

BARS & SPIRITS



Bar review: The Copper Shaker in downtown St. Petersburg



Copper Shaker's Cocchi Cutter begins with Brooklyn Gin. Photo by Justin Grant/special to tbt*

By Justin Grant, tbt* correspondent

Published: September 14, 2017

Updated: September 14, 2017 at 03:09 PM

I think I've found the Goldilocks bar.

There's definitely a sweet spot in my preference in drinking establishments. Not too crowded, but not dead. Not too expensive, but not a dive (often the inevitable result of very cheap drinks). Great selection, but not overwhelmingly so. Attractively designed, but not overstated. You get it.

The Copper Shaker in downtown St. Pete checks the list for about any "just right" scenario you want to throw at it. Opened to little fanfare in July, the bar has quickly become a favorite for those in-the-know. I stumbled upon it by accident, and I'm glad I did.

The Copper Shaker is just outside of the busiest part of Central, so you can avoid the long waits and big crowds of that area without venturing too far off the beaten path. It's popular, sure, but if you've battled the crowds at the east end of the Central Avenue strip on a First Friday, you can understand the appeal in a significantly less-crowded bar situated just a block or two away.

Inside, the Copper Shaker has that clean, dark and elegant look that you find in many speakeasy-inspired cocktail spots. Black ceiling, dark wood, textured planks in place of wall art, granite bar, rows of backlit bottles in front of a weathered brick wall. Of course, there's also the customary copper still at the entrance, and the large semicircular booths against the wall are framed in barrel staves. It's themed without veering into being corny.

This place is a cocktail bar first and foremost, and that's where you'll find much of the action. The names of the drinks are often humorous — Stolen Huffu still makes me chuckle — but the finished products are no joke.

I started out with the Cocchi Cutter, which is made from Brooklyn gin, Aperol, Cocchi (not cocchi, but I can't fault them for taking the low-hanging fruit) Americano and hopped grapefruit bitters. It was smooth, lightly sweet, with a nice herbal component rounded out by the pungent bitters.

Next I sampled the Presently Homeless, which involves fresh pear nectar. How do I know it's fresh? Because it actually affects the mouthfeel by adding a touch of that gritty pear texture. Very unusual for a cocktail, and very intriguing.

I could go on about the cocktails (shout-outs to Cousin Named Jeff and The Unusual Suspects), but I suggest you visit yourself and sample a few. Most are "only" \$10, which is, again, right in that sweet spot. Most bars would charge \$13 and up for these concoctions, and anything less would be unsustainable.

If you want to explore the rest of the spirit list, you'll be pleased to find a phenomenal whisky selection. There are more small-batch and boutique brands of vodka, gin (Uncle Val's Peppered Gin?) and other spirits that you'll find anywhere in town, but that's not to say there's an excess of stock. Instead, let's call it comprehensive.

For beer and wine, the selection is far more limited, but not chosen carelessly. The beer selection contains several local brews from Motorworks, Cigar City and St. Pete Brewing, as well as international standbys like Chimay and Samuel Smith's. The wine list is comprised of a half-dozen options, all available by the glass for a hair under \$10.

While I couldn't possibly be confused for a food critic, I'd be remiss in not mentioning that part of my experience. Prior to visiting, I noticed an interesting ramen spin-off made with a vegan dashi broth and enoki mushrooms in place of noodles. Unfortunately, this had been recently taken off the menu, so I was offered an off-menu alternative of cauliflower steaks with tomato jam.

Cauliflower steaks are about as exciting to me as portobello mushroom entrees — a commendable effort to provide a plant-based option, but can we please use some different veggies for once? In this case, however, I had to change my tune. Copper Shaker's chef has made an otherwise token option into a must-order, featuring charred cauliflower topped with savory tomato jam, crispy shallots and micro greens, bordered by streaks of coffee BBQ sauce and Sriracha. Brilliant.

To really seal the deal, I ordered a scotch, neat: Bruichladdich Port Charlotte Islay, an aggressively peated whisky (phenols at 40ppm, for fellow nerds) that seemed extremely fairly priced at \$11. Our bartender asked if I'd like it in a Glencairn glass, snifter or regular rocks glass. On. Point.

Tastes vary, of course, but for me, this bar is just right.

Contact Justin Grant at jg@saintbeat.com. Follow @WordsWithJG.



Sign up for Things To Do

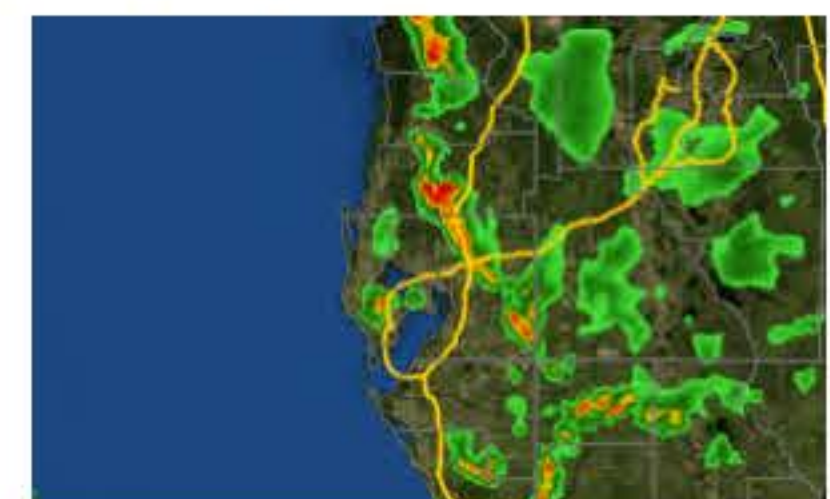
Never miss out on free or cheap fun again with Tampa Bay's best source for family-friendly events.

Sign Up

Sign up for our other newsletters

(View our Privacy Policy)

Weather Center



Weather Alerts:
Full-sized radar
Current conditions
10-day Forecast
Hurricane Guide

Radar Images:

MugShots