

# THE DC 2015 BAR GUIDE

MADISON BARS. MADISON BARS. MADISON BARS.

WALK AROUND CAMPUS, UP AND DOWN STATE STREET, AROUND THE CAPITOL SQUARE AND YOU'LL SEE: MADISON HAS NO SHORTAGE OF LOCAL BARS TO VISIT. HOWEVER, ALL THESE OPTIONS CAN BE A LITTLE OVERWHELMING. SO MANY DRINKS, SO LITTLE TIME, WE GET IT. AND WE FOUND YOUR SAVING GRACE.

WELCOME TO THE DAILY CARDINAL 2015 BAR GUIDE. HERE, YOU'LL FIND SOME OF OUR FAVORITE STOPS TO FREQUENT IN THE NEARBY CAMPUS VICINITY. CHECK IT OUT, USE IT AS A ROAD MAP, AND START YOUR NIGHTLIFE JOURNEY AROUND MADISON. HEY, MAYBE YOU'LL FIND A NEW FAVORITE ALONG THE WAY TO ADD TO OUR LIST.

## 1. THE PLAZA TAVERN

Besides your proof of age, the required material for this bar is cigarettes, facial hair and something that "used to be cool before too many people started wearing it." Yes, you may know Plaza for their famous Plaza burger, routinely rated one of the finest bar burgers in Madison, but have you experienced their bar scene? With various neon signs coupled with

murals of north woods hunting scenes, this unusual decor endears the regulars and intrigues the newcomers. If pool or darts aren't your game, cult classics like "Hook" or "Alien vs. Predator" are often playing in the background.

When the slam poetry sessions and coffee shops kick close, you can follow the sound of music you've never heard

before and the smell of freshly thrifted crewnecks to Plaza on Thursday evenings, where Long Island ice teas are \$2.50 for a single and \$5 for a double, and their chemistry errs on the strong side. Not your scene? That's fine, we will continue jamming to 90's alt rock. We didn't want you here anyway.

—Eli Radtke



KAITLYN VETO/THE DAILY CARDINAL

## 2. NATT SPIL

Right off the Capitol square and steps away from The Great Dane, a small purple brick building with no outdoor signage is home to one of Madison's best-kept secrets: Natt Spil. This dimly lit restaurant is not your average Madison bar. Inside, the small, cozy interior compresses a bar, intimate seating and a kitchen into one space. From the exposed brick walls to the menu and cocktails, everything screams

an alternative bohemian vibe. Unlike some of the Madison-area bars that feature watered-down, sloppy cocktails, Natt Spil's comprehensive cocktail list does not disappoint. They offer a variety of classics with a special twist, including their namesake "Natt Spil" cocktail. The menu features a strange but delightful mix of Asian delicacies with wood-fired oven pizza.

The "Shu Mai," a plate featur-

ing three shrimp, sausage and water chestnut dumplings is one of the most delicious and flavorful items from the menu. But you really can't go wrong with Natt Spil's "Three Cup Chicken," a glazed chicken dish with garlic and ginger rice and a refreshing tomato and cucumber salad. After dinner, this restaurant transforms into a chic nightclub complete with local DJs and a relaxed crowd of young Madison residents. For anyone looking for a low-key restaurant with a diverse menu of savory cuisine, Natt Spil is the best spot around.

—Jennifer Anderson

## 3. THE TIPSYP COW

The Tippy Cow, located on King Street off the Capitol Square, is a nod to all things Wisconsin. The vibes are much like a living room; twinkle lights, mismatched lamps and dimly lit sconces provide the perfect mood for laid-back drinks and conversation and copious amounts of cheese curds with your closest friends. The environment is eternally autumnal, no matter

what time of year you visit. The bar is large enough to fit a good crowd, but small enough to remain cozy.

As for the draft beer selection: it's killer and always changing. Being a Wisconsin bar, they will always have Spotted Cow a plenty, but there are many other little known and sometimes difficult to pronounce beers that are definitely worth a taste. There is a set and

lengthy list of draft beers, along with a chalkboard full of daily beer specials.

Come for the drinks, stay for the food.

Most importantly: the cheese curds. Don't even get me started. Fried to a perfect golden brown and oozing that wondrous cheddar cheese, these curds are a force of nature and something to be reckoned with. They go perfectly aside a Spotted Cow or any other of the plethora of options.

—Kerry Huth

## 4. MERCHANT

Imagine the earthy smell of an old sawmill filling your head while a strong, shirtless man grabs you by the waist and hands you a glass of liquor so exquisite that you, too, want to stay in the woods forever. This is but one hint of adventure that you may taste at Merchant: Each drink brings with it a story, sometimes one that the bartender, who is almost always a charming, bearded man, will tell you while smashing ice in his bare hands. Merchant is the perfect bar to bring your friends to show them how classy you are, or to bring a date while vaguely hinting

that you fit in with the dashing, young professional crowd that usually fills up the bar. And for those indecisive, fledgling drinkers, Merchant offers a bartender's choice that will almost always result in your new favorite drink. The mood of the bar changes swiftly at 10 p.m. on weekends with live music, an open dance floor and a large crowd to share your absinthe-fueled dance moves with. If you aren't sold already, the cheese curds are delightful and are the only things that rival the beauty of the drinks.

—Emmett Mottl



THOMAS YONASH/THE DAILY CARDINAL

## 5. SAKE LOUNGE

You've probably never heard of it, or seen it, unless someone asks if you want to do a sake bomb.

A small crawl space above the Osaka House on State Street, the Sake Lounge is the perfect pregame or the night's final destination for you and 48 of your closest friends—how they determined the occupancy limit to be 49 persons is beyond me.

While the bathrooms in the basement, which are truly an experience, may be a cause for

concern, the constant sound of "sake" chants and pounding fists on the counter makes this little gem feel like everyone's living room.

And sometimes it's the simple things in life, like balancing a shot of rice wine on two chopsticks above a pint of beer and making the shot fall into the beer by the sheer force of your fists on an already beer-soaked counter.

SAKE. SAKE. SAKE. SAKE.  
—Tommy Yonash



THOMAS YONASH/THE DAILY CARDINAL

## 6. THE KOLLEGE KLUB

After attending basement parties throughout my first three years of college, turning 21 gave me the (legal) right of passage to frequent a renowned, underground University of Wisconsin-Madison hotspot: The Kollege Klub. The 63-year-old KK, in its subterranean glory, is a microcosm of campus culture and swag. Memorabilia, carvings and

markings and various Badger-themed signs dot the room, including glass panels above the bar featuring various Big Ten universities.

While waiting in a slow line during gamedays or a night out can be a pain, the shared experience of UW cultural history is a perfect stop for visiting alumni or family. UW athletes have been known to

frequent the bar occasionally—I ran into Frank Kaminsky there last year—and with moderately priced drinks, it's not a spear through your wallet.

If you can manage the crowd, and the return to drinking in a basement again, the KK is a fantastic haunt for students and alumni alike.

—Conor Murphy

## 7. TIKI SHACK

You know that place off Ocean Avenue, where Yellowcard's lead singer used to sit and talk with you? Well, it took me five years past 16 to figure out exactly where that is, but I can confidently say I have finally located it. Complete with plastic palm trees, inflatable marine life and always blasting early 2000s music, Tiki Shack will have you drinking fruity drinks, singing middle-school

tunes loud and proud and staying up all night.

As the nights grow longer and colder, Tiki Shack is a State Street oasis that allows us to live out our sunny surfer dreams of white sands and glistening waters in the middle of frigid Wisconsin (that's what they mean when they say dive bar, right?).

Tiki also doesn't disappoint those of us who like a little mys-

tery in our lives. In exchange for \$2 and a lot of courage, anyone can try their hand at the bar's famous—or, for some, infamous—Mystery Beer Roulette. Featuring more than 30 obscure brews, this unassuming vending machine is sure to open up your horizons, whether you happen upon a Chai Tea Porter or a cold can of Clear Creek Ice. Unless you're the lucky bastard who somehow always gets Redd's Apple Ale—in which case, what are you and how can I be you?

—Adelina Yankova



THOMAS YONASH/THE DAILY CARDINAL

## 8. IVORY ROOM PIANO BAR

The Ivory Room Piano Bar, located on the 100 block of West Mifflin Street, draws a crowd of all ages every night it's open, with shows running from Tuesday to Saturday, and its star being the featured piano and those that play it.

Each night, the piano players rise to an impossible challenge, impressively matching each song request they receive with music, ranging from Bobby Darin's "Beyond the Sea" to Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby Got Back."

But make sure you throw a little money into their pot with your song request. Even if they

don't know it, they'll give you some store credit and call you out to request another tune.

Is it your birthday? Fear not, tell the bartender and they'll make sure you get the dubious seat of honor on the stage, sitting on the pianos while the players improvise a song in celebration.

But what makes the Piano Bar is the chemistry between the audience and the players. There's nothing like singing "Build Me Up Buttercup" with a fancy drink in hand accompanied by duelling pianos.

—Irene Burski



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## 9. RED SHED

How would you describe the Red Shed in a few words? "You could use the word homey. Not homey, homely." "Lots of wood." "Dimly lit." "Cowboys?" "An unassuming bar." "Long Island iced tea." "Pumpkin-sized mason

jars." "There's a wagon on the roof." "Sticky."

Red Shed is a charming dimple of weirdness on the face of Madison's bar scene. There actually is a red and white-striped covered wagon on the roof, in case you're looking for a vacation. It's also actually red—seriously, I think they use red light-bulbs—and almost actually is a shed. Red Shed is celebrated for cheap Long Island iced teas in mason jars you could swim in, a pool table in the back, Nerds shots that taste exactly like the candy

and a sense of fun that's hard to put your finger on. I've heard nights at Red Shed compared to entering a black hole: Upon walking in you're transported out of Madison to some bar in a small town of the '90s. You only meet strangers, and they all know each other. There's darts, but you don't play darts. You drink, but you don't feel drunk. You plop yourself down in a high-backed wood-veneer booth and a minute later, it's bar close. You board the covered wagon and hit the trail home.

—Justine Jones

## THREE-WORD BAR REVIEW

1. YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND
2. PURPLE BRICK BUILDING
3. AM I HOME?
4. SUPER CLASSY DRINKS
5. SAKE SAKE SAKE
6. TOTAL FRAT MOVE
7. SURF'S UP, DUDE
8. CROWD-SOURCED KARAOKE
9. THE OREGON TRAIL