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RESTAURANT GUIDE 2004

Belly Up to the Restaurant Bar

Bar food that actually tastes good.

BY JOEL SMITH
 503 243-2122

Many Portland restaurants are notorious for their "no reservations" policy.

And the ones that do take reservations often still subject you to a long wait before seating you. Think about it. When was the last time you had a reservation that actually started on time?

Well, don't get upset. Get even.

Instead of taking a seat in the dining room, why not enjoy a meal in the comfy confines of the restaurant's bar, or in those bars that have developed reputations as really good restaurants? The once-bastard bar, where you could fill up on drinks, beer nuts and not much else, has finally discovered itself as more than just a holding pen for pissed-off people. Bar cuisine—small, inexpensive plates you mix and match with a bevy of beverages—can be done with such cool and style that you may never want to go back to those stodgy candlelit dinners.

To help clue you in to the bar revolution, we've asked six downtown restaurant-bars to give us their best combination of small plates and superb drinks.

So go ahead and belly up to the restaurant bar.

THE PLACE	SCENE	ON THE MENU	BEHIND THE BAR	THE MATCH	THE VERDICT
<p>750ml 232 NW 12th Ave., 224-1432. Noon-11 pm Monday-Thursday, noon-midnight Friday-Saturday.</p>	<p>So spacey and swanky you'll think you've been personally invited to Captain Kirk's love cellar.</p>	<p>House-fired nuts, fresh crab, lamb brochettes and the best pommes frites in town.</p>	<p>Forty-plus wines by the glass, some by the sip, over 100 by the bottle. A lot of European, some California and Oregon. Arranged by color and style.</p>	<p>Vegetable risotto with a sip of Martinsancho Verdejo; seared ahi tuna with 1999 Gigondas. Vegetable risotto with a sip of Martinsancho Verdejo; seared ahi tuna with 1999 Gigondas.</p>	<p>The tiny lump of risotto manages to be creamy, crisp, salty and rich. Excellent with the luscious Verdejo. And the tuna, though good, is like freshly fallen snow—so beautiful that you almost dare not disturb it. Almost. The fruity red Gigondas goes especially well with the accompanying Asian slaw.</p>

<p>Fernando's Hideaway 824 SW 1st Ave., 248-4709. 11 am-10 pm Monday-Wednesday, 11 am-2 am Thursday-Friday, 4:30 pm-2 am Saturday, 4:30 pm-10 pm Sunday.</p>	<p>Get lost in the cavernous back room. Stay up all night dancing salsa upstairs. Or just sit at the huge bar and stare out the window.</p>	<p>Snacking Barcelona-style. Quail in chocolate sauce, marinated olives, and calamari cooked in its own ink, a Spanish delicacy.</p>	<p>Get past Rioja with your pick of 20 glass pours and thousands of bottles of Spanish red.</p>	<p>Dates wrapped in serrano ham with 2002 Monastrell. Poussin and potatoes with 2002 Araneón Tarragona. Sautéed prawns with '01 Condado de Haza.</p>	<p>Spanish wine goes well with nearly anything, including the rightly popular dates and the slightly underwhelming poussin. But if you're going for the chili-bathed prawns (and you should), order up a pint of the coolest, crispest ale in the house. No wine stands a chance.</p>
<p>Jo Bar 715 NW 23rd Ave., 222-0048. 11:30 am-11 pm Monday-Thursday, 11:30 am-midnight Friday-Saturday, 11:30 am-10 pm Sunday.</p>	<p>That beautiful rich red wall and the big windows for spying on the 23rd Avenue crowd, and sidewalk seating for being seen by same.</p>	<p>Bruschetta, pâtés and French onion soup to lasagne, ravioli and rotisserie chicken.</p>	<p>Good, sometimes unorthodox wine list (Slovenia?) with 15 by the glass and almost 100 by the bottle. Or try one of 10 specialty cocktails, like the pear-ginger martini or the Jo Bar Zombie.</p>	<p>Asian pizza with 2002 Renwood Syrah.</p>	<p>Marco Polo would be pleased with this little bit of East-West synergy. Swapping pepperoni and tomato sauce for salty, spicy hoisin sauce with smoked mozzarella and chicken, Jo's Asian pizza will set you on the road to nirvana. If you need a guide, though, the Syrah is a good choice.</p>
<p>Vault Martini 226 NW 12th Ave., 224-4909. 4 pm-midnight Sunday, 4 pm-1 am Monday-Wednesday, 4 pm-2 am Thursday-Saturday.</p>	<p>A little like falling into a swimming pool and finding that someone is serving really hip drinks in the deep end.</p>	<p>Olives, almonds, bread and oil. Salads, spreads and cheeses. Pizzas, grilled chicken and salmon.</p>	<p>James Bond heaven with more than 50 strange and delicious martinis, including the cilantro, the sun-dried Mary and the popular Joyful Girl.</p>	<p>Italian panini with a Wicked Gimlet martini.</p>	<p>A conundrum. Take one bite of the panini—salty, crisp, light. It's almost sinfully good. But then wash it down with a swig of the Gimlet. The martini is so intoxicatingly cool and refreshing that you'll feel like you just brushed your teeth and you won't want to go back to the panini. What to do?</p>

<p>Vigne 417 NW 10th Ave., 295-9536. 4- 11 pm Tuesday-Saturday.</p>	<p>Long, black stone bar and a lot of charming, vaguely Swedish blond wood.</p>	<p>Cheese, cheese, cheese. And some other stuff.</p>	<p>Highfalutin French and Italians whose names you can't pronounce. About 25 by the glass or taste.</p>	<p>Serrano-ham crostini with Puffeney Arbois Savagnin. Grilled mushrooms with Tomme du Templier cheese and a splash of Foradori Terodego Rotaliano.</p>	<p>The Savagnin and crostini are bound together by the pad of quince paste on top of the latter. Superb. Round Two is a classic love triangle: The cheese is enamored of the mushrooms, and the mushrooms would die for the wine, but the cheese and wine hate each other's guts. Typical.</p>
<p>Vitis 535 NW 16th Ave., 241-0355. 11 am-2 pm and 5-9 pm Tuesday-Thursday, 11 am-2 pm and 5-10 pm Friday, 5-10 pm Saturday, 9 am-1 pm Sunday.</p>	<p>Big windows and white tablecloths with a hint of industrial pipework. Wedged along I-405 and sunken into the street, it's well worth the search to find it.</p>	<p>Grilled fennel with olives, veal rolls with fava beans, jumbo shrimp, marinated quail.</p>	<p>Good mix of Italian and Oregon wines. Pretty light. Plenty available by the glass.</p>	<p>Mozzarella sandwich with poached egg (brunch menu) and 2002 Attems Sauvignonese.</p>	<p>It's a sandwich Swiss Army knife: creamy, crisp, salty and a little sweet, it hits you in all the right places. Pairing it with the fruity and lively Sauvignonese helps cut any lingering greasiness. You'll also want to try one of the many bruschette with any red wine.</p>

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