

The Holiday Issue

SOMMA

The Holiday Issue

The spirit of
JAMIE KING

THE BIRD & THE BEE: FUTURE IS PAST
RAISE THE RED LANTERN
COOLEST DIVE BARS IN THE WORLD



EDDIE MARSAN: WEIRD & LOVING IT
THE SIX SHOOTER FILM SERIES
TELEFON TEL AVIV RETURN TO EARTH

Volume 22.10 Dec/Jan 2009 USA \$3.50

Canada \$4.50 England £3.00 Japan ¥1000

A Rendezvous with Déjà Vu

Quietly nestled within San Diego's Mission Hills District, the Starlite radiates with a jovial amber glow, perfectly poised for the holiday season. One of Tim Mays' most recent ventures to excite the senses, the Starlite is a self-proclaimed "neighborhood hideaway" with a nostalgic, swinging '60's feel.

A prominent creator on San Diego's nightlife scene, Mays already has the extraordinarily successful live music joint, The Casbah, and the equally popular dining spot, the Turf Club, under his belt. The secret, according to Mays, is to create a comfortable experience that leaves patrons planning their next trip back.

Currently in its sophomore year, the lounge has quickly drawn a diverse following from across the city. Mays' concept for the Starlite echoes mid-century modernity washed in mineralized earth tones, courtesy of local design-build team Bells and Whistles (B&W), which was responsible for all facets of the design from conception to construction.

Mays' vision was sparked by the 1959 Alfred Hitchcock thriller, *North by Northwest*, starring Cary Grant, where the final scene unfolds inside a beautifully designed mountainside home, inspired by the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.

True to Wright's design principles, the Starlite has incorporated a wide-open floor plan, bounded by stone and wood to bring elements of the natural world inside. With one cinematic reference on file, B&W also began drawing inspiration from the uncomplicated Scandinavian designs of the '60s to the natural color palettes found in the hol-

lows of the Carlsbad Caverns, according to Jason St. John, designer, craftsman and B&W co-owner.

The Starlite gets it right from the start as patrons enter through a hexagonal passageway constructed of Brazilian Ipe wood. This unique entrance is a nod to the ghostly hexagonal reflections occasionally found in old Hollywood films when a stray beam of light had entered the camera. The focal point of the main interior is an impressive chandelier, made from a collection of thin, antiqued steel pipes tipped with fluorescent flares of icy blue LED lights. They hang like galactic stalactites over the sunken bar and are the last remaining artifact from the bar's past life as a prominent lesbian lounge, Six Degrees.

Staggered rock walls and rich cherry-stained woods make the bar a cozy den-like dwelling, while the open floor plan generates a sense of modern yet familiar comfort, in a Robert Redford meets James Bond sort of way.

The Starlite's music is as eclectic as its clientele. The beat of '50s, '60s and '70s rock and pop are piped soothingly throughout the entire lounge. A favorite of intelligentsia and hipsters alike, the lounge is also studded with older couples and industry types. For the outdoor adventurer, there is also Starlite's open-air patio, offering a chance to slip away from it all and dream among the stars.

The Starlite gives San Diegans a much-needed alternative to the raucous downtown Gaslamp and Pacific Beach nightlife scene. And the lounge is also an exciting change of pace for upscale epicureans who have been attracted in throngs to its seasonal menu of modern

comfort foods.

Starlite's kitchen is run by head chef Marguerite Grifka, whose fresh new take on American food has given the lounge something more than its good looks to boast about. Her philosophy is simple: highlight natural flavors. It's this philosophy that is reflected in the Starlite's menu, which uses free-range meats, local sustainable seafood, and organic ingredients as much as possible.

A classic cult favorite, "The Burger," an all-natural Brandit beef patty topped with Gruyere and caramelized onions, still reigns as a house favorite. But also tempting is the unexpected Sausage Board, featuring herb apple sausages, dates wrapped in bacon and roasted marrowbone. And don't forget the Pan Roasted Jidori Chicken with whole-wheat cavatelli pasta.

But the vegetarian need not fret. The organic Stuffed Kabocha Squash is also a top seller served with an apple, rum raisin, and pumpkinseed relish. Perhaps one of the best features about the menu, however, is that it can be enjoyed late into the night.

The Starlite's glory, though, is its extensive menu of specialty cocktails and hard to find liquors. The Starlite Mule (vodka, ginger beer, bitters and lime juice) is by far the most popular drink, a fresh take on the Moscow Mule from the late '40s. The spicy yet refreshing beverage is served in a chilled copper mug.

The Starlite achieves what it sets out to do. It creates a comfortable relaxing atmosphere and a superb dining experience that outshines the competition and draws you back for more. Text Mindy Benner

