

imbibe

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PLANET **imbibe**

ONE FOR THE ROAD

NEW YORK, **NEW YORK** – SO GOOD IT'S WORTH SAYING TWICE. **NAREN YOUNG** STRUGGLES TO PICK OUT HIS FAVOURITE BARS FROM THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS. GET READY TO BOOK YOUR FLIGHT...

How do you put together a list of the top five bars in New York? It's like asking someone which one of their kids they like more. Well, not quite, but few would question that Gotham City is one of the most dynamic metropolises in the world, particularly in relation to its bars.

From old school saloons to the slew of modern 'speakeasies' that have significantly changed the way people drink, there is literally something for everyone, no matter what your disposition. Here's a rundown of some long-standing favourites, some new kids on the block and a bustling downtown restaurant where you can even get Manhattans on tap.

PJ CLARKE'S

When someone as revered in the bar world as Dale DeGross tells you that PJ Clarke's is his favourite bar in all of New York, and that the joint has 'the best bartender in Manhattan' (his words), well, you'd best jump in the nearest yellow taxi and head up to this legendary drinking den. For anyone that wants a taste of old New York (it opened in 1884), there are few better places than this long piece of mahogany, manned by Doug Quinn who – yes, indeed – is the best bartender in Manhattan.

He's a no-nonsense, yet graceful and lightning-quick saloon barkeep who has no interest in making you a Lemongrass-tini or any other cocktail frippery. He'll shake your Manhattan and garnish it with one of those neon-coloured cherries. He'll

remember your name, what you ordered on your last visit, and he'll have another Guinness up on the bar before you even knew you wanted one.

Order yourself a plate of oysters, a Cadillac burger and an iceberg wedge salad. Then clear your schedule.

PJ Clarke's, 915 Third Avenue (at 55th Street), NY, 10022; pjclarkes.com

SAXON + PAROLE

As an increasing number of restaurants focus on creating a detailed beverage programme, Saxon + Parole, on the once ramshackle (and now gentrified) Bowery, is leading the charge. Named after two famous racehorses that were once stationed on this strip, it has spectacular design courtesy of AvroKO, its reclaimed

wood finishes evoking the barnyard feel that would have transpired along this raffish street in the late 19th century.

Savoury cocktails are a major focus and on their hyper-seasonal menu you might see fresh beetroot, fennel, celery, or cucumber juice, perhaps accentuated by sea salt or verjus. There are Manhattans on tap, house-made tonic water, bottled Champagne Negronis and gin-spiked Pimm's Cups, served in large pitchers.

Or fancy a non-alcoholic tippie? How about a Bell Pepper Lemonade? Want something after dinner? Order up a Dulce de Leche Old Fashioned, served on a hand-carved ice cube. This is a bustling, hopping joint, where service is professional and knowledgeable, and the acutely trained bartenders can suggest the ideal drink, no matter the time of day.

Saxon + Parole, 316 Bowery (at Bleecker Street), NY, 10012; saxonandparole.com

PDT

You're all probably familiar with the story of this venerated drinks temple. You walk through a hot dog shop into a phone booth, you dial the phone and, as if travelling through time, you are transported to another place. That other place is the quiet and civilised >>

imbibe.com 157

imbibe

CONTINUED



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DEMI MONDE, SAXON + PAROLE, PJ CLARKE'S, PDT



inner sanctum of Jim Meehan's vision: a place where grown-ups can comfortably converse over perfectly-made cocktails that range from the antique and obscure classics to the more esoteric and ambitious.

Shiso might be shaken into a Sour with Japanese whiskey, while green tea might find an able partner in cachaça. Whatever your tippie of choice (make mine the bacon-kissed Old Fashioned please), you have to soak it all up with the legendary hot dogs from the adjacent Crif Dogs. Your life will be more complete as a result.

Meehan continues to attract and cultivate a pack of young nobodies into a fine-tuned team of professional somebodies, who carry on his legacy of sincere, well-informed and personal service. The best bar in America? Yes.

PDT, 113 St Mark's Place (at Avenue A), NY, 10009; pdtnyc.com

MAISON PREMIERE

Brooklyn's trendy Williamsburg has no shortage of great bars, many of them new. The best of these is Maison Premiere, a virtual museum full of antique furnishings and bespoke finishes. There is an acute focus on absinthe – with a spectacular absinthe fountain centre-stage – but this is merely a shadow of what these terribly serious barkeeps are capable of mixing up. The Carondelet (Beefeater, lime, lemon, blossom honey, vanilla, sea salt) might be one of the most finely balanced drinks I've tried, its whisper

of salt making it the perfect foil for the obscenely large list of oysters, which changes daily and is ticked off by the customer and handed to the bartender.

To enjoy these bivalves and perhaps a crab claw or two, the beautifully adorned back garden (with its own service bar) might well be the most relaxing oasis to be found in any bar in New York. Perhaps the drink they're most renowned for here is the julep, and there's always at least four different versions on the menu. They are, in a word, flawless.

Maison Premiere, 298 Bedford Avenue (at 1st Street), Brooklyn, NY, 11211; maisonpremiere.com

DEMI MONDE

The paint has barely dried on this sexy new bar, located in the cocktail wasteland known as the Financial District. The subterranean room – designed by Warren Red, and operated by David Kaplan and Alex Day of Death & Company fame – is

finished in black leather, mirrors, vibrant red walls and rope dividers that are tied, I'm told, in the 'Japanese bondage style'.

It's a far cry from the civilised ambience of their East Village neo-speakeasy; its sunken lounge and open-plan concept suggesting that I could be in a Parisian club. Talented chef Phillip Kirschen-Clark turns out some incredible bar food, with each item spiked with alcohol in what he dubs 'spirited cuisine'.

The Negroni-pickled oysters need to be tried to be believed. The real star, however, is the bar, and Day has compiled a wonderful list that is thoughtfully and beautifully curated. The Wolf Tone is a delightful summer Old Fashioned of sorts, with the charms of pisco and grappa augmented by St Germain and eucalyptus. A bar headed for greatness? Yes.

Demi Monde, 90 Broad St (at Stone St), NY, 10004; demimonde.com

NEXT TIME: Naren Young whets his whistle in San Francisco...