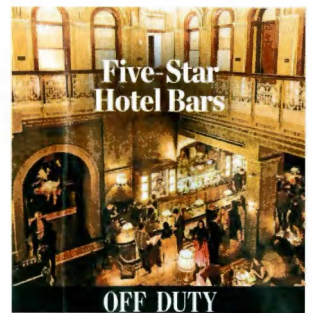


OFF DUTY



Raising the Hotel Bar

Forget the pool, spa, views. These days, more travelers are choosing hotels expressly because of their ambitious, magnetic bars. This guide lets you belly up to the buzziest

BY KEVIN SINTUMUANG

"WHICH HAS the better bar?"

When confronted with the choice between a few hotels, this is usually what I ask myself. Nothing against tourists who seek out marble showers with unpeened nozzles, or on-site spas that promise spiritual rejuvenation and free green apples, or a gym that serves infused waters. A great hotel bar, in my experience, can make your stay. I always remember a hotel's watering hole. I rarely

remember a hotel room.

While there's no shortage of cookie-cutter hotel lounges that, for all their attempts at hipness, exclude as much charm as an airport bar, classic drinking spots like the American Bar at London's Savoy, Bar Marmont at Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles and the New York Bar at the Park Hyatt Tokyo (see "Lost in Translation") are almost always packed—now more than ever. "It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why hotel bars are becoming more prominent," said Declan McGurk, bar manager of the Savoy's American Bar in London. "But

in part I believe they are becoming less intimidating. At one time, if you didn't wear a tie you couldn't visit X bar in a five-star hotel. With the evolution of the modern traveler, that's no longer feasible for the majority of hotels."

Mr. McGurk also credits the bar scene's "creative renaissance" for the amplified allure. "Once upon a time, a hotel's culinary team would be its lauded creative force and bars would have just concentrated on Martinis and Champagne," said Mr. McGurk.

Please turn to page D6

PLENTY OF ROOMS AT THE BAR

Continued from page D1

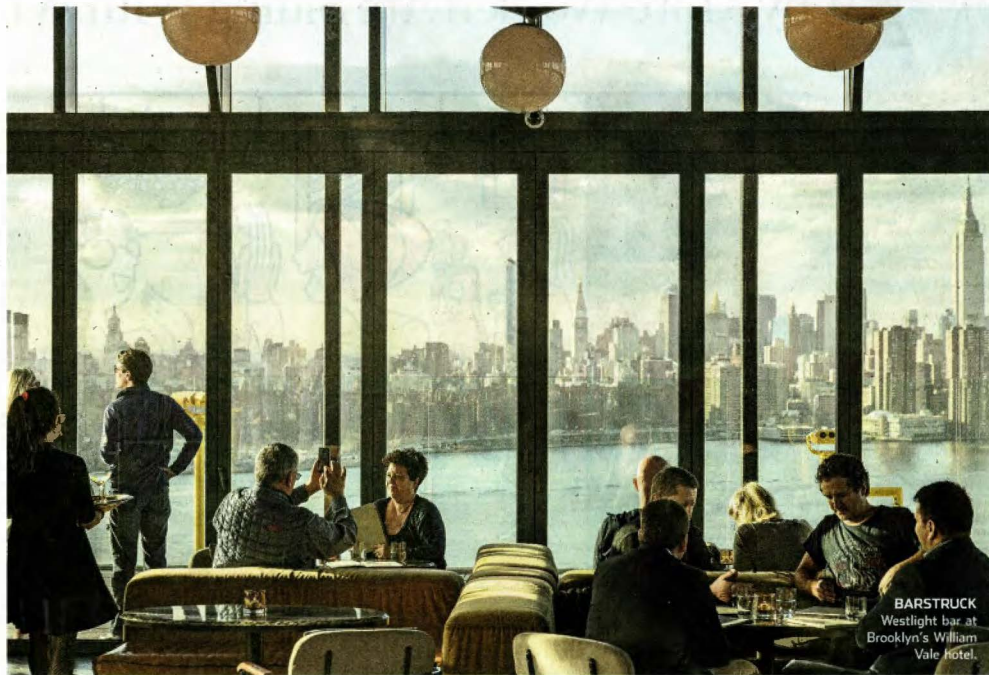
It isn't just the major libation landmarks that draw crowds these days: In new hotels, well-considered cocktail lounges are becoming as de rigueur as USB ports. At nearly every Ace Hotel, from Pittsburgh to Portland, Ore., for instance, you're more likely to find the bar before the check-in counter. And the best new-breed bars are worth seeking out even if you're not a guest. In Paris, the team behind the cultish Experimental Cocktail Club opened the Grand Pigalle hotel in 2015, where locals convene for artisanal cocktails nightly.

On a recent trip to San Francisco, Ariel Meadow Stallings, a Seattle publishing professional, booked the Clift hotel so she could easily belly up to its Redwood Room bar. "I picked the hotel for the ambience of the [Redwood Room]—its dark, sexy, historic feel," said Ms. Stallings. "I'd looked at the pictures of the hotel rooms so I knew they were nice too, but I wanted that bar in the building with me."

Increasingly, travelers want local experiences but aren't prepared to expend too much effort, especially on quick trips. Often, a vibrant hotel bar offers the easiest way to crack a city's scene. Hang out in one, order a drink and after a few sips and conversations with regulars and like-minded guests, soon enough you'll stop feeling like a tourist.

"I really appreciate the constant flow of new people from all over the place in a hotel bar," said John Pomeroy Jr., an event producer based in Oakland, Calif. "I've found that hotel bartenders are as effective as concierges, as they are constantly involved with people who are from out of town."

After arriving in Miami Beach and spending an eve-



BARSTRUCK Westlight bar at Brooklyn's William Vale hotel.

SASHA MASLOV FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (THE BEDFORD, THE WILLIAM VALE); ZAK BRINNETT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (FAENA HOTEL)

Guiding Spirits

8 hotels with new bars well worth the buzz—and the trip

1. Faena Hotel,

Miami Beach Leopard print couches. Red velvet chairs. Curtains with palm trees. The Living Room would be loud even if it were empty (which it rarely is—expect entertainment or a DJ nightly). Saxony Bar is smaller and more intimate, perfect for a post-dinner cocktail. If you want to



PUNCH TRUNK The Tree of Life bar—and bartender Marko Tomovic, below—at the new Faena hotel in Miami Beach.

could nurse Manhattans at Vesper, the classic cocktail bar off the lobby, or at the Study, a small bar tucked away in the hotel's Rose Rabbit. Lie supper club. Anytime I was in L.A. for business, the lucky co-workers who'd gotten the green light from our bosses to stay at the Chateau Marmont were always the ones we ended up hanging out with in the evening. And I imagine any visitor to London who stays at Chiltern Firehouse or the Mondrian, with its botanical-based Dandelion bar, also has everyone coming to them. If I didn't live in New York, I'd stay at the Beekman. The hotel's Bar Room is not only

seated first, for instance), which is the case for many hotel bars. Several properties have their own guest-only bars, including Faena in Miami Beach, the Jefferson in Washington, D.C., and New York's Nomad, where the Library bar is closed to non-guests after 4 p.m.

Some may long for the days when hotel bars were free of wait lists and theatrics. The Distill bar at Bangkok's Lebua Hotel, for instance, showily makes cocktails with 32 types of flavored ice and sells a Hungarian sweet wine for \$200 a spoonful. Artesian at London's Langham hotel became

ning at the recently opened Faena hotel, I didn't feel like an outsider. Make your way through the lobby and you'll find the Living Room, a scene-stealing lounge designed with the help of director Baz Luhrmann. With heaps of red velvet, leopard prints and gold, it's certainly brash and ostentatious—think Mr. Luhrmann's 2001 film "Moulin Rouge" crossed with a Ringling Bros. circus tent—but I felt as comfortable there as I do in my own Brooklyn living room, even if my home is rarely filled with folks wearing white linen as so many of my fellow drinkers were. Outdoors, close to Damien Hirst's gilded skeleton of a woolly mammoth, is a second bar, known as Tree of Life, where patrons sipped Aperol spritzes and carefully crafted gin-and-tonics. It was, literally, a breezier kind of scene. Afterward, I made my way to a third attraction, the Saxony, with its own entrance outside of the hotel. It was a more subdued, speakasy vibe, but once the crowds started to pour in, the dancing commenced and I was in a quintessential Miami nightclub. I wouldn't normally find myself clubbing in Miami, but the Faena made it too easy. Three bars, three different scenes, and I hadn't even left the block.

Choosing to stay at a place with a magnetic hotel bar (or bars, plural) offers another advantage, especially if you're traveling for work: When you're at the hot spot, co-workers, associates, friends and even family want to come to you instead of making you schlep elsewhere. And for those traveling long distances, having colleagues visit you for a drink on your first night while you deal with fresh jet lag is humane. Being at the bar everyone wants to be at helps sweeten the deal.

For the past few years, during my annual stints in Las Vegas for the Consumer Electronics Show, I would make the Cosmopolitan hotel my base. There, on any given night, my associates and I

tipple under the stars instead, head to the hotel's outdoor Tree of Life bar and admire the hand-painted mosaic tiles as you sip on a spritz. [3201 Collins Ave., faena.com/miami-beach](http://3201CollinsAve.com/faena.com/miami-beach)

2. Ace Hotel, New Orleans

Opened a year ago, in a circa-1928 art deco structure, the lobby-bar lounge at the Ace Hotel New Orleans appears curated by a savvy (and not stuffy) Garden District collector. Scattered about, ever so artfully, are locally sourced armchairs, enclaves of sofas and vintage lighting. Live music on most nights resounds from the adjoining stage hall, Three Keys. Furthering the clubhouse vibe, sun-and-fun worshippers—heading down from the rooftop pool and bar—spill from elevators toting towels and suits. [600 Carondelet St., acehotel.com](http://600CarondeletSt.com/acehotel.com)

3. The Beekman, New York City

How could a place this magnificent be hidden for so long? That's what you'll ask when you enter the Bar Room at the Fowler & Wells restaurant and look up at the Victorian-era atrium of the Beekman hotel, which opened last summer after remaining vacant and in disrepair for 15 years. You'd want to drink there no matter what they served, but fortunately the long list of classic cocktails—like the Rob Roy and Pisco Punch—are made with deft skill. [5 Beekman St., thebeekman.com](http://5BeekmanSt.com/thebeekman.com)



4. The William Vale, New York City

This 23-story glass skyscraper in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, stands in stark contrast to the surrounding converted factories and warehouses, and its 22nd-floor bar, Westlight, is just as distinctive. Don't expect reclaimed wood or Edison bulb lighting here. Instead, electric-blue and mustard-yellow velvet chairs and a polished stone bar anchor the vast room. The best part: 360-degree views of Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens, not to mention bites from chef Andrew Carmellini. [111 N. 12th St., thewilliamvale.com](http://111N.12thSt.com/thewilliamvale.com)

5. Hotel Pulitzer, Amsterdam

It isn't easy to reinvent an iconic property like Amsterdam's Hotel

Pulitzer (est. 1971), but after last year's extensive redesign, the canal-side hotel, a complex of 25 interlinked historic townhouses, is now one of the most stylish places for both visitors and locals to meet. At the Pulitzer's Bar, housed in two Art-Deco-styled rooms, you'll find cozy nooks and young bartenders in bow ties serving excellent cocktails like pineapple old-fashioneds. [375-331 Pinsengracht; pulitzerbar.nl](http://375-331Pinsengracht.com/pulitzerbar.nl)

6. The Berkeley, London

In swill Knightsbridge, just across the road from Hyde Park, the venerable Berkeley's latest endeavor, the Blue Bar, seems taken straight out of a Bond film (Daniel Craig's versions), with a steely color palette and ultracool modern furniture. Skip the too-predictable dry Martini in favor of a whiskey from the exhaustive list or the "Picasso," made with Tanqueray, cucumber, spicy mint lemon curd and Pimm's and soda. [Wilton Place, theberkeley.co.uk](http://WiltonPlace.com/theberkeley.co.uk)

7. Ritz, Paris

Of all the places to get a drink at the Ritz, which recently reopened after a four-year renovation, the one best-loved by Parisians themselves is the Bar Hemingway, a clubby oak-paneled den in the very back of the hotel. This studiously masculine little place—with tufted chocolate-leather banquettes and tub chairs—is named, bien sur, after the studiously macho American novelist, who spent many hours tipping and chatting with other well-known elbow-benders such as Cole Porter, Gary Cooper and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Bartender Colin Fields has a serious gift for both mixing and inventing cocktails. [15 Place Vendôme, ritzparis.com](http://15PlaceVendôme.com/ritzparis.com)

8. Four Seasons Hotel Abu Dhabi at Al Maryah Island, United Arab Emirates

The concept of a cocktail lounge with Zsa Zsa Gabor as a theme may seem delightfully inspired or horribly kitschy, depending on your point of view, but somehow, it works at the Zsa Zsa Lounge. The old-Hollywood quotient is embodied in lacquered black-and-white floors and a covered balcony with views of the Abu Dhabi skyline—an ideal spot for a "Glamorous Life" sundowner (orange juice, cranberry juice and champagne that together create a lovely shade of pink). —Alexander Lobrano, Steve Garbarino, Kevin Sintumuang, Gisela Williams, John Wogon

handsomely situated—in an atrium that's become an Instagram celebrity in its own right—the cocktails are stellar.

While a great hotel bar can make you feel like a local when you're on the road, it can have a kind of inverse effect for locals. The Bar Room renews my sense of wonderment about the place I live. Then again, hotel guests of the Beekman have a distinct advantage over the locals: They enjoy preferential treatment at the oft-packed Bar Room (getting

famous for its over-the-top conceptual cocktails—one, known as the Chameleon Crystals, came in a wooden box that emitted a white light when you opened it. The drinks are delicious but less than ideal for folks who just want a Heineken at the end of a long day.

Still, when travelers find their ideal hotel bar, that hotel becomes their home-away-from-home. After a nightcap comes the best part—they just need to take an elevator ride to bed.

Where Scribes Imbibed

The Ritz bar in Paris had Hemingway and Fitzgerald but that wasn't the only watering hole favored by the leading litterateurs—and tipplers—of the last century

Carousel Bar at the Hotel Monteleone, New Orleans

Since 1949, the Carousel Bar has been revolving (literally) in the French Quarter's elegant Monteleone. Its circus-themed carousel top and hand-painted wooden chairs charmed regulars like Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Truman Capote and Eudora Welty. [214 Royal St., hotelmonteleone.com](http://214RoyalSt.com/hotelmonteleone.com)

Bemelmans' Bar, the Carlyle, New York

Opened in 1947, the bar has long telegraphed urban sophistication with its espresso leather banquettes, 24K gold-leaf ceiling and live jazz piano. The cartoon murals by Ludwig Bemelmans, creator of the beloved Madeline books, add whimsy. Bemelmans painted the murals in exchange for 18 months free accommodations. [35 East 76th St., rosewoodhotels.com](http://35East76thSt.com/rosewoodhotels.com)

Blue Bar, Algonquin Hotel, New York

Home of Dorothy Parker's legendary "Round Table," the dining room next to the moodily lit Blue Bar was a haunt of the city's 1920s literary set—including George Kaufman and Robert Sherwood, Alexander Woollcott and Edna Ferber. Legend has it Harold Ross used his poker winnings at the Algonquin to help finance the New Yorker. [59 W. 44th St., algonquinhotel.com](http://59W.44thSt.com/algonquinhotel.com)

The Orient Bar, Pera Palace Hotel, Istanbul

Built in 1895 to welcome disembarking Orient Express passengers, the grand Pera drew a long line of writers to its crimson-velvet armchairs. John Dos Passos drank here, and so did Nobel laureates Ernest Hemingway and Knut Hamsun. Agatha Christie and Graham Greene wrote "Murder on the Orient Express" and "Stamboul Train" at the Pera, respectively. [52 Mesrutiyet Caddesi, jumeirah.com](http://52MesrutiyetCaddesi.com/jumeirah.com)

1912 Museo Bar, Westin Palace, Madrid

Since 1912, the luxurious, club-style, leather-upholstered Museo Bar has served the likes of Salvador Dalí, Federico García Lorca, and "Don Ernesto" Hemingway. [7 Plaza de las Cortes, westinpalacemadrid.com/en](http://7PlazaDeLasCortes.com/westinpalacemadrid.com/en)

Long Bar at the Raffles, Singapore

The pub-like bar was a landmark source of inspiration for Noel Coward, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling and birthplace of the fruity, pink Singapore Sling—which allowed prim colonial ladies to imbibe undetected. It's closed for renovations until next year, but the hotel's 1896 Bar & Billiards Room is still slinging Singapore Slings. [7 Beach Rd., raffles.com](http://7BeachRd.com/raffles.com) —Rhonda Garelick



The Bar Room at the Beekman in New York.