

Stool Pigeon: Bar Ampere

BY MICHAEL RYAN
24 Nov, 2011 10:25 AM

What if I told you there was a secret passage leading from Gin Palace to a hidden saloon bar straight out of the wild west, with rocking chairs, a bar made from an old Honkytonk piano and creaky old floorboards underfoot?

What if that bar was at the back of another bar that epitomises sophisticated European-style drinking, but isn't Gin Palace? Confused yet?

Vernon Chalker, owner of Madame Brussels, Collins Quarter, the Gin Palace and now Bar Ampere, has added a secret passageway between one of his oldest and newest bars.

You enter Bar Ampere from Russell Place. It's a cramped little space with more seating outside than in, but as places like Bar Americano are proving, size doesn't matter on Melbourne's bar scene. Punters seem happy to adopt the espresso bar culture that characterises Rome and Paris.

A glance at Bar Ampere's menu may boggle the mind of those used to seeing a simple list of beer, wine, spirits and cocktails. Stimulants, aperitifs, digestives, wines, beers and sustenance (food) all get pages to themselves.

Don't be ashamed if you haven't heard of some of the drops on offer, as most are imported and unavailable in Australia. A Cocchi Americano turned out to be a delicious and moreish aromatic drop similar to vermouth but with hints of apple and cinnamon. When I asked where you could buy it, the bartender wouldn't reveal his source. Sad face. Anyway, it was delicious and certainly puts a zing in your step.

The bar itself looks gorgeous. Grey concrete, yellow glass and lighting, and staff in grey lab coats all combine to make a sophisticated space that may have you checking you've dressed appropriately as you walk in.

But that's all just a cheeky facade. You'll realise this if you venture past the bathroom and enter the Swamp Room, that secret passage/saloon bar I mentioned earlier. This den of sin instantly makes you want to let your hair down, 19th-century style. If you make a fool of yourself, a quick exit stage right will have you in Gin Palace where you can make new friends. So really, you get three bars for one admission ticket at Bar Ampere. How cool is that?

[Bar Ampere](#), 16 Russell Place, Melbourne. Call 9663 7557

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