

Hidden Bars Brought to Light

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Those looking to get into the jazzy Mendeleev Bar first have to find the noodle shop under which it is hidden.

In a city whose method of operation is exclusivity in everything, it's quite surprising that the concept of secret bars took hold only recently. Secret bars are not "secret" in the strictest sense. Most of them have a website and a Facebook page.

At the same time, it's practically impossible to just stumble upon one while walking around nighttime Moscow. A much better phrase to describe these places would be "well hidden."

The Mendeleev Bar (20/1 Ulitsa Petrovka, +7-495-625-3385), established by Arkady Novikov, Moscow's most prolific restaurateur, and Igor Lantsman, owner of the popular Rolling Stone club, hides in the basement of Lucky Noodles.

Lucky Noodles, also by Novikov and Lantsman, is an attempt to re-create an atmosphere of a cheap stand-up Chinese noodle joint in the very center of Moscow, complete with Chinese staff who barely speak any Russian.

The first few times I went there for noodle soup and a Tsingtao beer, I didn't even notice the curtain in the corner behind the cash register with a bulky bouncer lounging next to it. It turns out there's a staircase behind the curtain leading to the basement. The interior is dark, plaster is peeling off the walls and ceiling exposing brickwork, and there's lots of vintage furniture, with no two items alike. Taking inspiration from the famous Apotheke in New York's Chinatown, Mendeleev is all about concoctions, the preferred ones being the high Thai, a version of mai tai with Mendeleev's own blend of rum, and the Chinese market martini.

Igor Lantsman confides that expats are the target audience for the bar.

"I like foreigners. I think they act as a barometer for the quality of the place," he said. At the same time, Lantsman doesn't consider Mendeleev glamorous. "We are oriented at people who are not hunting out trends, not going to clubs that have 'the most girls,' but where the food and music are good."

Mendeleev has jazz nights on Thursdays and dancing on Fridays and Saturdays.

Oldich Dress & Drink (11 Ulitsa Bolshaya Dmitrovka, +7-499-951-7993) is also in the basement, but of a rather overpriced vintage clothing shop. Oldich was the talk of the town in November when it opened. It's right next to the Conde Nast office on Bolshaya Dmitrovka, and GQ's editor-in-chief, Michael Idov, couldn't stop tweeting and Facebooking about it for days. He even deejayed at the opening.

The first few parties were 100 percent exclusive. If you weren't on the list, you could forget about it.

But when the hype somewhat died down and we finally managed to get in, all we found were several beautiful young people dancing halfheartedly to the tunes from DJ Osadchi. The interior is of macabre variety, with (hopefully fake) post-mortem masks on the wall and a creepy mannequin at the entrance.

The menu boasts some rather sophisticated cocktails and burgers. At the toilet, I ran into a completely trashed guy in a cheap suit who looked very much out of place at Oldich. He said, "Dude, whaaaaat's up? Happy new year!" When I came back, no one was dancing anymore. The young and the beautiful were getting their coats and talking of walking to the nearby Simachev Shop & Bar.

The website for the club 12 Volts (12/2 Ulitsa Tverskaya, +7-495-933-2815) boasts a United Nations certificate as the most LGBT-friendly bar in Moscow. I wonder whether the UN is aware it's been giving out certificates like that.

Google Maps showed the spot right off Tverskaya Ulitsa, but it took us a while to find it. We could have given up altogether if not for a couple of girls who looked like they might be heading to an LGBT kind of place.

We followed them into the dark alleyways and soon were at an unmarked entrance at the side of a building. We buzzed in and found ourselves at the top of a staircase that led to a barred door. Apparently we were deemed fit to enter and the door swung open.

The bartender was a no-nonsense heavily tattooed woman in a leather jacket. We got Long

Islands and watched the mostly gay crowd swing to a mix of Russian and Western hits from the '90s. When we came out, we were silent for a few moments. Then I said, "That one girl who stood right next to me at the bar looked kind of cute." My friends laughed and said: "That was most definitely not a girl." Oh, well.

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