

CRAFT COCKTAILS!

Berlin's craft cocktail scene has been steadily bubbling away over the past couple of years, smugly watching the other food crazes as it swigs a Tom Collins from the sidelines. Laura Harker travelled from City West to Neukölln to get her artisanal drink on.

Traditionally, the West has been the hoarder of all Berlin's best cocktail bars – take a look at Wilmersdorf's sophisticated Rum Trader and Schöneberg's dapper Victoria Bar and Green Door for inspiration. But craft cocktails – well-proportioned, carefully considered combinations of spirits, syrups and infusions – have now spread further east, to finally take over parts of the city where €3.50 caipirinhas once reigned.

Let's start back in Schöneberg, where one of the first of the new generation of cocktail bars opened in 2009. Once you've rung the bell and been let in, behind **STAGGER LEE**'s curtained windows (Nollendorfstr. 27) you'll find entwined couples in dark corners, small groups who've settled into the leather sofas and a few inquisitive hipsters perched at the bar who've ventured out of deepest, darkest Neukölln to sample this New Orleans saloon bar. Blues music adds to the Deep South feel and smokers get the full experience, having to swing the old-style saloon doors into their very own smoking parlour. The barman, watched over by chief mixologist Jakob Etzold, are suited and booted in crisp white shirts and prim bowties, shaking their mixers in the shadow of the huge vintage cash register on the corner of the bar. Just watch out for the

spittoon on the floor below. The menu ranges from exotic tiki drinks to old classics and inventions with quirky ingredients like homemade beer-flavoured sugar. In keeping with the American style, it would be rude not to pick a traditional American cocktail – their Manhattans (€8.50) expertly mix sweet vermouth and bitters with delicious Willet Rye Bourbon.

Next we head to Mitte, where, not far from currywurst speakeasy Butcher's Bar, a deceitful façade that could be mistaken as an art gallery hides the single black room of the very slick **BUCK AND BRECK** (Brunnenstr. 177). Buzz on the discreet doorbell and you'll be led to the centre of the action, where 14 drinkers sit around the barman like gamblers at a blackjack table, watching as he delicately pours liquor mixtures into brass goblets. Since the bar's opening in 2010, owners Gonçalo de Sousa Monteiro and Holger Groll have been indulging Berlin's glitterati with an enticing menu of historically inspired cocktails leaning towards whisky, brandy and gin drinks (mostly €10.50). The one to go for here is their Don Lockwood: Islay Scotch and Bourbon, shaken with maple syrup and bitters.

Further east, hidden away in one of Bötzw Brewery's old machinery rooms, lies one of Prenzlauer Berg's most enigmatic establishments. Opened by Rum Trader owner Gregor Scholl in 2013 and left in the hands of mixologist Michael Hanke, **LE CROCO BLEU** (Prenzlauer Allee 242) is right next to Tim Raue's swanky La Soupe Populaire and the pair go hand in hand for an upmarket Prenzl' night out, so expect many well-dressed diners who've popped in for a swift aperitif or stiff post-dinner tippie. Ethereal blue lighting from the crystal chandeliers clashes with the industrial brewing machines and gauges; full of kitsch taxidermy and toadstool tables, the décor is as curious as the menu. There's no focus on a certain spirit, rather a good mix of



TWINPIGS

classic recipes using homemade syrups and the finest brands of liquor – Pierre Ferrand 1840 cognac is mixed with dry orange Curacao, DOM Bénédictine and Champagne to conjure up their Prince of Wales cocktail (€18). For something a bit different, try their wondrous Fairy Floss (€16, photo, bottom left); even if only to taste the absinthe-dipped candy floss that comes

Absinthe-dipped candy floss comes floating in Sazerac Rye.

floating in the Sazerac Rye. Not one to miss out on the fun, even gritty Friedrichshain has a slick watering hole with upmarket booze. On quiet Traveplatz, the **ANTLERED BUNNY** (Oderstr. 7) has been putting a classy twist on the traditional *Eckkneipe* for the past couple of years. The tiny joint can only seat 15 lucky customers, so get there early to bag a table and get to work on the menu, which also features light

bites from next-door sister café Aunt Benny (until 21:00 only). As well as an entire wall impressively lined with various gins and whiskies, the bar itself is a treasure trove of handcrafted concoctions – if bar manager Damien Guichard is unable to find the exact bitter or syrup he wants, he'll make it himself. The usual line-up of cocktails on offer is very reasonably priced considering the level of craft and excellent service. Opt for one of Guichard's intriguing creations, like the scintillating Eastern Dawn (€11): sake from Friedrichshain's Sake Kontor, gin, sweet

vermouth, maraschino cherry juice, Peychaud's bitters and a spray of absinthe.

Our final stop is Neukölln. Once dominated by €2 *Fassbier*, the gentrifying 'hood has of late received an infusion of crafty infusions, from Geist im Glas to Cabslam. But nothing symbolises the turn of the cocktail tide more than the 2014 conversion of generic Boddinstraße hipster *Kneipe* Die Frühperle into **TWINPIGS** (Boddinstr. 57), Neukölln's rebellious answer to the classic cocktail scene. While the shabby-chic interior hasn't changed much, the nuanced drink menu certainly has. Chilean architect Paulo de Araujo and Swedish filmmaker Pär Kjellén have killed two craft birds with one stone by putting as much care into their beer selection (Kreuzberg's Heidenpeters always features prominently on the chalk-scrawled beer menu) as they do into their mixed drinks. Traditional or with a twist, their cocktails are on the cheaper end of the scale (€7-10) but still expertly shaken and they deliver in potency. Paulo's favourite is the Mr. Smokey – a mix of Mezcal, Bénédictine, agave syrup and sage. A lively crowd usually mingles for sophisticated midweek drinks and weekends are marked with DJs spinning until the wee hours.

The moral of the story? Chances are if you're out on the tiles, you won't ever be too far from a craft cocktail bar. So, if you ever tire of the beer-saturated nightlife in the city, it's good to know that there are places out there where you can always slink off to for convivial chat, punchy drinks and an artisanal maraschino cherry bobbing around in your glass. ■



LE CROCO BLEU

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