



Esquire

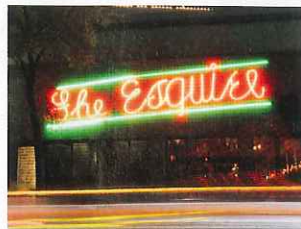
the **BEST BARS** *in*
AMERICA 2013

VOL. 8

OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION, ONCE AGAIN GUIDED BY ESQUIRE'S FAVORITE DRINKING PARTNER AND THE WORLD'S FOREMOST COCKTAIL HISTORIAN, DAVID WONDRIK. IT'S A TRICKY TIME FOR BARS: ARE THEY PLACES TO ESCAPE REALITY, OR ARE THEY PLACES TO MARVEL AT HOW A DRINK GETS MADE? SO, AS WELL AS ADDING TO OUR EVER-GROWING LIST, WE ASSESS THE STATE OF THINGS: THE BARS, THE BARTENDERS, THE DRINKERS. DRINKING ITSELF.

▶ else at this very dark, clubby bar is even remotely whimsical. Williams & Graham is a love letter to the old saloon, but one conceived by a third-generation bartender who knows the difference between playing bartender

and really tending bar. Once past the bookcase, there is no pretension here. Just serious cocktails and a way of making time slip away. In other words, a bar. *3160 Tejon Street; 303-997-8886 (Call for a reservation.)*



The Esquire Tavern

SAN ANTONIO

You're having: a tequila old-fashioned

It's the same sad old story: An ancient local dive goes along for decades, a place for us drinking, talking, eating, dancing, cursing, hooking, brawling, spitting, kicking, and suffering humans to forget our old troubles and sometimes get into new ones. It ain't fancy—it ain't even clean. But it's cheap, and it's always, always there. Then some sharpshooter comes along, buys the building, scrubs the place within an inch of its life—"restoring" it—and puts in a chef and a squad of sleeve-gartered mixologists in place of the tamale lady and the crusty old shot-pourers and beer-slingers, and then everything costs double what it did before and the place is full of douchebags. Well, not quite. When Chris Hill, the sharpshooter in question, bought the Esquire Tavern in 2008, it had been shuttered for two years, dragged down by time. Rather than gut it, he restored it, giving it a second shot. There's still the little terrace out on the River Walk, the funky wallpaper (it had to be re-created), the dark wooden booths (mostly rebuilt), and the 100-foot stand-up bar. You can still get a bottle of beer for four dollars, a pint for five, and an impeccably made classic cocktail for nine: more than anything cost at the old Esquire but hardly extortionate. What's more, despite the scrubbing and the painting and the modernization, the Esquire still feels old—still feels like a place where life has been lived. And while I'll concede that everyone's perception of douchebaggery is different, I didn't find many examples at the Esquire. *155 East Commerce Street; 210-222-2521* ▶

N.Y.C.: AN UPDATE



Tooker Alley

AS GOES DRINKING IN NEW YORK, SO GOES DRINKING IN AMERICA. HERE, AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CITY'S FIVE MOST INTERESTING NEW BARS.

By DAVID WONDRICH

CS **I**t is in the United States that the cocktail has reached the height of its popularity, and it is in New York that it has attained the pinnacle of its perfection." So said *The New York Herald* 96 years ago, and so must we maintain today. Indeed, there are so many excellent cocktail bars opening in New York every year, we could fill up our pages just with them. To leave space for everyone else, we've squeezed our favorite new Gotham bars into one entry this year. That doesn't mean we love them any less. (Besides, New Yorkers are used to hanging out in a crowd.)

POURING RIBBONS, in a rather unlikely upstairs space in the deep East Village, is a paradise for the unashamed cocktail geek: spectacularly sophisticated, adventurous modern drinks in the classic style; rare spirits (think bottles of Chartreuse from the 1950s); excellent, informed service.

BOOKER AND DAX, also in the East Village, harnesses the power of lab science in the interest of intoxication, deploying processes such as pressure infusion, vacuum distillation, centrifuge separation, clarification (for citrus juices), and a whole arsenal of other tricks, including a spectacular fire wand for setting things on fire. Despite all that, it's still a regular bar, with drinks that actually taste good, which is not always the case at the weirder reaches of mixology).

Then there's the **BEAGLE**, our third East Village bar. Trim, neat, and exceptionally friendly, this well-liked establishment has a small but useful dinner menu, a reasonably priced wine list with an excellent array of sherries, and—the reason it's here—unpretentious, good-humored, and highly skilled bartenders who turn out a mix of underexposed cocktails from the classic era and elegant low-key originals, such as the Haitian Divorce, a cunningly simple mix of old rum, mezcal, sherry, and bitters.

Even more low-key is **TOOKER ALLEY**, in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, which is comfortable, restrained, and quietly eccentric. Jazz in the background, a few excellent cocktails (buried in a menu book that digresses frequently to teach you about hobo symbols and the like), and Del Pedro behind the bar. Pedro, who co-owns the place, is one of the pioneers of the cocktail revival and was mixing excellent cocktails when most of today's hot mixologists were in grade school.

Then there's the **DEAD RABBIT GROCERY AND GROG**, situated in a 185-year-old building at the southern tip of Manhattan. The Dead Rabbit is not low-key; it's insane—so geeky and so history-obsessed that by all rights it should be an impossible, insufferable place to drink. Instead it's glorious. Sure, there's a wait to get into the elegant Parlor upstairs, a picture-perfect gentleman's bar with bartenders who are quick-draw masters of a vast menu of delightful interpretations of 19th-century cocktails, cups, punches, juleps, sangarees, toddies, and just about every other kind of drink known to Victorian mixology. But the place you wait is the Taproom downstairs, which, though narrow and thus often crowded, is nonetheless a fine bar in its own right, a place to get a perfect pint of Guinness, a shot of one of the many rare Irish whiskeys stocked, or even a glass of punch like you get upstairs. And there are oysters. *The New York Herald* would have loved the place.

Pouring Ribbons: 225 Avenue B; 917-656-6788
You're having: depends on where you fall on the cocktail grid

Booker and Dax: 207 Second Avenue; 212-254-3500

You're having: a Chartrouth
The Beagle: 162 Avenue A; 212-228-6900

You're having: a Haitian Divorce

Tooker Alley: 793 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn; 347-955-4743

You're having: a Hobo Julep
The Dead Rabbit Grocery and Grog: 30 Water Street; 646-422-7906

You're having: a Tween Deck Cup