

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition  
Revised & Updated

– The –

# French Quarter

Drinking Companion

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A guide to the bars in America's  
most eclectic neighborhood

By Allison Alsup, Elizabeth Pearce, & Richard Read



– The –  
**French Quarter**  
Drinking Companion



*Photograph by John d'Addario*

– The –

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# A Note on the Second Edition

New Orleans is not a city known for change. Time seems to move slower here and traditions linger. Visitors come to New Orleans, in part, for this very reason. To the casual observer, the French Quarter's age and visible history are defining characteristics. Tourists expect the eternal: to visit the same establishments their parents and grandparents once frequented, arriving in mule-drawn carriages and passing wrought iron balconies and brightly colored Creole cottages.

They also expect to dine on the same dishes and sip the same drinks as earlier generations. Consider that our most famous drink, the Hurricane, is approaching its centennial, our city's official cocktail, the Sazerac, its bicentennial, and in 2018, the city itself will mark its tricentennial.

So one might assume the same steadfastness applies to our drinking culture. And certainly some elements have remained constant. Indeed it's a testament to the French Quarter's staying power that the majority of the bars from our first edition remain open, keeping locals and visitors alike well watered and happy.

That said, bars open and bars close. Our second edition features over a dozen notable newcomers as well as updated information on past entries. We've also revisited our "Favorites" (listed at the back of the book).

In the four years since *The French Quarter Drinking Companion* first appeared, even that elegant Grand Dame of the city, the Vieux Carré, has embraced an evolving cocktail culture. Here are some of the notable trends the Tiplers have observed in their mugs and hi-ball glasses:

*The return of classic cocktails:* Visitors are more likely to see worthy stalwarts like Old Fashioneds, French 75s, or Manhattans on menus, and not just in historic bars.

*Upscalification:* With our first edition, the de rigeur drinking vessel was the go-cup. Not so anymore. Cocktails, and even beer, are more likely to arrive in glassware instead of plastic. The focus on craft usually translates into a better tasting drink prepared with quality ingredients. The downside? Drinks often cost more.

*The food/drink crossover:* Bars have figured out that if they want to keep people drinking, it's good to give them food; likewise restaurants have realized that great drinks help them stay busy. The benefit to the drinker: casual dining at the bar and inventive pub fare.

*Rise of tourism:* In 2014, the city regained the level of tourism it had before Hurricane Katrina. The French Quarter in particular can be very crowded at peak times. The savvy traveler who doesn't want to fight the throngs will want to plan bar visits accordingly.

But don't worry: these are minor shifts. New Orleans' unique vibe remains the same. To completely misquote Coco Chanel—a woman who never visited, but who would've felt right at home if she had—French Quarter fashion changes, but French Quarter style endures.

# Introduction

*Man, liquor sure goes fast in hot weather.*

Stanley Kowalski, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

*Well, honey, a shot never does a Coke any harm!*

Blanche DuBois, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Drinking in New Orleans comes with the territory, literally. Our city is surrounded by water. It practically floats. New Orleans and its inhabitants are defined by a liquid landscape. In a city shaped like a bowl, its base dipping below sea level, we are the truest definition of a watering hole.

Beyond topography, drinking is embedded in our DNA. New Orleans was founded by the French, who've never been shy about their fondness for wine and spirits. According to legend, they settled the French Quarter—or Vieux Carré (Old Square), as they called it—during Carnival, the annual festival of whooping it up. The French were followed by more Europeans, including Spanish, Irish, and Italian settlers. Jews, Latin Americans, and others piled in—the point being that the one thing New Orleans has never, ever been is Puritan. Understand that, and you begin to understand our relationship with booze.

Oh, and did we mention that it's also the unofficial home of the cocktail and the city that Prohibition forgot? We never stood a chance at sobriety.

New Orleans now boasts more bars per capita than anywhere in the U.S. And if you're looking for the city's highest concentration of nightclubs, neighborhood pubs, lounges, and other boozy places, you'll find it in the French Quarter. In fact, there are well more than 100 places to fill your cup here. We Tipplers counted to 180 and gave up. The sheer number of es-

tablissements means that there's room for everything from tony, highfalutin' nightspots to holes in the wall that can make the skeeziest Tijuana dive bar look glamorous by comparison. The Quarter doesn't discriminate against any kind of drinking.

For drinkers afraid of commitment, this is your Holy Land. Once you're in the Quarter, there's no need to get in the car and drive from neighborhood to neighborhood. In a space that totals less than a square mile, every bar in the Quarter is accessible by foot or rickshaw. And since there are no cover charges, you'll never have to feel too invested in one spot. So the evening might start with martinis by a piano and end with pancakes and a mimosa. This capricious meandering is the essence of the Quarter, and here's something you should remember before you can't: how the evening begins isn't necessarily how it will end.

## A Few Words Regarding New Orleans' Drinking Culture

Drinking in New Orleans is a little different from other parts of America. For starters, our bars don't have to close. Many of the ones in this book serve booze 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In fact, there's a story dating from August 2005, when Hurricane Katrina was threatening to wash out the city and Mayor Ray Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation. The legend goes that employees at one French Quarter bar realized for the first time that the front doors didn't have locks. Why would they have needed them?

While round-the-clock service is certainly convenient, it also means that a bar's clientele changes throughout the day and night. Your fellow drinkers at 2:00 P.M. are undoubtedly (well, hopefully) going to be very, very different from the ones you encounter at 2:00 A.M. Since most people prefer to do their serious drinking after dark, in this book we tend to talk about the evening and nighttime crowds. But depending on when and where you do your tipping, you may see some holdovers

from the previous “shift.”

Another difference: in New Orleans, we can take our drinks on the street. (Did you expect anything different from the land of drive-through daiquiri shops?) The only catch is that on the street, whatever you’re imbibing must be encased in plastic. Any bartender or waiter can happily provide you with a go-cup, so when you’re wanting to wander, leave the breakables behind. In fact, carrying glass is one of the few things that can ruffle the feathers of New Orleans’ legendarily laissez-faire police force. In fact, not only can you carry your cocktail wherever you roam, we encourage you to do so. More than visiting any single bar, strolling through the Quarter, sipping a drink, and chatting with friends provide the quintessential New Orleans experience. There’s nothing like passing through Jackson Square at midnight while clutching a Pimm’s cup in one hand and fanning yourself with the other.

## The Making of the 100

Some cities are best understood by their churches, parks, and industries. We feel that drinking is one of the best ways to understand the French Quarter. Drinking is fundamental to the identity of New Orleans. In other places, drinking may be tucked away, with nips taken on the sly or reserved for special occasions only. However, in the French Quarter, drinking is a daily ritual.

This book’s purpose is to evoke what it’s like to drink in the Quarter. While the entries can be read individually for the purposes of gathering typical guidebook information, our hope is that you will read all of our reviews and, in doing so, in some way experience the panorama of our drinking culture. Our book is designed to be different from other guides. We’ve been purposefully anecdotal because that’s the way we see drinking in the Quarter—as an important part of the story of New Orleans.

When we set out to make our list of the French Quarter's 100 notable bars, we had a couple of criteria. First, of course, the bar must be located in the French Quarter, that neighborhood that runs from the Mississippi River to Rampart Street and from Canal Street to Esplanade Avenue. Heck, this is why we wrote this book in the first place. There are plenty of guides to New Orleans, but few are dedicated exclusively to its oldest neighborhood. Fewer guides still, if any, focus solely on bars—not restaurants, not hotels, but bars. Considering that the Quarter is where most visitors spend their time and where many locals come to celebrate, that seems odd, doesn't it? We aim to fix that with this book.

We did make one exception for one very special bar, but the Sazerac is so legendary that its reputation swells across Canal Street.

Our second criterion was that the bar had staying power. Bars, like other businesses, are subject to the whims of consumers. The right location, ambiance, price point, and management can ensure years of success. Screw up one of those—or more—and a bar can go under in weeks.

For the most part, the watering holes in this book have been around for years, some for decades and quite a few for over a century. The new places on our list made the cut either because we have faith in their owners or because they're simply the latest iteration of a bar in the same location. For example, several hotel bars have changed names and even owners over the years, but somehow, the bars and their clientele have remained the same.

That doesn't mean that all of the places on our list are perfect. True, some are spectacular. Some rank as the best of their kind in the world. Others are more like anthropological experiments—not the kind of place where we'd want to hang out every day but important to visit at least once. Not every bar on this list will appeal to every tippler. Nor are our reviews necessarily an endorsement of a bar for our favorites, which are listed

at the back of the book. But that doesn't mean that you, dear reader, won't have the time of your life in any of the bars reviewed here. Our reviews are based on our own visits and may vary greatly from others' experiences in the same bar. Though we've tried to capture the general feel of each bar, our stories are not necessarily representative of the ones you will tell. Our opinions shouldn't be taken as definitive judgments on the bars, only as snapshots of our experiences.

A final disclaimer: we were drinking while we wrote this thing. The details of our adventures were sometimes fuzzy the next morning. Other times, we've merged similar incidents into a single, representative review. And of course, we've left out the more boring parts. But it's generally a true account of our adventures. Even if you never visit New Orleans (though we hope you do), please join us for a round as a guest Tippler. Before you turn the page, though, we invite you to pour yourself a drink.

# Iconic Bars

It's no secret: New Orleanians love to drink. Throughout the last 300 years or so, the city has been home to thousands of bars, juke joints, taverns, pubs, and lounges, most of which have disappeared without much ado. But a handful of bars have earned a very special place in the hearts and livers of drinkers—bars that have become mainstays of the French Quarter landscape. These markers have altered where we go, where we meet, even which sidewalks we congregate on.

Like the city itself, New Orleans iconic bars are a diverse lot. Some, like the glamorous Carousel Bar, are decidedly upscale. Others, like brick-and-beam Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, are down to earth. What binds them together is that they're all characters. Distinct and unmistakable, these iconic establishments are here for the long haul. They're not gimmicky or trendy. They're just perfect places for drinking, for gossiping with friends and making new ones. If you visit no other bars in the Quarter, you'll do well to visit these.

## Carousel Bar

214 Royal Street (in the Monteleone)  
504-523-3341 | HotelMonteleone.com

**YOUR TAB:** You're at a hotel bar, and you're at the upper end of the Quarter, so it's not going to be cheap.

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** Decadent things. Try a "Death in the Afternoon"—a cocktail invented by Ernest Hemingway that consists of a shot of absinthe topped off with champagne.

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** There's no official dress code, but this place looks like a million bucks. Leave the flip-flops at home.

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** The Monteleone added an area for live music performances. Check the Web site to see who's playing on any given night.

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** Whenever you're on your best behavior. This isn't the place for sloppy, late-night tequila shots.

**TATTOO THEMES:** For this crowd, tattoos are incidental, not a centerpiece.

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** A healthy mix of over-30 tourists and old-school New Orleanians, out for a night on the town.

**BEST FEATURE:** Are you kidding? The namesake Carousel Bar in the center of the front room.

The Carousel has changed since the last time we were here. That's a good thing.

For years, the Carousel's giant bar was jammed into a room just off the lobby of the Hotel Monteleone. It still is, and it still dominates that room, but the wall on the far side has now been removed. Guests who can't find a seat at the bar or on one of the banquettes can slip through to a new, airy lounge area.

And that's exactly where we go. It's a Saturday afternoon, and the Carousel "proper" is packed to the gills, so we make our way to a couple of sofas in the back, which provide a great view of Royal Street.

On the upside, this new space comes with its own, more user-friendly bar. Up front, at the namesake Carousel Bar, wedging yourself between sitting guests to order a drink can be a little weird: unless you stand very close to the bar, it's going to spin right by you. (Did we mention that the Carousel Bar spins? Well it does—like a Carousel, but slower.) The bartenders are pros, so it's no big deal for them, but for the rest of us, it's unsettling.

The downside is that the back bar comes equipped with a flat-screen TV, making it feel like a sports joint. Not that there's anything wrong with sports joints per se, but it's not the sort of thing we'd expect at one of New Orleans' most iconic watering holes.

But whatever: a couple of negronis later, we're not thinking of that. We're deep in conversation with a couple of tourists from New York, trading insights on the best-kept secrets in our respective hometowns. They rattle off restaurant after restaurant, bar after bar that we've never heard of, which makes us feel like slackers when they ask, "So, where's the best place to get a drink in New Orleans?"

After a short pause, Richard replies, "You're soaking in it."

## Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop

941 Bourbon Street

504-593-9761 | LafittesBlacksmithShop.com

**YOUR TAB:** Reasonable if you order beer and well drinks

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** They feature a specialty purple drink, but it's awfully sweet. Stick with the standards.

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** Anything goes here, from tourist shorts to formal apparel.

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** Rowdy sing-along piano playing

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** Most folks come here at night, but we love drinking on the sidewalk on a quiet afternoon.

**TATTOO THEMES:** Demure to daring

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** Tourists checking it off the list and locals who still keep it on theirs

**BEST FEATURE:** The building itself

Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop contends it is the oldest operating bar in the United States, and there's little reason to doubt it. The building was erected between 1722 and 1732 near the house of local hero and privateer Jean Lafitte. Though there is no record of him actually drinking at this bar, proximity leads to probability, so in all likelihood, Jean Lafitte knocked back a few here long ago.

The records of early New Orleans government are peppered with attempts to control liquor sales, to little avail. When French governor Vaudreuil set limits on the number of taverns and their hours, he was blithely ignored. In 1763, after the new Spanish governor announced a cap of 13 taverns in the city, his office was immediately plagued with petitions to increase it to 38. So it seems fitting that at least one of those early establishments has continued to serve the city since that time. While we've been governed under 10 flags, our drinking has remained a constant.

At our table near a window, we sip our \$5 beers and hear the story of Jean Lafitte, courtesy of the buggy driver who has parked his rig in our view. He regales his riders with tales of dubious veracity, but our growing buzz makes us tolerant of his mixture of fable, lore, and outright falsehood. His inaccuracies, we begrudgingly admit, are an integral part of the French Quarter's magic, a place where distinguishing between truth and fiction has never been a high priority.

The clip-clop of the mule fades down Bourbon Street, and that 18th-century sound mingles perfectly with the historic brick-and-post construction that surrounds us. The bar's only illumination is candlelight, and now that dusk has turned to dark, patrons are compelled to lean in to see each other. This motion repeats at each table, and the bar fills with a tableau of spies and illicit lovers plotting intrigue.

We prefer Lafitte's on weeknights, when the room offers the promise of a clandestine tryst or furtive observation. On weekend nights, the cloak-and-dagger whispers are challenged by the cacophony of the piano bar, where well-oiled patrons lustily belt out "Me and Bobby McGee." If you wish to escape the commotion, amble out to the tiny patio, where even on a sweltering summer evening you can catch a cool river breeze. But tonight we remain inside the quiet bar, listening to the murmur of patrons making plans, perhaps noble, perhaps unlawful, perhaps mundane, but all made in the grand tradition of New Orleans: with a drink.



*Photograph by John d'Addario*

## **The Napoleon House**

500 Chartres Street

504-524-9752 | [NapoleonHouse.com](http://NapoleonHouse.com)

**YOUR TAB:** Average. Tack on some reasonably priced food to help absorb the booze.

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** The Pimm's Cup is legendary.

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** Napoleon House is one of the most picturesque bars in the city, if not the world. Don't ruin the ambiance for your fellow tipplers by showing up in cutoffs and a tank top.

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** Opera and classical music, nonstop.

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** In the afternoon, as the sun begins to set. It's Harry Potter-level magic.

**TATTOO THEMES:** Everyone has a little ink nowadays, but here, it tends to be covered up.

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** The crowd doesn't hail from the shuffleboard set, but they're not super young, either. Just behave yourself.

**BEST FEATURE:** Generally speaking, it's a toss-up between the front bar (which probably hasn't been redecorated since the Battle of New Orleans) and the charming courtyard.

Entering the Napoleon House can be unsettling. Or maybe “unsettling” is the wrong word. “Striking” might be better.

The Napoleon House sits at the bustling corner of St. Louis and Chartres streets, opposite the swanky, shiny Omni Royal Orleans hotel and diagonally across from the refurbished Supreme Court building. Combined, those two Beaux Arts facades are pretty imposing. But swing open the narrow door to the Napoleon House, and you step into a much older world: one that's dimly lit, with amber slants of sunlight splayed across well-worn wooden tabletops that have seen their share of spilled booze and cigarette burns over the years. Opera plays at a respectable but not ear-shattering level. The walls have a patina that Hollywood set designers would have a hard time matching—because it's real.

Unlike the buildings across the street, the Napoleon House was built on a human scale. The ceiling seems low, even though it's not, and the place doesn't feel as if it's changed much in 200 years.

The story goes that Napoleon House is so named because it was here, in this bar, that notorious pirate Jean Lafitte and his pals hatched a plan to rescue Napoleon from his prison on Elba Island and move him to New Orleans. (Of course, that raises the question of what Napoleon House was called before it became the Napoleon House, but whatever: details can ruin a good story.)

Today, about the only signs of Napoleon you'll find at the Napoleon House are a bust of the itty-bitty emperor behind the bar and a poster on the wall. The other faces in the place represent a good mix of tourists and locals (though mostly tourists) enjoying well-made drinks, served by a wait staff of men in white shirts and bowties.

If you're only here for the drinking, you'll probably be seated in the front room—either at the bar or at one of a dozen or so tables. If you're hungry, they're more likely to seat you in the spectacular (though intimate) courtyard or the slightly more formal dining room. And if you happen to stumble in for a party...well, you're in luck, because the “Appartement de l'Empereur” on the second floor is a little slice of magic.

As we settle into our favorite table—the one in the middle of the room with an inlaid chessboard (no playing pieces, sadly)—we turn to the waiter and unanimously say, “Pimm's cup, please.” This isn't much of a shocker. No one in town comes close to the Napoleon House in making these quintessentially British cocktails, which are light and smooth as lemonade but with a much bigger kick.

We pass the time gossiping about the latest New Orleans news, stopping now and then to eavesdrop on a couple of nearby tables. One group is chatting about Hové, a local parfumerie half a block away that one of them had stumbled into. (FYI, their vetiver bath gel is amazing.) Another foursome is contemplating a midafternoon snack. Richard can't help himself and turns to face them.

“Split a muffaletta. It's one of the best in town.”

They thank him for his suggestion—warily. It's obvious that they're not used to interacting with strangers so casually, but a few drinks down the road, they've changed their tune.

An hour later—after the foursome has inhaled their muffaletta and peppered us with questions about other local restaurants—we stumble out into the late afternoon sun, a little shocked to return to a world filled with automobiles and smartphones.

## Pat O'Brien's

718 St. Peter Street  
504-525-4823 | PatObriens.com

**YOUR TAB:** Midrange, depending on how much you tip the piano players to play “Sweet Caroline”

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** Hurricanes by the gallon, though Budweiser and Abita show up a lot, too

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** Your bridesmaid dress, your football team's jersey, matching bachelorette-party T-shirts, khakis and your frat's logo

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** Lots of visiting in the patio, but the piano bar is all lounge standards

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** Before the game, after the wedding, Christmas Eve, day and night

**TATTOO THEMES:** Not too many visible

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** Fellow wedding-party members, your high-school or college mates, your family

**BEST FEATURE:** The Fountain of Fire

For locals, Pat O'Brien's is inevitable. Whether making a stop on your 21st birthday, accompanying out-of-town visitors, or deciding on a lark to “play tourist,” sooner or later, whether you want to or not, you're seated in the piano bar, roaring along with the other hundred bodies to “Margaritaville,” never sure if you are doing so ironically. But if you're here once again, sipping on a hurricane you didn't intend to order, you might as well enjoy it. Pat O'Brien's slogan is “Have Fun!” and by the end of the night, even we jaded local Tiplers had succumbed to the bar's charms.

The courtyard's ample drinking space permits groups to cobble chairs and tables together and create the seating needed for parties of 10, 20, or more. The sheer number of people drinking around us differentiates Pat O's (as locals affectionately call it)



*Photograph by John d'Addario*

from most patio bars. It is not intimate. Instead, the night starts lively and ends up rowdy, a rollicking sea of bobbing hurricane glasses illuminated by the red, orange, and yellow flames that dance in the spray of the courtyard's huge center fountain.

Post-reception wedding parties arrive, tuxedos askew and bowties abandoned, the bridesmaids having eschewed pumps for flip-flops. Herds of bachelorettes crowd the area, sporting banners announcing their upcoming nuptials. Legions of sports fans stake out turf and tonight are particularly vocal before an upcoming championship game, engaging in dueling fight songs, like in Casablanca but without the Nazis. And of course, no one is trying to leave.

We choose gin and tonics over hurricanes, and you should, too. As much as you may want to sample this drink at its source, be warned: they are pretty terrible here. The original recipe made with passion-fruit juice creates a delicious drink. Today, volume demands that Pat O's sacrifice quality for quantity, so the cocktail's current incarnation starts with a Kool-Aid base and tastes of chemical and disappointment. Still, it is a pleasure to watch waiters bearing trays of the gaudy lantern-shaped glasses to other tables. Those on a budget, take note: you can exchange your glass for cash. We know savvy locals who scour empty tables for abandoned hurricane glasses and turn them in for drinking money. It's a thrifty trick.

After finishing our first drink there, we are ready for a different venue. But before moving to the piano bar, Allison and Elizabeth head to the loo. NB: if ya gotta go, the upstairs ladies' restroom is one of the nicest in the French Quarter. Take a cushy seat and chat with your girlfriends as you apply lipstick. Refresh yourself with perfume from a restroom attendant who offers amenities and towels. After hitting johns of dubious quality, you will appreciate the oasis that is the Pat O'Brien's ladies room.

We all meet again in the piano lounge, where the dueling pianos thunder away. The musicians are as deft at crowd manage-

ment as they are at pounding out the standards. We join in on “House of the Rising Sun,” promising to “tell our children not to do as we have done.” Everything you expect to hear is here: “Piano Man,” “New York, New York,” and “Sweet Caroline.” Though the piano players seem to be having a good time, we wonder how they stand playing the LSU fight song night after night. We salute birthdays ranging from 21 to 80 and anniversaries from the 1st to the 40th. We also hear people doing their part to continue a family tradition, drinking in the same bar as their parents and grandparents.

This joint singing merges us with the larger crowd: an odd sensation to have in a bar. Collective energy is more common while singing in church or shouting at a football game with likeminded people, not with a group of folks you haven’t even met. Unlike other bars, where you might merely feel welcome, Pat O’Brien’s provides you with a group to join. Some may call that a refuge; others may call it a cult. If you start thinking about it too much, it’s disconcerting. But the drinks are there to keep us from thinking. We close our eyes and join in for another round of “Sweet Caroline,” singing and swaying as one.

## Sazerac Bar

123 Baronne Street (in the Roosevelt Hotel)

504-648-1200 | TheRoosevelt.com

**YOUR TAB:** High, but worth it for the view

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** Do you have to ask?

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** A tie, a bridesmaid dress, something natty

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** Classic jazz, but more likely the crowd

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** Daily 11:00 A.M.–2:00 A.M. (the Sazerac is one of the few bars respectable enough to have hours)

**TATTOO THEMES:** Hidden

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** Tasteful friends, dates, business colleagues, wealthy relations

**BEST FEATURE:** Service

We've gathered on Elizabeth's birthday, surrounded by friends. It's not unusual to be in the Sazerac on someone's birthday, for it's the kind of bar that invites punctuating life's accomplishments: engagements, graduations, anniversaries, a good haircut.

With its windowless, wooden-paneled walls and coved ceilings, the Sazerac evokes a faintly nautical feel. As we step up to the long curve of the immaculately polished bar, it's not much of a stretch to imagine we've stepped back in time and aboard the *Mauritania* or the *Lusitania* or any of the ocean-liners (post-Titanic, thank you) that once steered wealthy Americans across the Atlantic en route to their grand European tours. Indeed, the Sazerac is symbolically linked to river and ocean. Its architecture reminds visitors what's easy to lose sight of in the maze of the Quarter, namely that New Orleans is a port city and home to the longest wharf in the world. The original 1930s murals by American Paul Ninas lining the walls attest to the city's connection to the waterfront. (Note: they also attest to the fact that African-Americans were the ones loading and

unloading the docks.)

As one of our friends, a former architecture professor who just happens to be still articulate enough to describe such matters, says, it's not surprising that the bar feels like a ship and different from the Victorian and antebellum proportions that rule the Quarter. Art Deco was an expression of our nation's newfound faith in industry, technology, and transportation. (Disclosure: Tippler conversations aren't usually this clever.) He notes that the period marked the first time we wanted our buildings to look forward to the future rather than back at the past. Ironically, such an implicit belief in the future of steam engines and automobiles almost seems nostalgic now. However, what can't be denied is that an upbeat optimism still reigns over the Sazerac.

But before we sail any further, let's concede a point to the landlubbers: the Sazerac Bar is not in the French Quarter. In coming here, the Tiplers have crossed over the breakers of the Vieux Carré and cruised a half-block past Canal. Yet we would be remiss in not including the Sazerac Bar in our 100, for it's the exception that proves the rule.

The history of New Orleans drinking doesn't begin with the Sazerac (no doubt that began before even making land), but the Big Easy's link to cocktails do. First concocted in the mid-19th century by the pharmacist Antoine Peychaud, of Peychaud's bitters, the Sazerac "coque-tail" supposedly offered medicinal benefits and, no doubt, profit. As far as the Tiplers are concerned, the intervening years have done nothing to diminish the drink's health benefits, and the Sazerac remains the official, unofficial cocktail of the Crescent City.

Buyers beware: at \$10 for its namesake drink, the Sazerac is a sipping bar by New Orleans standards. But settle into one of the plush chairs or sofas, and you will probably concede that \$10 is a small price to pay for a finely crafted Sazerac swirled with Herbsaint that numbs the lip and the pain of the world. Nor is a 10-spot so much considering the attentive, experienced wait-

person who now glides across the floor bearing not only our cocktails but also carafes of ice water and polished round trays containing wasabi peas, Chex mix, and a Tippler's favorite, local Zapp's Spicy Crawtator chips.

Suddenly, we feel cared for, tended to, and indeed hopeful, like first-class travelers looking forward to adventures. In the glow of the soft lights and table lamps, everyone appears slightly more attractive, their shoes decidedly more expensive against the carpet. Indeed, everyone appears like a contender to become the heir of a fabulous estate. Outside may be a world of ripped vinyl seats, plastic cups, and linoleum floors that must be hosed down before dawn. But here, at least for a little while, we can float and feel the weight of the world lift as the crisp-shirted server returns to refill our water glasses and someone comments about "relying on the kindness of strangers." Luddites, aesthetes, closet and freely admitted snobs, welcome to your refuge, at least for one round.

BTWs.. a Web site worth reading, for its snapshots of the bar's history and former governor Huey P. Long's connection to the hotel)

## Tujague's

823 Decatur Street

504-525-8676 | TujaguesRestaurant.com

**YOUR TAB:** Average to just above-average. Here, as elsewhere, you get what you pay for.

**WHAT YOU'RE SWILLING:** If it's late and you're heading home, try a Sazerac. They've been making 'em here for a century and a half.

**WHAT YOU'RE WEARING:** Folks in the dining room tend to dress up a bit. In the saloon, the attitude is more casual, but flip-flops may still feel out of place.

**WHAT YOU'RE HEARING:** The tinkle of cocktail glasses, the clomp-clomp-clomp of mule-uggies, and the strains of a brass band playing for the folks at Café du Monde across the street.

**WHEN YOU'RE THERE:** Around dinnertime, or possibly an hour before the wedding starts.

**TATTOO THEMES:** Hard to say: most are covered up.

**YOUR DRINKING BUDDIES:** In the restaurant, the crowd is often about 50/50, New Orleanians and tourists. The saloon can skew much more local.

**BEST FEATURE:** The bar itself. From the stunning antique mirror to the old-school brass footrail, they just don't make 'em like that anymore.

If you're not looking for Tujague's, it's easy to miss. Sure, there's a large neon sign stretching up the side of the building, boasting the year the place opened: 1856. But even so, Tujague's has a hard time standing out from the garish t-shirt shops and other tourist magnets littering its territory on Decatur Street.

To the casual visitor, Tujague's can look equally unassuming on the inside. It feels like the sort of place your grandfather would've frequented when he was your age—and in fact, he very well might've. Like a gracefully aging grande dame, Tujague's wears its age proudly. It doesn't try to seduce you with sleek,



*Photograph by John d'Addario*

asymmetrical flower arrangements or trendy, recessed lighting. Tujague's relies on character—pure 19th century character.

It's a sweltering summer afternoon as the three of us walk up Decatur, en route from the French Market to catch a movie at Canal Place. The thought of sitting in a dark, air-conditioned theater, munching on a giant tub of popcorn, seems decadent and perfect today.

But as is often the case in New Orleans, Mother Nature has plans of her own. In the time it takes us to traverse two city blocks, clouds bubble up out of the blue, turning the sky a dark, angry gray-black. Sixty seconds later, it's pouring. We dash for the nearest open door: Tujague's.

Our eyes adjust to the gloom and find that we're the only people in the place. We step up to the bar and perch our soaked shoes on its renowned brass foot rail. A few minutes ago, we would've given our eyeteeth for a refreshing beer, but now, we're wet and chilly: whiskey all around, please.

Thunderstorms often bring life to a halt here. It's not unusual to see people huddled under balconies, chatting with strangers and waiting for the weather to let up. It may seem like an inconvenience, but in fact, it's a welcome pause, as refreshing as the rain pouring down from the sky.

Today's rain doesn't last long—in summer, it rarely does. By the time we hit the bottom of our drinks, it's not even drizzling, and we're free to keep strolling up steamy Decatur Street, fortified..