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In his new post at Kansas City's miniBar, Ryan Miller is giving his pop up, Fancies Sodas & Cocktails, a home

Jenny Vergara
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Ryan Miller started his soda business amid the pandemic after experimenting at home.

Zach Bauman for Fancies Soda & Cocktails

Jenny Vergara

How long can a successful cocktail pop-up last? Shawn Sherrill and Steve Tulipana, owners of both **RecordBar** and **miniBar**, hope the answer is indefinitely.

The partners recently extended an invitation to Ryan Miller, Kansas City bartender and bar consultant, to stay on after he hosted a successful monthlong pop up inside miniBar: **Fancies Sodas & Cocktails**. Additionally, Miller will serve as the general manager of the space, which is currently undergoing a complete renovation to prepare to host a full calendar of live music starting later this month. Miller will be responsible for the main bar.

Working on his non-alcoholic soda recipe before the pandemic, Miller originally wanted to create something refreshing that he could sip on during a busy shift behind the bar. He started using the flavored syrups he already had on hand and mixing them with sparkling or carbonated waters to create what he called “flash” sodas. He continued his experimentation at home during lockdown, and he soon developed with his own syrups and flavors with his son as his taste taster.

Miller thought the easiest way to get his own soda company off the ground would be to use it in cocktails. After much feedback, he found that highball cocktails – those made with a single spirit and a carbonated beverage like gin and tonic or scotch and soda – were what people were most interested in, which guided his menu development.

He decided to launch Fancies Sodas & Cocktails as a traveling pop up at the end of last year, building a mobile bar inside of an old 1970s stereo cabinet that had a three-draft system for the cocktails that he brought with him from bar to bar. With a love of alliteration, he called his pop ups “Hotdogs & Highballs,” and he would take over local bars, playing classic rock music, grilling hot dogs and serving drinks made with his sodas. That all led him to his concept's next home.

“After doing a few pop-up’s at places like The Campground and Ça Va, and getting great feedback from each place I went, I went to miniBar next,” Miller says. “No one had been in space since the pandemic, so we worked together to transform it into something that looked more like a traditional American neighborhood bar, which is something I’d love to have myself, one day.

Now, continuing to make a splash at miniBar, Miller is serving up his highballs with seasonal flavors that are looking ahead to fall. Look for gems like a gin and carrot tonic, whiskey with ginger soda and, his favorite, an Americano made with his chai-spiced soda, Campari and sweet vermouth. You can also think up your own drink using one of his sodas as a base. Currently, he is offering a vanilla-bay soda, beetroot tonic, carrot tonic, strawberry tonic, caramel-apple soda, sarsaparilla, cranberry-thyme soda and a celery and fennel soda which will be rolled out for a

special brunch service on Mon., Aug. 23 – aimed directly at service industry folks who typically have the day off. And although the food options from Fancies are somewhat limited, the menu – developed with help from Verbena's Sam Hall – is kitschy, delicious and fun, with offerings like a pimento grilled cheese sandwich, bourbon-butter popcorn and toast with gribiche egg salad and radish.

“I knew Fancies Sodas & Cocktails shouldn't stay a mobile pop-up forever, so I am thrilled to stay on as GM for miniBar for the foreseeable future,” Miller says. “I have a place here to make and sell my sodas and I serve them in my highballs on draft, in addition to a selection of more classic cocktails. MiniBar is a neighborhood bar first, so we are happy to serve our guests anything they want from a can of beer and a shot to an Old Fashion that is made well and with consistency.”

In addition to his work at miniBar, Miller is also actively looking to buy a brick-and-mortar building where he could have his own bar and retail storefront for Fancies with room in the back to produce them, allowing him to expand his wholesale accounts to other bars and restaurants. Right now, he is making and selling Fancies Sodas to RecordBar, miniBar and **Lucky Boys** in the West Bottoms.

“In this new space, we would have a bar with both a curated wine and cocktail list and some grab and go snacks, maybe a small menu,” Miller says. “We would also be able to sell Fancies sodas along with apparel and merchandise. I would also want to have a liquor license where I could pre-mix, bottle and sell my highball cocktails to-go, in addition to my sodas. I would love to invest in my own neighborhood and find a space between Union Hill and Longfellow neighborhood to do this.”

It's great to see Miller back behind the bar after a long pandemic, and with his master plan for Fancies sodas in place and his work at miniBar, he remains hopeful about the future.

“I am having fun, and I am back behind the bar,” Miller says. “This is what I have been missing working in restaurant management and multi-unit beverage stuff for these last few years. Now, I can take all of my energy and actually put it toward something with my name on it.”

miniBar is open Tuesday through Saturday from 6pm to 3am. Happy hour is every day from 6 to 8pm.

Editor's note: *This post was updated to correct the names of Fancies Sodas & Cocktails and Hotdogs & Highballs, as well as clarify that Monday Brunch is a one-time event.*

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