 33. (Look closely in that place and among the Trader Sam's-style decor, you'll find hidden Mickeys and nods to Walt himself.)



— The outside of the upstairs pirate ship is actually in the stairwell. Julie Tremaine

Downstairs at Wilfred's is what you might expect from a tiki bar: bamboo and seagrass offset by intricate wooden carvings by artist Billy Crud and hanging lanterns. Upstairs, I'm just going to be blunt: It's a pirate ship. It's an actual, entire interior of a pirate ship constructed inside the upper level of the building, and it is extremely cool — especially since you walk out the ship's doors (made of sea creatures, of course) and onto a patio overlooking the river.

When you consider the ghost pirate downstairs, Wilfred's Lounge might draw some inspiration from Pirates of the Caribbean, but there are also other Disney-ish hints inside: The upstairs displays a map of the Pirate's Lair on Tom Sawyer Island amid its rum bottles and antique pistols and ropes hanging overhead.

Soon after dinner, I hit the road — but I left Napa with some treasure of my own: a first-edition Wilfred's tiki coconut, now proudly displayed on my bar among the bottles of wine I brought home from my trip. It feels right there. They make sense together.

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Reach Julie on

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