



Courtesy The Dewberry Charleston

CHARLESTON

15 Best Bars in Charleston

15 PHOTOS

by STEPHANIE BURT
May 1, 2018

10 min

Whether your thing is high-quality cocktails or a beer with harbor views, this city has you covered.



V

People often think of Charleston as a small Southern town, but when it comes to its nightlife, the city can compete on many levels—surprising visitors, and making their decisions about where to go that much harder. It's so common you barely even hear it, but the adage "there's something for everyone" applies. The bar at Husk, Charleston's venerated restaurant serving Sean Brock's new South vision on regional staples, is a destination in its own right for its own version of locally sourced, creative cocktails. Hip to the beer scene, Charleston breweries are well represented at the city's bars, from casual dives to sleek watering holes. Then, of course, there's no shortage of spots to sip a rosé from Provence with oysters on a patio. No matter your preferred choice, our list of the best bars in Charleston has something for you.





Courtesy NDG

BAR

The Bar at Husk →

\$\$\$

Dark and sexy, the inside of this bar feels a bit like a pirate ship, but not in a theme-park way. The downstairs is dominated by a long bar, and the exposed brick wall opposite it has some bar seating as well—but get ready to get cozy, because on the weekends, you can expect it to be packed wall to wall with thirsty diners. Of course, if you need more room, head upstairs or try to snag a table at the proper restaurant, Husk. You've heard about the burger, the bourbon collection, the balanced-yet-boozy cocktails, and you're finally here to experience it all.



Photo by Callie Cranford

BAR

Royal American →

\$

Stained glass, string lights, stickers, and a portrait of Ernest Tubbs. Dive bar, check. But wait ... a "No PBR, don't even ask" sign? That's the little clue that the Royal American is no regular dive bar, despite the fact that you aren't sure that latch on the bathroom stall ever really worked. There's a stage right beside the bar, a patio out front, a patio out to the side, dogs, and if you're lucky, the train conductor might just hold down the whistle as he passes by on tracks just a few feet from the building.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

BAR

The Cocktail Club →

It's Charleston architecture taken down to its brass tacks, literally, with framing of former room walls creating different spaces, crumbling brick fireplaces anchoring those rooms, roomy leather chairs and an underlit bar so tall there are ladders for the bartenders. Servers are dressed in little black dresses moving through the crowd, and you haven't even seen the rooftop bar yet.

WATCH THIS

The Largest Vintage Car Junkyard in the World



Courtesy Edmund's Oast

RESTAURANT

Edmund's Oast →

\$\$

You want beer? Edmund's Oast produces beer as well as showcases other offerings from outstanding producers, so there are more than 35 options on tap. More interested in wine? Then there plenty of options—leaning heavily on whites, rosé, and sparkling—that compliment the food, and most run \$12 to \$15 by the glass. Fancy a cocktail? Then enjoy one of the most inventive programs in the city, run by Jayce McConnell.

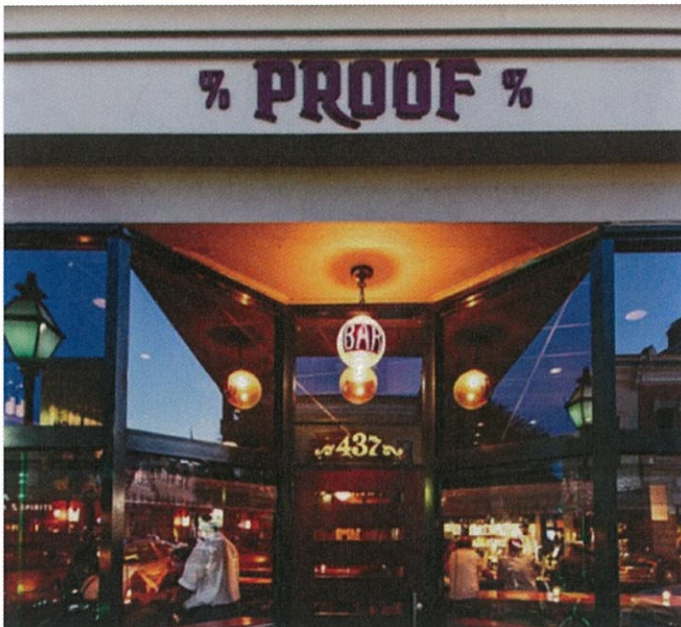




Photo by Andrew Cebulka

BAR

Proof →

\$\$

It's an unassuming entrance on King Street into a small place with dark wood, sunlight slanting in through front windows until finally succumbing and the night begins. There are small votives on the bar and surrounding tables, and the main light of the place emanates from the bottom-lit bar itself. An absinthe fountain sits prominently between guests and barkeeps and bottles crowd narrow shelves on the bar wall. There's a daily quote and some daily specials on a chalkboard, punctuated by the sound of bartenders hand-cracking ice.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

BAR

Vintage Lounge →

\$\$

This space was most formerly Torch, a dark nightclub, and Betsy Berry of B. Berry Interiors has transformed it into a light and elegant space that suggests a stylish European spot. One of the most striking elements of the space is the barrel ceiling, gilded in an uneven pattern and creating a soft glow that makes for great selfie light. The marble-topped bar extends down the length of the room, and a hidden gem of a courtyard/patio at the back in black and white and surrounded by green walls is classic-movie set beautiful.





Courtesy Graft Wine Shop & Bar

SHOP

Graft Wine Shop →

\$

Masculine, cool, and sleek, Graft is primarily a bottle shop where the owners like to hang out with their friends, but saddle up to the nine-seat bar, and you can be their friend, too. There is vinyl spinning, customers coming in to purchase wine for the evening, and some real conversations about terrior and tasting notes served on occasion. No pretension here. Graft just wants you to drink good juice.



≡ Vote Now →

ROAD HAST
Traveler

SUBSCRIBE 🔍



Courtesy The Living Room at the Dewberry

BAR

The Living Room at the Dewberry →

It's rare that a hotel bar in Charleston becomes a locals spot, but that's exactly what happened here. It really is, in many ways, the perfect post-event meet up spot (and there are a lot of events in Charleston, in case you are wondering), while at the same time a spot for guests of the hotel to start or end the evening.





Photo by Andrew Cebulka

BAR

Felix Cocktails et Cuisine →

\$5

Felix is most obviously channeling Paris, but that doesn't make it any less charming. A curved marble-topped bar is right near the door, lighting is soft and softly reflected in curved mirrors, vintage French posters are the art on the walls, and the seating is all soft leather in a charming and neutral camel brown. There's been some turnover behind the stick here, but the cocktail game is still strong here, anchored by the "Felix & Tonic," cognac and a locally-made tonic. French liquors, of course, dominate many of the recipes, but there are three cocktails on draft, two of which are rum, which firmly remembers that this is a Charleston bar after all and there are palmetto trees lining King Street. If you'd rather wine, then there are plenty of choices starting at \$8.



Photo by Andrew Cebulka

BAR

The Gin Joint →

\$

One of the few places on East Bay that's as frequented by locals as tourists, the speakeasy-themed Gin Joint has become a Charleston staple for after-work cocktails and people-watching. The menu changes with the seasons, but opt for the bartender's choice, where you pick two flavorful descriptors (tart, citrusy, refreshing) and then let the bow-tie clad bartender whip up a specialty with the assortment of fresh herbs and fruits on hand that day.

BAR

The Belmont →

\$5

For craft cocktail enthusiasts, this place is akin to a Fernet-foggy dream come true. Open nightly at 5:30, there are black and white movies projected on the back wall, a 1950s clock hanging from the tin ceiling, dark corners and cozy booths, and not too many people at any one time allowed in the door. Excellent drinks come on cloth beverage napkins, homemade pop tarts and charcuterie come from the kitchen, and in general the ambiance oozes the edge of film noir.



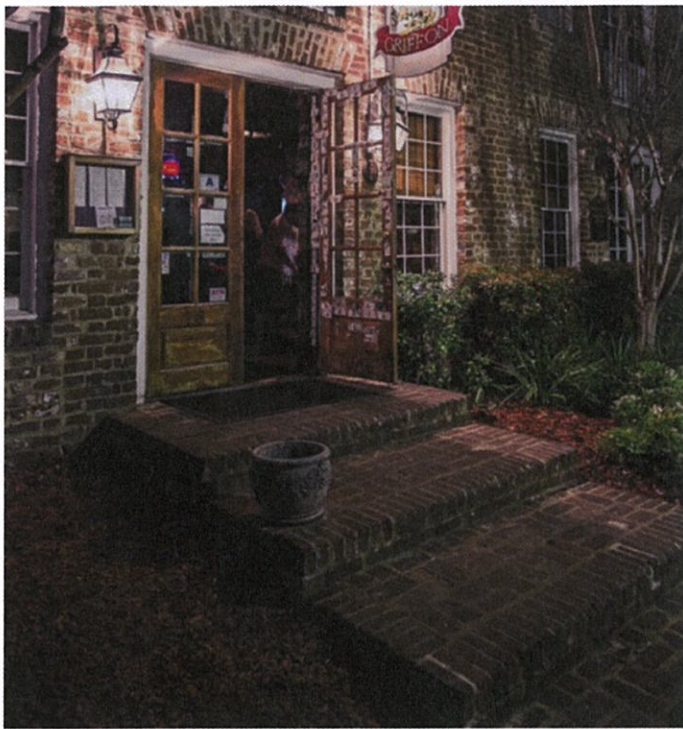


Photo by JWKPEC

RESTAURANT

The Griffon →

\$5

A dive bar of epic proportions, right in the middle of the tourist district. People have been tacking-up dollar bills on these walls for close to 20 years. But it's better than just bottled beer; there are lots of local beers on draft and a strong lunch menu that brings the city together over onion rings.





Photo by Jennings King

BAR

Bar Mash →

\$

Let your eyes adjust; this place is dark, the only window is the one on the door. It's industrial, with concrete floors befitting its former factory life, but there's shuffleboard and big leather booths to soften the space. The bar is all warm woods, and its collection of American whiskey is probably why you decided to come.

BAR

Closed for Business →

\$

It's all about the beer here, and that's evident when you walk in the door. There are plenty of taps and usually plenty of people with pints in front of them at high-topped tables near the front window. The space is long and lean and covered in eclectic bar memorabilia. The vibe is laid back and just a little loud, and it's a good bet that this is the kind of place that serves a substantial sandwich and fries. It does, of course.



Photo by Olivia Rae James

RESTAURANT

Goat. Sheep. Cow., North →

\$

You know those gourmet shops you walk into and think, "Wow, I could live here?" Welcome to Goat. Sheep. Cow., North. And while you can't exactly pull the futon out, you *can* sit and gorge on fondue or French onion soup for an afternoon, served with copious amounts of wine and bread alongside them. The bar beckons, the outdoor seating is *très* charming, and the inside is a tucked-in corner for "after hours" Left Bank writers. And by left bank, of course, we mean those over the bridge in Mount Pleasant. Just make sure you take a lactaid pill before you come, if need be—it's dairy, all the way.

MAP

Places We Went



BAR
The Bar at Husk
\$\$\$



BAR
Royal American
\$



BAR
The Cocktail Club

