

Razing the (Ultra) Bar



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A relative of mine recently visited Las Vegas from the East Coast. Naturally, she called me for recommendations of some cool places to eat and drink. The list of restaurants came naturally, with names of celebrity chefs, Las Vegas institutions and Las Vegas gems quickly rushing to the top of the list. Bars, however, were a different story ...

Maybe I should have referred her to Tabu, the new "ultra-lounge" at the MGM Grand. Perhaps she should visit Shadow, the new "destination lounge" at Caesars Palace. Maybe the Venetian's "sophisticated and sultry" V-Bar fits the bill. But I can't forget the "ultra-hip" Ghost Bar at the Palms, Las Vegas' "sultriest new resort."

But what if she really enjoys a good martini? Well, then, she simply must go to Red Square at Mandalay Bay. Or maybe she should try the Terrazza Lounge at Caesars ... but don't forget the Petrossian Bar at Bellagio.

If she likes mixed drinks and little umbrellas, she should try Nectar, the Venus Tiki Bar, Breeze Bar, Caramel or even the Big

Apple Bar. If she likes to dance, she could try Studio 54, Venus, Rain in the Desert, Whiskey Bar, Fontana Bar, Cleopatra's Barge or Rumjungle.

What does she like: Irish pubs? Rum bars? Tequila bars? Casual bars? Topless bars? Pick-up bars? Oxygen bars? Crowbars? Prison Bars? Candy bars? Why did she have to ask such a difficult question? Doesn't she know I have work to do?

What's the point of my story? Keep reading.

Walk through the front doors of virtually any modern hotel and casino in Las Vegas and you will be presented a plethora of beverage fulfillment options. With each option specifically engineered to satisfy your current desire, you have a world of opportunity at each property, whether it's the Bellagio, Caesars Palace, Venetian or MGM Grand. But with so many options lies a dilemma: What if I don't know what I want. Even worse, what if, when I decide what I want, my date wants something different? She won't go to the Irish pub -- I won't go to the ultra-hip, chic, sexy, sultry, indulgent lounge.

Generally speaking, though, I DO know what I want. I may be so bold as to say that I believe that what I want may be reflective of what John Q. Public wants. I want fresh, good, consistent beverages at reasonable prices, served by NORMAL human beings with a pleasant demeanor. I want comfortable surroundings in a relaxed environment. I want an establishment that is more general in nature than, say, a martini bar.

I also have a handle on what I don't want in a bar. I don't want to be intimidated by a server who is so attractive and stand-offish that I am afraid to order anything that may be considered less than "ultra-chic." I don't want to be told that a bar is cool. In my opinion, if you have to tell me you are cool, you aren't.

With virtually all Strip properties attempting to out-do each other's "ultra-bars", they have, in my opinion, made themselves "ultra-uncool" and "ultra-unoriginal." I would prefer not to have to tell my share of Las Vegas visitors to flip a coin to determine which "ultra-sultry" property to visit, and then flip another coin to determine which "ultra-chic" bar to patronize.

Maybe I'll just send them to a good local bar with nice employees and consistent service. After all, there is a reason the Hard Rock Hotel's bars are perpetually cool. Even the Double Down Saloon, an infamous hole-in-the-wall tavern, has its loyal followers. The loyalty and perpetual, Forz-like coolness of these bars are not because of their proclamation of being "ultra" anything. They are just cool.

Or ... maybe I just don't (ultra) get it.