

RAISING THE BAR: SECOND ROUND

Tired of Hollywood door lines that lead to... *what?* That exhibitionist old queen Paris Hilton doing her strip routine again? Bumping into a famous twin dressed like a medieval lawn gnome? Tommy Lee celebrity-guest “spinning?” Okay, it all has its degrees of cheap laughs. But truth is, L.A. blows New York away when it comes to its alternative bar and nightlife scenes (*strip mall locales included*).

BY **STINSON CARTER**

You just have to look a little, people. (Eagle Rock is, uh, that way!) Here, a bevy of watering holes—new and classic—where a *TMZ* camera won't be closing in on your privacy, or your latest 15 minutes of infamy. Now someone close that door! Here comes Stavros, in search of bottle service and trust fund babes! Noooooooo!

THE EDISON (108 W. 2nd St., 213.613.0000, edisondowntown.com) Downtown is still a tough sell to a designated driver. But if you have a reason to go there—jury duty, long-delayed first visit to friend's loft, etcetera—don't head back to your comfort zone without checking out The Edison: A well-funded experiment with alcohol, distressed surfaces, and visible filament. Take a date to a pair of leather club chairs in a candlelit boiler. (Just pretend you don't notice the busboys hustling around you in suspenders and newsboy caps.)

BAR 107 (107 W. 4th St., 213.625.7382, myspace.com/bar107) Bar 107 is a quick save if “somebody” forgot about The Edison's strict dress code, just two no-man's-land blocks away. This place is what you'd imagine Pee Wee Herman's estate sale to look like: a coin-operated Love-O-Meter, taxidermied big game (sporting Ray-Bans and Schlitz hats), and a cigar store Indian guarding the door.

SEVEN GRAND (515 W. 7th St., 213.614.0737, sevengrand.la) For taxidermy and alcohol taken seriously, climb the Ralph Lauren-plaid stairs inside, and drink a mint julep from a silver goblet in a bar modeled after James Joyce's former Dublin haunt: The Stag's Head. This place has seen more whisky than an Irish liver, and hosts regular “tastings” with visiting liquor dignitaries, distillery reps, and such.



LITTLE CAVE BAR (5922 N. Figueroa St., 323.255.6871, myspace.com/thelittlecave) Faux bat guano aside, this bar in Highland Park feels like a Hollywood haunt ten years ago—its darkness preserved as much by the matte-black interior as it is by the absence of glowing text-message screens. (For those of you without serious spelunking experience, “guano” is the men’s bathroom and “guana” is the women’s.)



THE CHALET (1630 Colorado Blvd., 323.258.8800) It is arguably Eagle Rock’s only nightlife destination, and well worth breaking out the Thomas Guide. The wood beam and mortared stone bar is a perfect spot for a cheap well drink and plenty of booth or banquette real estate to enjoy it.

THE GRIFFIN (3000 Los Feliz Blvd., 323.644.0444) If you can get over the fact that the place is across the street from Costco, the brick-buttressed ceiling, chain-hung iron chandeliers (Cher home catalogue?), and caged patio give it a strangely pleasant British dungeon feel. It’s a better setting than it is a scene, so import your own bar dressing on a weeknight and you’ll likely have not just a booth but even a fireplace to yourselves.



MIXVILLE BAR (2838 Rowena Ave., 323.666.2000, edendalegrill.com) The bar at the Edendale Grill occupies the fire-truck bay of a 1920s Silverlake station. Order a classic cocktail at the dark oak bar under the tin tile ceiling, and then wander back to the B&W photo booth to give someone an excuse to sit in your lap.



JUMBO’S CLOWN ROOM (5153 Hollywood Blvd., 323.666.1187, jumbos.com) Jumbo’s is a burlesque parlor as envisioned by Fellini rather than Larry Flynt. The dancers’ names go up on a neon blackboard every night like dinner specials at one of the thousand surrounding Thai restaurants. Between dance numbers, the pastied ladies are not afraid to plant their Rubenesque rumps on a stool next to yours and tell you about their boyfriends’ screenplays.

YE RUSTIC INN (1831 Hillhurst Ave., 323.662.5757) Here you can come watch the ball game without digging up athletic wear. Or order chicken wings without staring down a waitress’s midriff. Balancing this fringe sports bar crowd are tables of girls emitting a constant strobe of Coolpix flashes, having chosen this place as the ironic “dive bar” location for a 21st birthday party.

THE DRAWING ROOM (1800 Hillhurst Ave., 323.665.0135) “I don’t go to Rustic, I go to Drawing Room,” you’ll sometimes hear, dripping with grittier-than-thou superiority. Though they have a point, The Drawing Room does have a few more professional drunks, and is certainly less sports-focused. On Sunday nights, you can still find Karaoke for spillers, instead of for people with dashed vocalist dreams (as per usual in Hollywood).

CRANE’S HOLLYWOOD TAVERN (1611 N. El Centro Ave., 323.467.6600, myspace.com/cranestavern) Crane’s has all the professionalism of a lemonade stand. Sometimes it’s hard to tell who works here and who’s just friendly enough with the staff to refill their own pitchers behind the bar. But

then again, that’s the beauty of the place. There’s live music most nights, and if it’s not good it’s at least sincere. And there’s a burger-and-hot dog buffet from time to time (and if that’s not good it’s at least free).

THE WOODS (1533 N. La Brea Ave., 323.876.6612) The former Lava Lounge now looks like an elfin gay bar... in a good way. There’s a fiber-optic “night sky” ceiling, cubist walls made of cedar blocks, and cross-cut trunk slab tables you can count the rings in if you get bored. When approaching its strip mall locale, follow the sign above the bar, not the crowd of smokers, or you may end up at the AA meeting a few doors down.

TINY’S K.O. (6377 Hollywood Blvd., 323.462.9777, tinysko.com) This crowded Hollywood punk/Goth/miscellaneous misfit bar is run by well-inked Suicide Girl bartenders who pound group shots at regular intervals. So don’t expect the tab-closing business to run all that smoothly if you catch them at the end of the shift. Just squeezing through the place from door to bar requires a fun game of social roulette.

LA POUBELLE (5907 Franklin Ave., 323.465.0807) This family-run Beachwood-strip brasserie is a perfect place to grab a wicker chair on the sidewalk, order a glass of Sancerre, and pick apart the passersby (some of whom are big-name Scientologists heading to the French-chateau-like “Celebrity Centre” just across the street). The French cuisine is best on a stomach full of booze, but Sunday’s half-price wine bottles make that easy to achieve.

O Bar (8279 Santa Monica Blvd., 323.822.3300, obarrestaurant.com) The name is a bit of a riddle. You have a sense that it's gay in nature, but don't know why. Is it "O" for orgasm? "O" for O-ring? O for... just, "Ohhhh?" Regardless, its interior is as slick as a Robertson boutique, and its kitchen churns out serious food. And, like the Abbey, it's the future of gay bars: A mingling of sexes and preferences that becomes increasingly difficult to nail down... so to speak.

BOARDNER'S (1652 N. Cherokee Ave., 323.462.9621, boardners.com) Boardner's is not a dumping ground for whoever wasn't on "The List" at nearby clubs, but packs in a crowd of regulars who keep a safe distance from the sparkly cocktail dress and black leather jacket set. To get a high-backed booth on a busy night, ask for menus whether you actually plan to eat or not.

THE POWERHOUSE (1714 N. Highland Ave., 323.463.9438) We find that there's something alluring about being a few steps away from the epicenter of Oscar night and swilling cheap (for Hollywood) drinks in the back alley "patio." Duck in on a frantic L.A. night and you just have a conversation you can actually hear.

YE COACH & HORSES (7617 W. Sunset Blvd., 323.867.6900) For a hasty retreat from the Sunset Strip, head to this very dark shotgun bar, a staple of Guitar Row (and our only Sunset pick), where you can order veggie samosas right to your booth from the Indian place next door. Be nice to the bartenders your first time around: They're probably close allies with everyone else in the bar. Jukebox is excellent if you like Guns N' Roses and the like (we do).

FORMOSA CAFE (7156 Santa Monica Blvd., 323.850.9050, formosacafe.com) Formosa is no longer where "they" go, and it certainly

didn't gain any caché when the Target went up next door. But the dining car bar is still the best place to finally wear that fedora your ex-girlfriend talked you into buying. Never underestimate a bar that's been around for over 50 years. Plus, you can sit in the same booth where Jean Harlow throws a drink in clean cop Guy Pearce's face in Curtis Hanson's now-classic neo-noir L.A. Confidential.

THE VILLAGE IDIOT (7383 Melrose Ave., 323.655.3331, villageidiotla.com) There's a giant black-and-white picture of cops in riot gear on the wall above the open kitchen. Ignore this, but note the high ceiling. You never know how cramped L.A. bars are until you come here. The food is adequate to good, the bar is very well stocked, and the vibe is Hollywood just back from a trip to New York: Belts and button-downs make an appearance, politics come up in conversation, and wine is ordered by grape instead of by color.

THE KIBITZ ROOM (419 N. Fairfax, 323.651.2030, canters.com/kibitzroom) If you're still waiting at The Dime after 20 minutes for the William Morris agent to leave the actress-bartender alone long enough for her to take your order, cross the street to the Kibitz Room, where drinks and good live music can be imbibed with logistical ease. The Wallflowers and Fiona Apple are among those who got their start playing this narrow, brown-boothed Canter's Deli afterthought.

THE OTHERROOM (1201 Abbot Kinney Blvd., 310.396.6230, theotherroom.com) The Otherroom is a beach bar without too many beach people. It makes up for only selling beer and wine by stocking brews and vintages you won't find anywhere else, and family-style tables make for easy introductions. Sunday afternoons here are full of Provençale Rosé and ocean breeze, and are a reason to take advantage of the easy Sunday traffic on the 10 Freeway.

BEECHWOOD (822 Washington Blvd., 310.448.8444, beechwoodrestaurant.com) Beechwood has a similar nouveau-shore crowd as The Otherroom. The addition of liquor, and a large outdoor patio, torques up the mingling, but the superheated cinderblocks at knee-level around the patio's fire pits can be treacherous after a few drinks.

THE ABBEY (692 N. Robertson Blvd., 310.289.8410, abbeyfoodandbar.com) What started out years ago as a gay coffee shop is now a neo-gothic megabar that gets a new exposed brick- and velvet-draped wing about every six months. It's more about straight people going to a gay bar than it is about being a gay bar. Straight men (read: actors) come for approval, straight women come to dance unmolested, and the rest of the crowd is made up of gays and lesbians who can tolerate them.

POLO LOUNGE (9641 Sunset Blvd., 310.276.2251, beverlyhillshotel.com) It got its name as the clubhouse for celebrity weekend polo players such as Will Rogers and Spencer Tracy. Marlene Dietrich single-handedly changed their "no slacks for ladies" rule, and Dr. Hunter S. Thompson was here drinking "Singapore Slings with Mescal on the side" when a dwarf brought him a pink telephone with the call that sent him off to Las Vegas, hence, thus, "Fear and Loathing." Taking over a plaid-clothed table on the patio and getting shamefully drunk and obnoxiously loud is highly recommended, just to take it back to its roots and spite the stuffiness accrued over the last few decades. Although we still do recommend wearing a green Lacoste sports jacket there, with gold gator-etched buttons, so they don't know what's coming to them.

