15 Top Hotel Bars in the US, According to the Experts

These hotel bar concepts push boundaries with themes from subterranean swank with live DJs to velvet-appointed Parisian maximalism.

By **Kate Dingwall** | Published on April 2, 2024

PHOTO: SPECTATOR HOTEL

Hotel bars can be ideal spaces for both midday meetings and Martini breaks. They're often respites for weary travelers, as well as destinations for sitting around with a serious drink. Or, they might be snazzy locales for evenings out on the town. Almost always, they're deeply comforting places for old-fashioned hospitality.

The 16 bars we honor here execute all of the above at an expert level. Sazerac Bar sways drinkers with uniquely New Orleans cocktails and hospitality honed over almost a century of service. In another camp, the relatively new Silver Lyan in D.C. boasts wonderfully off-kilter offerings like lychee Martinis, Bagel Bites, and Jell-O shots. Dallas' Midnight Rambler is a disco destination for locals to let loose and travelers to shake off the day. Regardless of the approach, all of the following bars are renowned for balancing local flavor across food and drinks.

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Winner: Silver Lyan (Washington, D.C.)

PHOTO: SILVER LYAN

For Ryan Chetiyawardana's first stateside bar, he sought to capture the spirit of cultural exchange, weaving symbols and flavors from his background with American heritage. Examples of this include the Japanese Saddle, sakura stirred with citrus, leather bitters, cereal orgeat, gin, and Cognac – a nod to the cherry blossom trees gifted to D.C. from Japan.

While you can order serious stirred and boozy drinks like the above, there's also a focus on making Silver Lyan feel "damn fun." The Project Manhattan is an applejack Manhattan made in the microwave to integrate flavors ("nuked," according to the menu). There's a pink cobbler called Salmon Cannon (no fish, just Old Tom gin, birchwood booch, Douglas fir, and pink tea) and Jell-O shots with Champagne chasers, plus a snack menu of hot dogs, Bagel Bites, and ice cream sandwiches.

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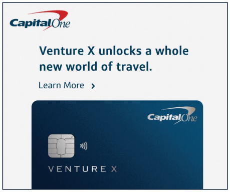
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Sazerac Bar at The Roosevelt (New Orleans)

ROOSEVELT
A WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL

PHOTO: HILTON

Sazerac Bar is one of the most storied places to sip a cocktail (Sazerac, we'd hope) in New Orleans. The hotel opened the bar in 1938 then purchased the rights to the Sazerac name in 1949 and dubbed the bar accordingly. Today, the menu is still full of perfected NOLA classics, like the Ramos Gin Fizz and Vieux Carre. The decor, including African walnut wood paneling and murals by Paul Ninas (painted in 1938), has been painstakingly maintained.

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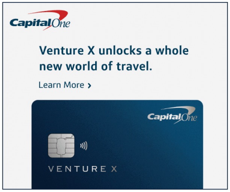
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Redwood Room at The Clift (San Francisco)

PHOTO: THE CLIFT

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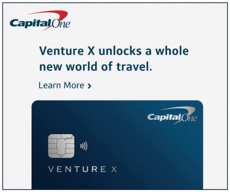

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The standout feature at this San Francisco institution is a massive redwood bar, carved almost a century ago from 2,000-year-old Redwoods and flanked with both paintings by Gustav Klimt and matching redwood walls that soar gloriously toward the ceiling. Recently, the entire hotel was overhauled to bring the Redwood Room back to its former glory, including a gussied-up cocktail program.

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Rarities at the Lotte New York Palace (New York City)

PHOTO: NEW YORK PALACE

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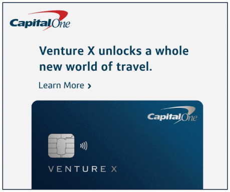

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The first hurdle to entry at this hotel bar is to know someone – Rarities bookings are invitation-only, though a reservation in one of the hotel's suites (which can run you upwards of four figures) will also gain you access. If you can snag a seat, drinkers can select something exclusive, elusive, or well-aged – perhaps a flight of Pappy Van Winkle, or would you prefer your spirits pre-prohibition?

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Midnight Rambler Bar at The Joule (Dallas)

PHOTO: THE JOULE

At this swanky subterranean bar, drinks are catered toward the cocktail crowd. Esoteric infusions and shrubs are menu staples, and Midnight Rambler Bar serves classics correctly, like a Filthy Martini with olive-infused vermouth, lacto-fermented onions, and a healthy sidecar of olives. None of that detracts from the bar's ability to make you want to get up from your leather booth and dance. Regular DJs are always on rotation, and the cocktail menu accounts for that with thoughtful shot pairings.

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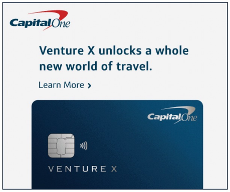

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Bar Calico at Freehand (New York City)

PHOTO: FREEHAND

Though firmly situated in New York at the Freehand hotel, Bar Calico is a snug shrine to both Mexico and the American Southwest. Sotol and mezcal are centerpieces, both in the bottles that line the back bar (neat pours are served with dried apricots, chopped walnuts, and pickled nopales) and in cocktail form. The Chihuahuan is a crisp, clean, and herbal house Martini made with Cardenxe Desierto sotol.

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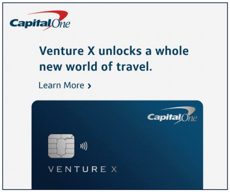

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07 of 16 Founders Club at Fairmont Olympic Hotel (Seattle)

PHOTO: FAIRMONT

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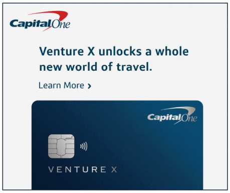

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Tucked behind a bookcase in The Olympic Bar, you'll find an intimate, moody enclave called Founders Club with just 30 seats. The classics are all covered here, including Hanky Pankys, Sazeracs, Clover Clubs, and Hemingway Daiquiris, as are reserve cocktails that highlight historic and hard-to-find spirits. The Cognac section alone spans several pages and many single barrels.

08 of 16 Chandelier Bar at Four Seasons (New Orleans)

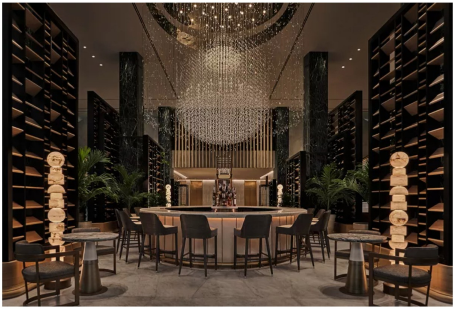

PHOTO: FOUR SEASONS

With over 15,000 pieces of glass and crystal, it's hard to take your eyes off the grand lighting centerpiece anchoring Chandelier Bar. Drinks by beverage manager Hadi Ktiri dive into New Orleans history. Expect the requisite Sazeracs and Hurricanes alongside more esoteric options like The Forge Sazerac (the original 1850s Sazerac recipe) and Roffignac, a sparkling Cognac cocktail named after the 1820s mayor responsible for the city's streetlamps.

09 of 16 The Lobby Bar at The Ritz-Carlton (Amelia Island, Florida)

PHOTO: THE RITZ-CARLTON

Away from the tourist throngs of the Florida beach bars lies a quiet oasis for drinks that are perfect for vacation but employ more big-deal cocktail techniques – this is The Ritz, after all. If you prefer tropical and transportive drinking, order a Mojito riff made with Haitian sugar cane rum or a Margarita topped with Champagne.

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The Club Bar at The Peninsula (Beverly Hills)

PHOTO: VANESSA TIERNEY

This see-and-be-seen Beverly Hills bar nails the no-expense-spared, Hollywood glamor experience. The Club Bar is dim and leathery, with dark wood panels and deep chairs that are often occupied by movie exes and other high rollers. They're here for the classic cocktails, rare spirits, and a lavish wine list (including bottles blended exclusively for the bar), plus the classy bar snacks like delicate folds of shrimp har gow and Peking duck potstickers.

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Bar Marilou (New Orleans)

PHOTO: ATELIER ACE

Slipping into this velvet-appointed bar is an exercise in Parisian maximalism. From the leopard print carpeting to rich and rouge walls, you'll find tables angled for reclining and tassels as a prominent design detail. Bites at Bar Marilou are equally influenced by Parisian lounges, from frog legs spiced with Szechuan and deep-fried pomme Anna with dollops of caviar. The Pisco Sour? Spiked with génépy. Even the tropical Little Birds with rye, banana, and clarion honey has a distinctly Parisian, pastis backbone.

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Rowes Wharf Bar at Boston Harbor Hotel (Boston)

PHOTO: BOSTON HARBOR HOTEL

If the name isn't a glaring hint, Rowes is perched over the Boston harbor and reaps the bounty of its location. Maine crab cocktails, Countneck clams, chowder, hot lobster rolls with caviar, and oysters are on almost every table. But drinks aren't standard maritime fare – may your server suggest an Islay Scotch pairing with your oysters? The cocktail menu follows the gospel of bartending legend Jerry Thomas and is peppered with punches, daisies, fizzes, sours, cobblers, and coolers.

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Blue Bar at Algonquin (New York City)

PHOTO: PATTI MCCONVILLE / ALAMY

The Algonquin's bar is the stuff of New York City legend and lore. The blue-lit bar opened in 1933 and remained packed through the swinging 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Real legends like James Dean and Elle Fitzgerald often sidled up to Blue Bar as did fictional ones like Don Draper – it was one of the ad legend's favorite spots on *Mad Men*. For the deep-pocketed, a $10,000 Martini is made any way you like and garnished with a single loose diamond. (Though, it needs to be ordered at least 72 hours in advance.)

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The Bar at The Spectator Hotel (Charleston, South Carolina)

PHOTO: SPECTATOR HOTEL

For a respite from the Southern heat, slip into this well-appointed speakeasy off downtown's city market. Here, bartender Allan Lancaster translates the hotel's sleek 1920s interiors into chic but cheeky cocktails. The Islay an Egg is an Ardbeg sour, while The Dude Imbibes is a White Russian by way of Charleston, employing Chai vanilla vodka, local cold brew, and Carolina cream liqueur. The best vantage point in The Bar is from the plush green leatherback stools that position you right in front of Lancaster.

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Tiger & Peacock at The Memphian (Memphis)

PHOTO: THE MEMPHIAN

A colorful, high-energy cocktail bar is your reward if you make it up to the seventh floor of the South Cooper Street hotel. Tiger & Peacock is not a place for Arcadian unwinding – locals tend to flock here to dance late into the night surrounded by disco balls, stuffed animals, and neons. The menus match the more Millennial mood: Drinks are sorted by zodiac sign. If you're an Aquarius, find your skin with a bold and free-spirited tequila-and-amaro drink; Cancers may prefer a bright but bitter balance of amaro and citrus vodka.

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Plus One: Portrait Bar at The Fifth Avenue Hotel (New York City)

PHOTO: THE FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL

While this NoMad bar hidden inside The Fifth Avenue Hotel is just months old, it could easily pose as one of those old-but-iconic hotel bars, with intimate tables dotting the dark wood and very velveted room and historic and oft-haunting portraits hung to the ceiling. Portrait Bar's deftly made drink menu, courtesy of industry vet Darryl Chan, maps the globe with spirited originality. From Seoul, Korea's Mapo District, a smoky, nutty drink with soju, sesame oil-washed Scotch, cucumber, pineapple, and vanilla, or St. James, a liquid hat-tip to London in the form of an Earl Grey milk punch.

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