

LONDON'S SECRETS:

PUBS & BARS

A Guide to Over
250 of the City's Best
Pubs & Bars

AMPDEN
REET, W.8.

THE CHURCH

Graeme Chesters



LONDON'S SECRETS PUBS & BARS

by
Graeme Chesters

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As ever, special thanks to Louise for continuing with the pretence that writing is a proper job.

NOTE

Not everyone will agree with the choice of places listed in this book and many will wonder why their favourite watering hole was omitted. Well, first of all there's isn't enough space to include every place and secondly we (reluctantly) have to admit that we don't know ALL the pubs and bars in London! Drop us a line and let us know about your favourite and we'll try to include them in the next edition.



Readers' Guide

The notes below refer to the general information provided for each pub and bar.

- **Address:** Includes the phone number and website (if applicable). You can enter the postcode to see a map of the location on Google (and other map sites).
- **Opening hours:** It's advisable to confirm the opening hours, particularly if you're travelling a long distance. Pubs near markets have special licensing hours and may open as early as 6 or 7am, while some places have no official closing time or just say 'until late' (presumably after midnight or when the last customer falls off his bar stool!). It's traditional for pubs to open later on Fri-Sat and to close earlier on Sunday. Some are closed at weekends – particularly pubs located in the City of London – or on Sunday and/or Monday.
- **Transport:** The nearest tube or rail station(s) is listed, although in some cases it may involve a lengthy walk. You can also travel to most venues by bus. Some pubs and bars are best reached by car, although parking may be difficult or impossible (not all pubs have car parks), and you'll need a sober driver to get home (or take a taxi).
- **Go for:** All pubs and bars included in this book have particular attractions – even if it's simply that they're traditional pubs (described of any frills) serving good beer and hearty pub grub – as noted.

Other points to bear in mind:

- **Disabled Access & Facilities:** Many pubs and bars are accessible to disabled people, although few make special provisions such as providing 'disabled' toilets. However, they are required to make their premises accessible for people who use a wheelchair, e.g. by providing a ramp. If you have special requirements, contact the venue in advance.
- **Bookings:** Many pubs/bars allow you to book a table, particularly gastropubs, although this isn't always the case. For example, most hotel bars don't accept bookings and you may have to queue for a table at busy times.
- **Cost:** An indication of prices is given, both for drinks and food, but generally cocktail, hotel and destination bars are the most expensive, and specialist beef and brew pubs are more expensive than heritage and traditional pubs. You may also pay extra for drinks when entertainment (comedy, music, theatre, sports, etc.) or a late licence is provided. Some bars charge a 'members' entrance fee after a certain time – usually after the pubs have closed – or may have a minimum spend (to deter those inclined to nurse one drink all evening!). Most pubs and bars accept Visa and Mastercard, but may not accept all cards – and some pubs don't accept any payments by card!
- **Families & children:** The legal age for drinking alcohol in pubs and bars in the UK is 18 (proof of age may be requested). Under-14s are only allowed into gardens, separate family rooms and the restaurant areas of pubs and wine bars unless the premises have a special 'children's certificate', in which case children must be accompanied by an adult. Children aged 14-17 can enter a bar but may only consume soft drinks.
- **Food:** Most pubs and bars serve 'bar' snacks and many also serve full meals, often in a separate dining room or restaurant. Many pubs – particularly gastropubs offering fine dining – are foodie destinations in their own right, and some even have Michelin stars. Many outlets show menus and prices – for both drinks and food – on their websites, along with food serving times.
- **Smoking:** Since 2007 smoking has been banned in pubs or bars (and other indoor public spaces), for which there's a maximum fine of £200. Some pubs provide a heated, sheltered outdoor area for smokers, although it's more likely that you'll have to enjoy your ciggy on the pavement in the cold and rain!

Contents

Chapter 1: Central London

14

The Adam & Eve	18
The Albannach	19
The American Bar	20
Aqua Spirit	21
The Argyll Arms	22
The Artesian	23
The Audley	24
Bar Américain at Brasserie Zedel	25
Barrica	26
The Beaufort Bar	27
Bedford & Strand	28
The Blue Bar	29
Boisdale of Belgrave	30
Bradley's Spanish Bar	31
The Brumus Bar	32
The Buckingham Arms	33
Café des Amis	34
The Calthorpe Arms	35
El Camion	36
The Cask Pub & Kitchen	37
China Tang	38
The Cinnamon Club	39
The Cittie of York	40
Claridges Bar	41
The Coach & Horses	42
The Coburg Bar	43
The Cock Tavern	44
The Connaught Bar	45
The Cork & Bottle	46
The Courthouse Hotel Bar	47
The Crazy Bear	48
De Hems	49
The Dog and Duck	50
The Donatton Bar	51
Duke's Hotel Bar	52
The Ebury Restaurant & Wine Bar	53
The Endurance	54
The Experimental Cocktail Club	55
5th View	56
The Fitzroy Tavern	57
The French House	58
Galvin at Windows	59
Garlic & Shots	60
The George Bar	61
Gordon's	62
The Goring Hotel	63
The Grenadier	64

The Guinea	65
The Harp	66
The Heights Bar	67
The Holborn Whippet	68
HUNter 486	69
LAB	70
The Lamb	71
The Lamb & Flag	72
The Library Bar	73
The Lobby Bar	74
The London Cocktail Club	75
The Long Bar	76
Longitude 0°8'	77
The Lord John Russell	78
Lowlander	79
The Mandarin Bar	80
Mark's Bar	81
Milk & Honey	82
The Morpeth Arms	83
The Museum Tavern	84
The Nag's Head	85
The Newman Arms	86
Nordic	87
The Old Coffee House	88
The Paramount	89
The Pearl Bar & Restaurant	90
The Player	91
The Princess Louise	92
The Punchbowl	93
Purl	94
The Queen's Head	95
The Queen's Larder	96
The Red Lion (Crown Passage)	97
The Red Lion (Duke of York Street)	98
The Salisbury	99
The Seven Stars	100
1707	101
Shampers	102
The Shochu Lounge	103
The Star Tavern	104
Terroirs	105
Upstairs at Rules	106
Vats	107
The Wonder Bar	108

Chapter 2: City & East London 110

The Artillery Arms	114
Beach Blanket Baby on	115
The Betsey Trotwood	116
The Bishop's Finger	117
The Black Friar	118
The Book Club	119
The Bow Wine Vaults	120

Callooh Callay	121
The Captain Kidd	122
The Carpenter's Arms	123
Cellar Gascon	124
The Coach & Horses	125
The Craft Beer Company	126
The Crosse Keys	127
The Dickens Inn	128
The Dogtail	129
The Eagle	130
El Vino's	131
Filthy MacNasty's Whisky Cafe	132
Fluid	133
The Fox & Anchor	134
The Golden Heart	135
The Grapes	136
The Gun	137
The Gunmakers	138
Hawksmoor Spitalfields	139
The Hoop & Grapes	140
The Jamaica Wine House	141
The Jerusalem Tavern	142
The Lamb Tavern	143
Loungelover	144
Madison	145
Nightjar	146
The Old Dr Butler's Head	147
The Old Fountain	148
The Old Red Cow	149
The Owl & Pussycat	150
The Palm Tree	151
The Peasant	152
The Pride of Spitalfields	153
The Prospect of Whitby	154
The Punch Tavern	155
The Three Kings of Clerkenwell	156
The Town of Ramsgate	157
28°-50° Wine Workshop & Kitchen	158
Vertigo 42	159
The Viaduct Tavern	160
Vinoteca	161
The White Swan	162
The Wine Library	163
The Worship Street Whistling Shop	164
Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese	165
Ye Olde Mitre Tavern	166
The Zetter Townhouse	167

Chapter 3: North London 168

Bar Pepito	170
The Betjeman Arms	171
The Booking Office Bar	172

The Bree Louise	173
BrewDog	174
The Bull & Last	175
The Camden Head	176
Camino Cruz del Rey	177
The Chapel	178
The Charles Lamb	179
The Drapers Arms	180
The Duke of Cambridge	181
The Euston Tap	182
The Flask (Hampstead)	183
The Flask (Highgate)	184
Gilgamesh	185
Happiness Forgets	186
The Holly Bush	187
The Horseshoe	188
The Island Queen	189
The Jolly Butchers	190
Juncton Tavern	191
The King's Head	192
The Lansdowne	193
The Lexington	194
The Marquess Tavern	195
The North Pole	196
The Old White Bear	197
The Pig and Butcher	198
The Pineapple	199
The Queen's Head and Artichoke	200
The Railway Tavern	201
The Sir Richard Steele	202
69 Colebrook Row	203
Slim Jim's Liquor Store	204
The Southampton Arms	205
The Spaniards Inn	206
The Wells	207

Chapter 4: West London **208**

The Anglesea Arms	210
The Atlas	211
The Bell & Crown	212
The Builder's Arms	213
The Bull's Head	214
Capote y Toros	215
The Churchill Arms	216
The City Barge	217
The Dove	218
The Eight Bells	219
The Harwood Arms	220
The Harelock Tavern	221
The Hillgate Pub	222
Jolie's Bar	223
The Kensington Wine Rooms	224
The Ladbrooke Arms	225

The Lonsdale	226
The Mitre	227
Montgomery Place	228
The Prince Alfred	229
The Prince Bonaparte	230
The Queens Arms	231
The Scarsdale Tavern	232
The Stonemasons Arms	233
The Tabard	234
Trailer Happiness	235
The Union Tavern	236
The Victoria	237
The Warrington	238
Westbourne House	239
The White Horse	240
The Windsor Castle	241

Chapter 5: Southwest London **242**

The Alma	244
The Boathouse	245
The Botanist Brewery & Kitchen	246
The Bricklayers Arms	247
The Cat's Back	248
The Devonshire	249
The Draft House (Northcote)	250
The Duke's Head	251
The Earl Spencer	252
The Fox and Grapes	253
The Leather Bottle	254
Lost Society	255
The Manor Arms	256
Powder Keg Diplomacy	257
The Priory Arms	258
Putney Station	259
The Roebuck	260
The Rooley	261
The Ship	262
The Spread Eagle	263
Sugar Cane	264
The Sultan	265
The Sun Inn	266
The Trinity Arms	267
The Victoria	268
The White Cross	269
Ye White Hart	270

Chapter 6: Southeast London **272**

The Anchor & Hope	276
The Anchor Tap	277
The Baltic	278
The Benugo Bar & Kitchen	279

The Boot & Flogger	280
The Brew Wharf	281
The Bridge House	282
The Cutty Sark Tavern	283
The Dean Swift	284
The George Inn	285
The Greenwich Union	286
The Hide Bar	287
Hoopers	288
Kate's Jamblers	289
The King's Arms	290
The Market Porter	291
The Mayflower	292
The Old Brewery	293
The OXO Tower Bar	294
The Palmerston	295
The Rate	296
The Richard I	297
The Royal Oak	298
The Skylon	299
The Southwark Rooms	300
The Trafalgar Tavern	301
The Wine Wharf	302
The Yacht	303
Zeitgeist at the Oldly Gardeners	304
Zero Degrees	305

CAMRA

The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA, camra.org.uk) is an independent, voluntary organisation that campaigns for real ale, community pubs and consumer rights. Formed in 1971 in protest against the bland processed beers produced by the big-name breweries, its aim was to encourage the production of traditional, flavoursome real ale (using traditional ingredients, which are allowed to mature in the cask through a process called secondary fermentation). CAMRA has been (and remains) hugely influential – revitalising beer brewing and drinking in the UK, where it now has over 200 branches – and has been described as the most successful consumer campaign in Europe.



**CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE**





Introduction

British pubs and bars are world famous for their unique atmosphere, bonhomie and fine beer, while increasing numbers are also noted for the excellence of their cuisine. Nowhere is this diversity and quality more evident than in London, which has a bewildering number of watering holes of all shapes and sizes: classic historic boozers and trend-setting bars; traditional riverside inns and luxurious cocktail lounges, welcoming wine bars and cosy brew pubs; mouth-watering gastropubs and brasseries; sophisticated hotel bars and raucous music venues.

The number and variety of London venues presents an obvious challenge: which to choose? This book seeks to help, selecting the most lauded pubs and bars of various types and in different price bands, split over six geographical areas: central, City and East End, north, west, southwest and southeast. Different areas tend to favour different types of hospitality. For example, the swisher parts of west and north London have more than their fair share of gastropubs, while the southeast of the capital is a happy hunting ground for fans of craft beer joints. And if you need to get suited and booted to impress a date or client with high-end cocktails at a designer bar, the W1 postcode provides more opportunities than most.

The venues in this book were chosen gradually and pensively, over the course of the four years I spent criss-crossing London while researching a series of books about the city. Indeed, a number of the places became regular stops, where I rested, sought refuge from the rain, made notes and reviewed photographs. They were invaluable for their atmosphere, drinks, food and, not least, bathroom facilities; the spectacular gents' loos at The Princess Louise, a classic Victorian gin palace on High Holborn, deserve a special mention.

Despite having lived in the capital for decades – in northwest, central and southeast London – and being a regular patron of its pubs and bars, I was surprised and heartened by the choice and quality I found. The number of innovative cocktail lounges, glamorous hotel bars and venues with magisterial views was particularly notable, as, indeed, was my worrying familiarity with a large number of London's drinking dens!

So, whether you're seeking somewhere for a pint of real ale, a glass of 'organic' wine, a designer cocktail or a delicious meal, a place to meet and have fun with your mates, or just somewhere to relax and chill out, you're bound to find your perfect venue in London – with the help of the insider 'secrets' in this book

Bottoms Up!

Graeme Chesters

April 2013



Ref	Place	Page	Ref	Place	Page
1.	The Adam & Ee	18	46.	The Grenadier	64
2.	The Albannach	19	47.	The Guinea	65
3.	The American Bar	20	48.	The Harp	66
4.	Aqua Spirit	21	49.	The Heights Bar	67
5.	The Argy! Arms	22	50.	The Holborn Whippet	68
6.	The Artesian	23	51.	HUNter 486	69
7.	The Audley	24	52.	LAB	70
8.	Bar Américain at Brasserie Zedel	25	53.	The Lamb	71
9.	Barrica	26	54.	The Lamb & Flag	72
10.	The Beaufort Bar	27	55.	The Library Bar	73
11.	Bedford & Strand	28	56.	The Lobby Bar	74
12.	The Blue Bar	29	57.	The London Cock ail Club	75
13.	Boisdale of Belgrai a	30	58.	The Long Bar	76
14.	Bradley s Spanish Bar	31	59.	Longitude 0°8'	77
15.	The Brumus Bar	32	60.	The Lord d hn Russell	78
16.	The Buck ngham Arms	33	61.	Lowlander	79
17.	Café des Amis	34	62.	The Mandarin Bar	80
18.	The Calthorpe Arms	35	63.	Mark s Bar	81
19.	El Camion	36	64.	Milk & Honey	82
20.	The Cask Pub & Kitchen	37	65.	The Morpeth Arms	83
21.	China Tang	38	66.	The Museum Tæ rn	84
22.	The Cinnamon Club	39	67.	The Nag's Head	85
23.	The Cittie of York	40	68.	The Newman Arms	86
24.	Claridges Bar	41	69.	Nordic	87
25.	The Coach & Horses	42	70.	The Old Coffee House	88
26.	The Coburg Bar	43	71.	The Paramount	89
27.	The Cock Tæ rn	44	72.	The Pearl Bar & Restaurant	90
28.	The Connaught Bar	45	73.	The Play r	91
29.	The Cork & Bottle	46	74.	The Princess Louise	92
30.	The Courthouse Hotel Bar	47	75.	The Punchbowl	93
31.	The Crag Bear	48	76.	Purl	94
32.	De Hems	49	77.	The Queen's Head	95
33.	The Dog and Duck	51	78.	The Queen's Larder	96
34.	Dul s Hotel Bar	52	79.	The Red Lion (Crown Passage)	97
35.	The Ebury Restaurant & Wine Bar	53	80.	The Red Lion (Dul of York Street)	98
36.	The Endurance	54	81.	The Salisbury	99
37.	The Ep erimental Cock ail Club	55	82.	The See n Stars	100
38.	5th View	56	83.	1707	101
39.	The Fitz oy Tæ rn	57	84.	Shampers	102
40.	The French House	58	85.	The Shochu Lounge	103
41.	Galvin at Windows	59	86.	The Star Tæ rn	104
42.	Garlic & Shots	60	87.	Terroirs	105
43.	The George Bar	61	88.	Upstairs at Rules	106
44.	Gordon's	62	89.	Vats	107
45.	The Goring Hotel	63	90.	The Wonder Bar	108

CHAPTER 1

CENTRAL LONDON

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THE ADAM & EVE

Address: 77A Wells Street, W1T 3QQ (☎ 020-7636 0717, geronimo-inns.co.uk/theadamandave).

Opening hours: Mon-Fri, 11am to 11pm; Sat, noon to 11pm; Sun, noon to 6pm. See website for kitchen opening times.

Transport: Oxford Circus or Tottenham Court Road tube.

Go for: The beer, wine and food – it does them all well!

This gastropub – or ‘food pub’ as it styles itself – is owned by Geronimo Inns, which has around 30 pubs in London. This one in Fitzoy (or Noho, as they like to call it) has an airy, modern interior which ‘pays homage to English icons’, with colourful cushions, shelves full of knick knacks, and arty prints on the walls; there are a number of outdoor tables for when the weather behaves.

The Adam & Eve offers a wide choice of British and international beer (it’s a freehouse), and a regularly changing wine list chosen by John Cleary, a Master of Wine – most are available by the glass in two sizes, costing from £4 per glass and £15.50 a bottle. It also serves decent food so, in short, it has something for everyone.

Booking is recommended if you want to eat, which many do, and its ‘rations’ include such iconic treats as Eggs Benedict and Cumberland sausage and mash. Bar snacks are available and the service is friendly. A great all-rounder, and somewhere to escape the hubbub of Oxford Street.



THE ALBANNACH

Address: 66 Trafalgar Square, WC2N 5DS (☎ 020-7930 0066, albannach.co.uk).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 1am; Sun, noon to 7pm (and as below).

Transport: Charing Cross tube/rail.

Go for: Terrific choice of malt whisky in a sophisticated environment.

Albannach is an outpost of ‘Scottishness’ deep in the heart of enemy territory, close to Trafalgar Square, generally regarded as the geographical heart of the Sassenach capital. It dubs itself the ‘Albannach Restaurant and Whisky Bar’, and is split into a lounge drinking and eating areas.

It’s a slick place – there’s a smart-casual dress code – with an emphasis on Scotch whisky, but you can also try Irish and Japanese examples as well as bourbon; there are over 120 in total. Albannach also serves cocktails, not all of which are whisky based, in its ultimate cocktail bar – the ‘A Lounge’ (open Thu-Sat, 7pm-1 or 3am, Sun-Wed, special events only – which has a minimum spend policy of £15 per head on some nights).

You can also eat well at Albannach, mainly Scottish specialties, including haggis and fish dishes. Standards are high throughout. This isn’t a budget destination, as you might assume from its prime location, but given the quality of the décor, service, drinks and food, it isn’t a particularly expensive one either. Booking is recommended.



THE AMERICAN BAR

Address: Savoy Hotel, 100 Strand, WC2R 0EU (☎ 020-7836 4343, www.fairmont.com/savoy/london/dining/americanbar).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 11.30am to midnight; Sun, noon to 11pm.

Transport: Charing Cross tube/rail.

Go for: An eclectic menu, if possible, treat at the spiritual home of the cocktail.

The American Bar on the Savoy Hotel's first floor exudes an atmosphere of the '20s, the so-called golden era of cocktails. It's an impressive venue, with understated Art Deco styling, elegant curves, a white ceiling and Terry O'Neill photographic portraits on the walls, while a tuned pianist plays American jazz to add to the ambience.



It's attracted celebrities for many years and is still a smart, sophisticated place to enjoy a cocktail from the extensive, pricey list (around £14 and upwards). Bear in mind that *The Savoy Cocktail Book*, published by Savoy barman Harry Craddock in the '30s, remains the cocktail mixologist's bible, and the position of head

bartender at the American Bar is still regarded as one of the hospitality trade's most prestigious. Dress the part – smart-casual or better and definitely no sportswear – and be prepared to queue as there's a no reservations policy.

If you desire an alternative to the American Bar's timeless elegance, the Savoy also houses the newer, equally glamorous **Beaufort Bar** (see page ?? [BELOW](#)).



AQUA SPIRIT

Address: 240 Regent Street, W1F 7EB – entrance at 30 Argyll Street – (☎ 020-7478 0540, www.aqua-london.com).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 1am; closed Sun.

Transport: Oxford Circus tube.

Go for: Cocktails and champagne served with glamour and great views.



This bar and restaurant complex at the top of what used to be Dickens and Dnes department store comprises Aqua Nueva, a Spanish restaurant; Aqua Kyoto, a Japanese restaurant; and Aqua Spirit, a glamorous cocktail bar. The latter's roof terrace makes it one of London's most desirable places to enjoy a drink on a warm summer evening.

The inside space is chic and sleek with a round bar, while the terrace has a wooden floor, comfortable chairs and great views. Bookings aren't accepted for the terrace, so arrive early if you want a seat. Views vary depending on where you sit, and can include the BT Tower, Liberty and the London Eye, among other landmarks.

As for drinks, there's a list of around 30 cocktails, priced at £9.50-15. Champagne costs from £14.50 per glass and £72.50 a bottle, while there are a choice of seven wines from £7 per glass and £28 a bottle. In addition to a couple of beer choices, there's a wide selection of spirits, notably rum and tequila. All this is enjoyed by a well-groomed (and well-off) clientele at this effortlessly upmarket spot.



THE ARGYLL ARMS

Address: 18 Argyll Street, W1F 7TP (☎ 020-7734 6117, 📧 nicholsonspubs.co.uk theargyl.larmsof@ordcircuslondon).

Opening hours: Mon-Thu, 10am to 11.30pm; Fri-Sat, 10am to midnight; Sun, 10am to 11pm.

Transport: Oxford Circus tube.

Go for: Wonderful Victorian décor and excellent ale.



There's been a pub here since 1742, when Argyll Street was built, but the current establishment dates from 1869 and was remodelled in the 1890s. It's a large, Grade II listed, Nicholson's establishment, with

lots of original Victorian fittings, including etched glass, mahogany, mirrors and an ornate plaster ceiling. It also has screened-off drink no areas known as 'snugs' and designed to separate the social classes (something the status-conscious Victorians were keen on).

The Argyll Arms might be sited at one of London's busiest pedestrian hubs, but it's relaxed inside and has a 'beer menu' with a wide range of well-tapped British and international brews. You can taste before ordering, with a 'sip before you sup' approach, while the upstairs bar has table service for the traditional pub grub on offer.

As you'd expect from its central location, the pub attracts a varied international crowd, which is younger and livelier on Fri-Sat nights. So go at other times if you want a contemplative pint in one of London's best late Victorian pub interiors.

THE ARTESIAN

Address: Langham Hotel, 1C Portland Place, Regent Street, W1B 1A (☎ 020-7636 1000, 📧 artesian-bar.co.uk)

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 2am; Sun, noon to midnight.

Transport: Oxford Circus tube.

Go for: Great design, fine cocktails – somewhere to really spoil someone.

One of London's most attractive bars in one of its grandest hotels, the Artesian is a triumph of classic-meets-contemporary design. Recently updated by the noted David Collins Studio, it blends the Victorian – marble bar, embroidered napkins and mirrors – with the modern: purple, leather-effect upholstery, ornate wood panelling and an elegant 'Chinese Chippendale' centrepiece, as the pagoda-like back bar is called.

Rum is a speciality here, with around 50 on offer, which the Artesian claims is London's largest selection. There's an extensive champagne list and an excellent choice of cocktails – it was winner of Tales of the Cocktail's 'World's Best Cocktail Menu' in 2011. The Artesian also prides itself on its 'gourmet bar food', and has faultless (and friendly) service.

The dress code is smart-casual and the location, opposite Broadcasting House, means

you might see or hear the odd familiar face or voice. It isn't a cheap date, but neither is it ruinously expensive, considering the Artesian was voted the 'World's Best Bar' by Drink International in 2012.



THE AUDLEY

Address: 41-43 Mount Street, W1K 2RX (☎ 020-7499 1843, taly-or-walks.r.co.uk/pub/audley-mafair/c3003).

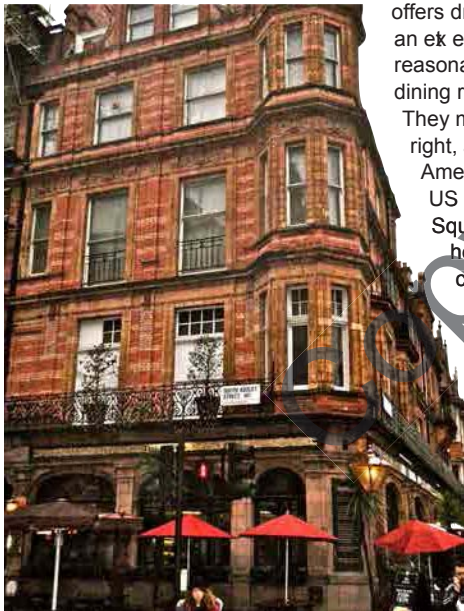
Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 11am to 11pm; Sun, noon to 10.30pm.

Transport: Bond Street or Green Park tube.

Go for: One of London's finest Victorian pub interiors.

A Taly or Walks pub, this is a grand, showy Victorian establishment spread over three floors in a building that used to be a hotel. The exterior is clad with attractive pale pink terracotta tiles and the large arched windows are decorated with flower-filled window boxes.

As befits its location in prestigious Mafair, the interior resembles a gentlemen's club, with gilded and polished wood, original crystal chandeliers, a fine mahogany clock and a red ceiling, giving a warm, welcoming ambience for the locals and tourists who patronise the Audley. It's smart, certainly, as you'd expect in this part of town, but also relaxed and civilised with good service, and offers drinkers a range of beer – and an extensive wine list. It also serves reasonable pub grub and has a dining room and an outdoor terrace. They must be doing something right, at least in the eyes of our American friends at the nearby US Embassy on Grosvenor Square: Michelle Obama brought her children here for fish and chips in 2009, suggesting that it provides an authentic English experience.



BAR AMÉRICAIN AT BRASSERIE ZEDEL

Address: 20 Sherwood Street, W1F 7ED (☎ 020-7734 4888, brasseriezedel.com/bar-american).

Opening hours: Daily, 4.30pm to midnight.

Transport: Piccadilly Circus tube.

Go for: Opulent decor, classic cocktails and an authentic speakeasy style.

London has a number of bars modelled on the Prohibition era theme and this is one of the best conceived and executed. It's in the basement of the former Regent Hotel, which was Europe's largest hotel when it was built in 1915, and is next door to the classic Parisian Brasserie Zedel.

The plush bar has enticing Art Deco decor, with gold-panelled rooms, dark wood panelling, tiger print carpets and elegant lamps. It provides the ambience of being aboard an ocean liner during the golden era of transatlantic travel.

Cocktails and champagne are the drinks of choice. There's a succinct list of six classic cocktails and six house cocktails, all good quality, costing £9.75 and served with nibbles. Of the eight champagnes, six are available by the glass as well as the bottle; glasses cost from £12.30, bottles from £67.50. There's also a selection of cognacs and American whiskeys, and list of around 20 wines, some of which can be bought by the glass (prices start from £5.90 a glass and £32 a bottle). Great service, drinks and décor combine to make this an ideal venue for an important date.



BARRICA

Address: 62 Goodge Street, W1T 4NE ☎ 020-7436 9448, ✉ barrica.co.uk

Opening hours: Mon-Fri, noon to 11.30pm; Sat, 1-11.30pm; closed Sun.

Transport: Goodge Street or Tottenham Court Road tube.

Go for: The great choice of Spanish wine and sherry.



This Iberian outpost in Fitz oiv a draws the punters with its choice of Spanish wine and sherry, and enjoy ble, reasonably priced food. It's a bright, modern bar, with yellow walls, a black and white tiled floor and plenty of tables. The 'homeland' is celebrated with Iberico hams suspended from the ceiling and Spanish-themed posters on the walls.

There are oe r 20 sherries to sample, and more than 100 white, red, rose and sparkling wines, including some rather good offerings and a fair smattering of rare ones. They take wine storage seriously here, with the reds stored in a temperature-controlled cabinet. Helpful tasting notes are provided for the wines, along with suggestions of food matches from the selection of artfully presented, good-quality tapas.

Barrica is popular, both with the area's media workers and those from further afield. It appeals to those after a quick beer or fino and plate of almonds, as well as to wine geeks and foodies looking to settle in for the evening, and booking is recommended for this friendly and professional venue.



THE BEAUFORT BAR

Address: Sao y Hotel, 100 Strand, WC2R 0EW ☎ 020 7836 4343, ✉ fairmont.com/sao y london/dining/beaufortbar).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 5pm to 1am; Sun, 2.30-6.30pm for the Art Decadent Tea.

Transport: Charing Cross tube/rail.

Go for: Art Deco glamour, champagne – and a super-indulgent afternoon tea.

The Beaufort is the Sao y's newcomer on the bar front, and while it's less feted than the American Bar (see page ?? ABOVE), it's arguably more atmospheric and plush. It's quite the glamour puss, in fact, with a stunning interior – a riot of gold leaf and black velvet – sleek service and fine drinks.

It specialises in 'champagne, cocktails and cabaret', and offers one of London's better choices of champagne by the glass, from around £16 upwards. Cocktail aficionados should choose the American Bar, however, as the Beaufort's list is less extensive. Its USP is its Art Decadent Tea served on Sunday



afternoons – an alcohol-infused afternoon tea which includes champagne and 'Tipsy Tea' cocktails alongside the sandwiches and scones.

Like its counterpart, this is a place to dress up for – smart-casual at the very least – and, similarly, you may have to queue to gain entry, as there's a no reservations policy. Last, but not least, don't forget to fill your wallet or have somebody else pay. This is a glamorous, high-end venue, as shown by the £62.50 per head price tag for the Art Decadent Tea.



BEDFORD & STRAND

Address: 1A Bedford Street, WC2E 9HH (☎ 020-7836 3033, bedford-strand.com).

Opening hours: Mon-Fri, noon to midnight; Sat, 5pm to midnight; closed Sun.

Transport: Coe nt Garden tube or Charing Cross tube/rail.

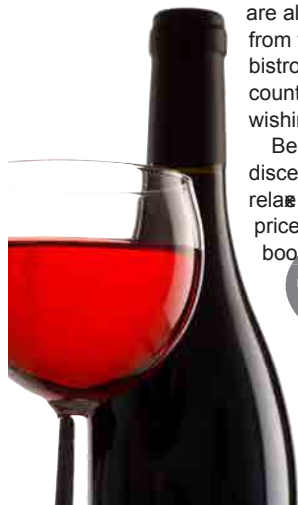
Go for: A tasty bistro with a broad wine list and good-a lue eats.

This basement e nue in Coe nt Garden stands out from the tourist traps and bland restaurant chains that rather dominate this area. The name is an American-sty e play on its location, which is the corner of Bedford Street and the Strand, and it bills itself (accurately as a bistro, wine bar and delicatessen, with seasonal French and British cook ng.

The ek ensie , reasonably priced selection of wines is the draw for many punters, with a mix of Old and New World offerings. A couple of doe n are aa ilable by the glass or carafe, as well as by the bottle, and some sherries and champagnes

are also sold by the glass. The bar area is partitioned from the white-tableclothed dining room, which offers bistro fare of good quality, while a separate deli counter serves charcuterie and finger foods to those wishing to snack on something lighter.

Bedford & Strand has become popular with discerning local wor e rs who like the clean d ecor, relax e d atmosphere and attractie quality and prices, and it also draws passing tourists, therefore book ng is recommended.



THE BLUE BAR

Address: Berkeley Hotel, Wilton Place, SW1X 7FL (☎ 020-7235 6000, the-berkeley.co.uk/n ightsbridge-bars/blue-bar).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 9am to 1am; Sun, 9am to 11pm.

Transport: Hyde Park Corner tube.

Go for: Exe llent cocktails and wines at one of London's smartest hotel bars.

Designed by the celebrated David Collins, this bar lie s up to its name, with a 'Lute ns Blue' colour scheme that encompasses its chairs, plasterwork and leather menus. These are set against a white onyx bar and black crocodile print leather floor, the Rococo and Art Deco detailing twinned with oe rsie d armchairs (big enough for the largest of bottoms), red lampshades and soft lighting.

Staff are professional and understated, and there's none of the snootiness you sometimes find in these venues; everyone is treated the same. It's an intimate space, with a capacity of around 60 people, so it doesn't feel soulless like some larger hotel bars. The drink are as classy as the env ironment: cocktails are exe llent, and there are also some high-end wines (a number available by the glass) and whiskies (oe r 50), as well as tapas-ty e snacks.

It isn't cheap, of course, but then this is an prestige, treat-y ourself, people-spotting establishment, with the usual smart-casual dress code, and is regarded by many to be one of London's finest bars.



BOISDALE OF BELGRAVIA

Address: 15 Eccleston Street, SW1W 9LX (☎ 020-7730 6922, boisdale.co.uk/belgravia).

Opening hours: Mon-Fri, noon to 1am; Sat, 6pm to 1am; closed Sun.

Transport: Victoria tube/rail.

Go for: A vast range of whisky, wine and cigars, accompanied by excellent jazz



A Scottish-themed Belgravia bar and restaurant (with a City outlet at 202 Bishopsgate and one at Canary Wharf on Cabot Place), the Boisdale's décor is an interesting blend of tacky and upscale, and not a place to go if you loathe tartan.

But it's club-like and comfortable, with a lively atmosphere and smart-casual dress code. Admission is £5 up to

10pm, £12 after, usually well justified by the quality of the jazz that's invariably playing here. You can eat and the food is excellent, if pricey – Boisdale is famous for its steaks – but for many, the drinks are the main attraction.

As might be expected in a place that celebrates all things Scots, there's a huge choice of malt whisky (more than 250) and also a vast wine list (400 plus), particularly strong on claret (the red wine of Bordeaux); the drinks list contains detailed tasting notes. Boisdale also has a wide range of cigars, and smoking is allowed on the bookable, covered and heated terrace. In short, a place for old-school indulgence, but don't forget your platinum credit card.



BRADLEY'S SPANISH BAR

Address: 42-4 Hanway Street, W1T 1UT (☎ 020 7636 0359, bradleyspanishbar.co.uk).

Opening hours: Mon-Thu, noon to 11.30pm; Fri-Sat, noon to midnight; Sun, 3-10.30pm.

Transport: Tottenham Court Road tube.

Go for: Nicely tatty, bohemian charm.

Inauspiciously situated in an alley near Tottenham Court Road tube station, Bradley's has been around for over 50 years, so it's obviously doing something right. It's a dark, two-floor affair, with a tiny bar at street level and a larger one below, and plenty of nooks and crannies for drinks.

It's hard to put your finger on the appeal of this popular bar, as it's slightly tatty with some cheesy Spanish decor, famously bad loos and a fairly limited (international) drinks selection. You can enjoy some Spanish beers, such as Mahou; there's a small wine list, starting at around £12.50 a bottle, and a wide choice of spirits, including tequila.

Part of the attraction is the jukebox – one of the few to still spin vinyl – and well stocked with classic rock. And Bradley's doesn't have any pretensions as a foodie joint: there are no tapas, unless you count crisps, nuts and pork scratchings. Best of all is the bohemian, congenial atmosphere. It's hard to pin down, but the place has a quirky *no sé qué* (*je ne sais quoi*) that keeps punters coming back for more.



THE BRUMUS BAR

Address: Haymarket Hotel, 1 Suffolk Place, SW1Y 4BP (☎ 020-7470 4000, firmdalehotels.com/london/haymarket-hotel).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 7am to midnight; Sun, 8am to 11pm.

Transport: Piccadilly Circus tube.

Go for: A relaxed cocktail or two in Theatreland.



The Haymarket Hotel is situated in the heart of London's theatre district and its Brumus Bar is a convenient place to rest your feet and revive your equilibrium before or after visiting one of the West End's attractions. The décor is bright and lively, with lots of pinks and reds, and a wooden board floor. The backs of the bar stools and some of the armchairs have striking silhouettes of dogs.

Cocktails are a speciality here, with a mix of classic and designer mixes, priced from around £11 which is about par for an upmarket hotel bar. There's also a good wine list, with many wines available by the glass. Prices are quite high – there aren't many bottles under £30 and bubbly starts from £56. Glasses of wine start at £7.50, with champagne from £12.25.

You can eat in the restaurant and there's also bar food, including tapas-type snacks (£3.50-5) and sharing platters (£16.50-18.50). The pre-post theatre meal is good value at £19.95 for three courses. As for atmosphere, there's no pomposity here, and the relaxed ambience extends to both staff and clientele.



THE BUCKINGHAM ARMS

Address: 62 Petty France, SW1H 9EU (☎ 020-7222 3386, pubs.co.uk/pub-detail.asp?pubid=365).

Opening hours: Mon-Fri, 11am to 11pm; Sat-Sun, 11am to 6pm.

Transport: St James's Park tube.

Go for: Decent ale in an attractive, traditional pub.

The Buckingham Arms and **The Star Tavern** (see page ?? [BELOW](#)) have the distinction of being the only two London pubs to appear in every edition of the CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) *Good Beer Guide*. The Buckingham is located in Petty France (the name comes from Petit France, as it once had a community of Huguenots, members of the Protestant Reformed Church of France), in front of the Wellington barracks and just down the road from the Ministry of Justice.

It's an attractive Victorian pub dating from the early 19th century, with leather armchairs and a nice mirrored back bar. There's an interesting side corridor which has an elbow ledge for drinkers and the pub will appeal to fans of traditional, non-pretentious venues serving well-tapped ale.

As well as Wells and Young's beer, there are two guest ales, often including something from Sambrook's, the Battersea-based brewer. In view of the pub's location, its clientele is made up of civil servants, soldiers and tourists who've wandered slightly off the beaten track



CAFÉ DES AMIS

Address: 11-14 Hanover Place, WC2E 9BP (☎ 020-7379 3444, cafedesamis.co.uk).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 11.30pm; Sun, noon to 8pm.

Transport: Covent Garden tube.

Go for: A cosy, comfortable place to enjoy wine.

This well-established Gallic bolthole in Covent Garden is, like Bedford & Strand (see page ?? ABOVE), a haven of civilisation in a sometimes fraught and chaotic part of London. It's both a restaurant, serving solid, tasty brasserie fare in a space with cosy corners and chandeliers (the set menus are especially good value), and a bar.

Located in the cellar, the bar is modern and understated with nicely subdued lighting. Its wine list isn't extensive but is of sound quality, not just French but international – from around £16.50 a bottle or £4.45 a glass. Brief tasting notes are provided, which is useful for non-experts. The bar also has a food menu, including French classics, baguettes and platters of charcuterie and cheese for sharing.

The atmosphere at Café des Amis is friendly, the service professional, prices competitive and it's in a central location: a sure recipe for success. As a result, it's popular with local workers – including actors, ballet dancers and opera singers from the nearby cultural spots – therefore booking is recommended.



THE CALTHORPE ARMS

Address: 252 Gray's Inn Road, WC1X 8BR (☎ 020-7278 4732, youngings.co.uk/pub-detail.asp?pubid=265).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 11am to 11.30pm; Sun, noon to 10.30pm.

Transport: King's Cross tube/rail.

Go for: A quiet pint in a traditional local.

Dating from the early Victorian period, this Grade II listed establishment is situated where Bloomsbury meets Clerkenwell and Holborn, which isn't generally regarded as a hotbed of fine drinking dens. Indeed, the Calthorpe Arms is something of a rarity in central London: a friendly, traditional corner pub.

The interior is brown and cream, with a cosy and nicely 'lived-in' ambience. It's a Young's establishment and stocks their usual range of beer and, sometimes, guest ales too. They're well cared for, as a number of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) awards testify, and the pub is a long-term entrant in the *Good Beer Guide*.

Prices are reasonable and hearty, traditional food is available, too, including a good Sunday lunch – there are no gastro pretensions or prices here. In short, this is an old-school, local boozer, a good place for a pensive pint and a plate of filling pub grub. Some might find it rather plain and quiet, while others will love it for the same reason.



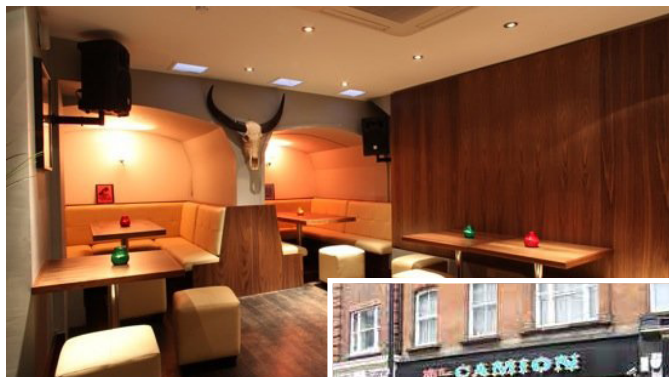
EL CAMION

Address: 25-7 Brewer Street, W1F 0RR (☎ 020-7734 7711, ✉ elcamion.co.uk .

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 3am; Sun, noon to 11pm. The Pink Chihuahua Cocktail Bar opens Mon-Sat, 6pm to 3am.

Transport: Piccadilly Circus tube.

Go for: Tequila, margaritas and a plate of nachos to soak it up.



El Camion's restaurant and its basement cocktail bar The Pink Chihuahua share a gaudy skulls-and-sombreros décor which recalls Mexico's *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). It may sound morbid, but the restaurant is authentic and the bar is fun, especially after 10pm when it begins to fill up.

The Soho branch is El Camion's second outlet – the original is on Portobello Road – and aims to 'bring a little bit of Baja California to London'. It serves good drinks and Mexican-style food (burritos, nachos, tacos, etc.) via an efficient, friendly table service. Not surprisingly, it's strong on tequila, with a decent range of *blanco* (white), *reposado* (rested) and *añejo* (aged) examples to try. Aficionados sip the better ones neat. Individual shots cost from around £2.75 to £7, depending on their age and quality.

El Camion also serves good margaritas (£6.50 and £7.50) and a few other cocktails, and has a range of bottled Mexican beers as well as a short wine list, including a Mexican Chardonnay. Its affordability, affordability and late licence have made it popular, therefore it's a good idea to book

THE CASK PUB & KITCHEN

Address: 6 Charlwood Street, SW1V 2EE (☎ 020-7630 7225, ✉ caspubandkitchen.com).

Opening hours: Mon-Sat, noon to 11pm; Sun, noon to 10.30pm.

Transport: Pimlico tube.

Go for: A tremendous choice of ale in a beer lovers' den.

Although slightly off the beaten track – in Pimlico – and only in existence since 2009, the Cask is already winning awards and now has a sister venue in Clerkenwell, the **Craft Beer Company** (see page ?? CH2). It's part of the new(ish) type of drinking establishment – a cross between a pub, a bar and a restaurant – which aims to

combine the best British real ale with fine international keg and bottled beer, to offer clients both quality and choice.

It's easy to overlook the Cask Pub & Kitchen, as it's unimpressive from the outside and located on an ugly '70s council estate. But the bar's interior is rather better, large and airy, though not the cosiest of environments. Staff are friendly and there's an interesting mix of clientele: locals, office workers, tourists and CAMRA types. Food is good, too.

As for the all-important beer, there are around nine real ales on tap, with BrewDog, Dark Star and Thornbridge featuring regularly. There's also a huge bottled selection, including craft beers from such far-away places as Japan and New Zealand, and all beers, including draught ales, are available to take away.

