

NOTABLE EDIBLES



PEDRO'S PALACE

The complete tale of Tooker Alley—the beautiful new Prospect Heights bar on Washington Avenue—isn't the easiest thing to explain, given that it includes an early-20th-century Chicago social movement, labor union memorabilia, hobo glyphs, a Salt Lake City cocktail glass designer named Dorothy Thorpe, a historical martini menu and a roster of cheap beers and shots.

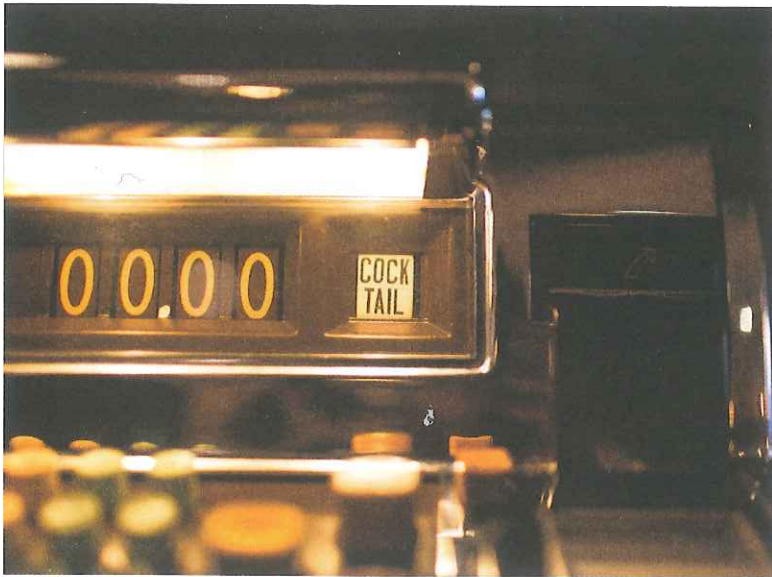
Which is fitting, because the man behind the bar isn't so simple either. That's Del Pedro—he'll be the 50-something goateed guy in a tiny tie, should you go—a 30-year scion of the city's drinking scene whose first bartending gig was pouring Rock and Rye for day drinkers in an Uptown dive. The Bahamian-born bartender grew up along with the Gotham mixology scene, eventually perfecting the forward-thinking cocktail menu at the beloved West Village restaurant Grange Hall, which closed in 2004, and working as one

of the most revered barkeeps at the justifiably famous Pegu Club on Houston Street.

But Pedro, a Bed-Stuy resident, doesn't just make a mean drink. He's also a quick-witted history buff capable of waxing sardonically poetic about everything from old-school punk rock to old-school politics, the latter of which inspired Tooker Alley.

The name was taken from the address of a Prohibition-era Chicago social-movement-cum-salon called the Dil Pickle Club. Founded by a labor organizer and welcoming to everyone—

Raising the Bar. Del Pedro, a 30-year scion of the city's drinks scene, has finally opened his own place. Prospect Heights drinkers can choose from custom cocktails or unassuming bottles of Bud.



Casa del Del. Drinks are served in elegant old glasses Pedro's been collecting for decades.

African-Americans, women, writers like Sherwood Anderson, even hobos—the club was perhaps one of the most forward-thinking groups, Pedro will tell you, of all time.

He seeks to channel their spirit in Tooker Alley, which he opened with the help of partner Cheryl Brown (a food editor from Prospect Heights) and designer Ashley Myers, who translated his request for a marriage of preindustrial (wood) and postindustrial (metal) into touches like wooden-topped stools with hand-cranked metal shafts.

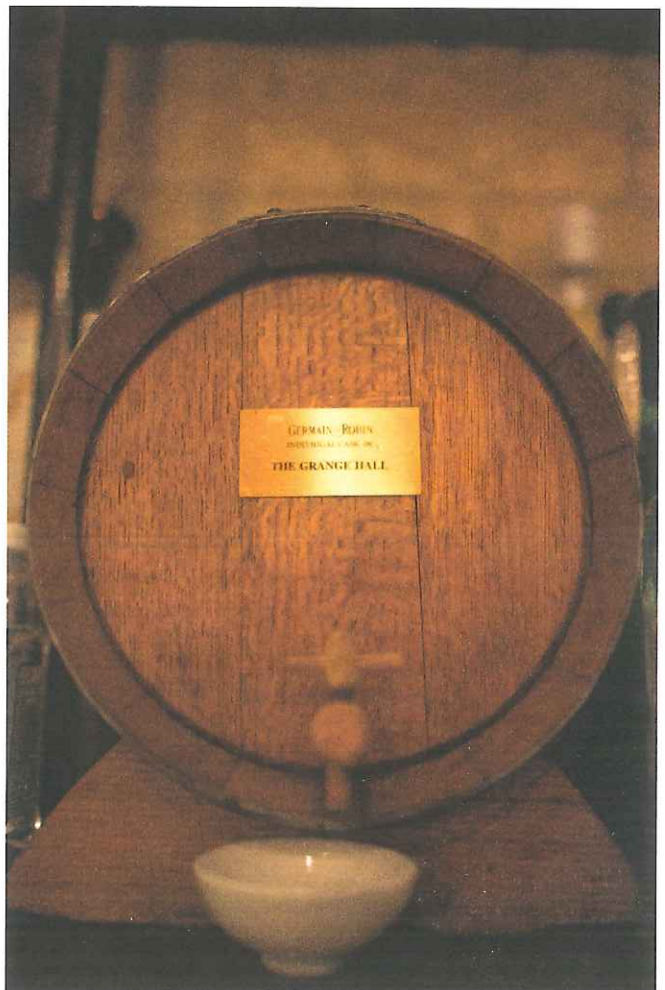
Pedro plans to host salon-like roundtables for folks from neighborhood groups and beyond. To encourage all comers, he's kept the picture windows free of the heavy curtains most cocktail lounges hang, and while many patrons will be lured by Pedro's first-class drinks, like the Woody Guthrie—demerara rum, pear eau de vie, lemon, ginger beer and apple cider for \$11—he also sells Budweiser longnecks for \$5. Whether you order that custom cocktail, draft beer or tap water, it will be served in one of dozens of elegant antique cocktail glasses Pedro's been collecting for years.

Indeed his personal stash of artifacts is all over Tooker Alley: There's a Brobdingnagian photo of union workers organizing in Union Square, a little lightbox of slides showing industrial jobs (dairymen, women in textile mill), an old whiskey barrel rescued from Grange Hall and a stunning 1942 cash register Pedro bought off a guy in Akron.

In other words, despite its political place name, the place is pure Pedro. "If they don't like Tooker Alley," a friend recently joked, "then Del, they don't like *you*."

Something tells us he's got nothing to worry about.

—Rachel Wharton



Photographs: Vicky Wasik