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Bar Of The Quarter - Room Manchester

New restaurant-bar combos are popping up all over the place in Manchester these days, with cocktails a recurrent theme. Your Quarter examines what Room has to offer in the face of competition from the City's ever-diversifying cocktail scene.

Situated at the top of King Street, in the building that used to house Reform, Room certainly has the location right. Its Victorian heritage lends an impressive grandeur to the venue, with high ceilings, wood panelling and huge, arching windows, which provides some great people-watching opportunities on the unsuspecting streets below. A red-carpeted spiral staircase sweeps majestically up from the ground floor entrance to the bar and restaurant on the first floor, where you're greeted by a statue of Lord Gladstone, who was Prime Minister when this building was constructed in 1871.

The furnishings turn it into a sophisticated bar, albeit it with a somewhat retro vibe including glossy black tables, leather seating and a variety of designer chairs. Large print wallpaper, which might induce claustrophobia in a smaller venue, fills the expansive walls nicely here and massive red lampshades loom overhead, emphasising the 'Alice in Wonderland' feeling that this dramatically large venue can convey.

The focal point is the bar, glowing white in the centre of the room and effectively separating the bar from the restaurant. Tucked away discreetly in the corner, resident DJs play laid-back sets at the weekend, with the emphasis on lounge music and funky soul.

Drinks-wise, a selection of specialist bottled beers (no draft) includes Leffe, Hoegaarden, Cusquena and Staropramen. There's also a decent wine list, offering options around the £14 mark and available by the glass. A dozen Champagne bottles feature too, with a 1990 Krug topping the bill at £170.

However, it's the cocktails that rule the roost. Classics and signatures for £6 and Champagne cocktails for £7 are blended, shaken, muddled and twisted into life using some quality spirits, with bar staff able to offer plenty of variations on a theme to suit individual tastes. Room 'Originals' include some imaginative and varied options, from the summery, 'Cool as a cucumber', to the winter-warming 'Room stimulant'.

The bar attracts much of its clientele from the business district on its doorstep. A cocktail hour runs from 5-7pm every weekday, offering a soothing antidote to those feelings of being 'crushed, muddled and shaken' from a hard day in the office.



There are a lot of comings and goings in the bar; no doubt partly due to the fact many guests are either waiting to go into, or have just come out of, the restaurant. But, even for others, it seems that Room represents part of a night out, rather than being the sole venue. People may well be seduced by the relaxing atmosphere and leisurely cocktails into lingering here longer than intended; but they seem to move off in the end, onto the next stop on the bar-hopping circuit, or perhaps a club.

Room is a plush, classy venue that somehow manages to steer clear of pretension and ostentation. High ceilings keep the cigarette smoke at bay, and music is played at an ideal level, low enough for conversation but loud enough to maintain a lively atmosphere. Wear a funky dress, or dress down with jeans and a trendy top; the aim is to feel relaxed and casual while still looking good.

Drinks: Classic and imaginative cocktails, speciality beers and a 'cheeky' wine list.

Open: 11pm, or 2am Thursday to Saturday. Closed Sundays.

Cost: Cocktails £6-7; free entry.

Service: Smart and friendly. Casually dressed bouncers, refreshingly free from attitude.

Decor: Traditional grandiose meets contemporary sleek.

Go if: You want to meet people somewhere classy, or wind down somewhere special after work.

Avoid if: You want to go dancing, or can't imagine being in a bar without a pint.