

2015 Best Of Our Valley Winners: Nightlife & Cocktails

Written by Suzanne Koch

Tuesday, 12 May 2015 14:43 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 May 2015 14:57

Nightlife & Cocktails

The bustling nightlife and innovative cocktails of Phoenix are possibly two of its most well-known assets for a reason—whatever type of evening one is looking for, they'll be sure to find it among the local nightclubs, lounges and neighborhood bars.

BY ASHLEY R. CARLSON



BEST LOUNGE

>>THE MINT

Occupying 7,000-plus square feet of prime location in Old Town Scottsdale, this “ultra lounge” is actually the former site of a bank—the obvious inspiration behind the name. With the bank’s old vault as a centerpiece, an expansive patio dotted with cabanas and a specialty Champagne bar in the co-ed restroom, The Mint’s atmosphere screams luxury. Guests can reserve a private dining/wine room and VIP accommodations, making The Mint the perfect choice for upscale events of any kind. themintaz.com.

BEST BLOODY MARY

>>MORNING GLORY CAFE

This tranquil locale at the Farm at South Mountain offers a quiet garden retreat for one to take in the morning. Guests are invited to order Morning Glory Café’s signature Bloody Mary before delving into a vast selection of delectable breakfast options like brioche French toast, fresh farm omelets and huevos rancheros. Featuring local and organic ingredients, Morning Glory Café encourages visitors to arrive on their bikes or with furry friends in tow. thefarmatsouthmountain.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BLUES/JAZZ BAR

>>THE RHYTHM ROOM

This well-known blues and jazz bar has been entertaining audiences with great performances since opening in 1991. With an understated, casual ambience and friendly staff, guests to The Rhythm Room know that they’ll not only get to watch talented performers like The Steepwater Band and Janis Ian, but also receive great service while doing so. Typical bar fare and a fun, dive-y feel lend to this music venue’s hometown charm. Though the venue does not have a kitchen, it is visited by food trucks on Friday and Saturday nights. rhythmroom.com.

BEST COCKTAIL WAITRESS

>>KIVA LUNDY, BOTTLED BLONDE PIZZERIA + BEER GARDEN

This multitasking beauty has been in the serving industry for several years, citing positions with Suede/ The Mint and Wild Knight as some of her favorite experiences during her schooling at Arizona State University. When she’s not serving up delectable cocktails at Bottled Blonde Pizzeria + Beer Garden, Lundy works as a social media specialist and content writer for a local start-up company. Lundy enjoys spending time with her boyfriend, dog and traveling whenever her busy schedule allows. bottledblondeaz.com.

BEST ARIZONA BREWERY

>>THAT BREWERY

This brewery and foodie paradise in Pine has been impressing thirsty connoisseurs since 2004. Memorable brews include THAT Strawberry Blonde, Knotty Nut Brown and Monsoon Mud Stout. Those looking for a great dish can enjoy salmon sliders, elk and buffalo chili and prime rib sandwiches. Owners Tamara and Steve Morken are also avid philanthropists: THAT Brewery participates in various fundraisers and events that support Pine and the nearby town of Strawberry. thatbrewery.com.

BEST ARIZONA WINERY

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>>CADUCEUS CELLARS

Perhaps best known because of its famous owner, Tool musician Maynard James Keenan, Caduceus Cellars in Jerome has beaten the harsh Northern Arizona weather to produce truly memorable, award-winning wines in the last decade. Winos can visit the cellar for tastings any day of the year, and the wines available online are often limited-edition or box sets, such as the VSC Christmas White Special, the Caduceus Nagual del Judith and the 2012 Kitsune. caduceus.org.

BEST BAR TO FEED YOUR INNER CHILD

>>DAVE & BUSTER'S

This restaurant and arcade-game emporium is an entertainment- lover's dream. Created when two entrepreneurs, appropriately named Dave and Buster, joined forces to open a joint American-style eatery and arcade, Dave and Buster's has grown into a national favorite for both children and adults to come drink, eat and play. For more active players, try the bowling alley, pool hall and shuffleboard, where one can order delicious items like the Mountain O' Nachos or Lotsa Loaded Tots when hunger strikes. daveandbusters.com.

BEST BARTENDER: FEMALE

>>SHAMARAH SHOUP, MAYA DAY + NIGHTCLUB

Before being invited to bartend for Maya Day + Nightclub upon its opening, Shamarah Shoup worked at many other sports bars, beer events and nightclubs in the Phoenix area. When she's not pouring drinks, she's busy with schoolwork; Shoup is pursuing a Mechanical Engineering degree at Scottsdale Community College with plans to transfer to Arizona State University. Shoup enjoys spending time with her family and dogs (a k a her "children") and designing new drinks for Maya customers. A favorite creation of Shoup's is the as-yet-unnamed gin cocktail with elderflower liquor, fresh lime juice and a splash of refreshing grapefruit. mayaclubaz.com.

BEST BARTENDER: MALE

>>MARCUS VALENZUELA, MAYA DAY + NIGHTCLUB

Marcus Valenzuela joined the force at Maya Day + Nightclub after a stint in Colorado and loves the energy that Old Town Scottsdale emanates. After his day job wraps up, he prepares for a fast-paced evening at the club, stating that the atmosphere offers a nice escape from the 9 to 5. Valenzuela's favorite drinks to make are White Gummy Bears for the female customers and green tea shots for the guys. When he's not working, Valenzuela likes to spend time exercising, traveling and visiting with his girlfriend. mayaclubaz.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST BLACK-OUT DRINK, BEST HAPPY HOUR, BEST MARGARITA, BEST MIMOSA AND BEST PARTY

>>BAR EL HEFE

This famed taqueria in the heart of Old Town Scottsdale is not your average taco stand. Boasting an extensive menu including braised beef, carne asada, duck carnitas, an award- winning hamburguesa and Hefe Dog, those with a hefty appetite can enjoy appetizers and desserts alongside their margaritas and mimosas. Guests are invited to try Hefe's Blackout Margarita, a delectable and potent mix of Cazadores, Four Loko, agave nectar, sweet and sour and fresh-squeezed lime juice. With a memorable happy hour and attractive and attentive staff, it's no wonder that El Hefe in Scottsdale is the chosen destination for residents and visitors alike to drink and be merry. elhefescottsdale.com.



BEST CRAFT BEER BAR, BEST DANCE MUSIC SCENE, BEST DAY-DRINKING SPOT AND BEST PLACE TO SPEND A 21ST BIRTHDAY

>>BOTTLED BLONDE PIZZERIA + BEER GARDEN

A hip pizzeria and beer garden in Scottsdale, Bottled Blonde is the go-to for Phoenixians craving wood-fired pizzas, artisanal meats and cheeses and local craft beers. With a woodsy, rustic atmosphere and bubbly staff, Bottled Blonde Pizzeria + Beer Garden is the perfect venue for lunch, happy hour or an evening out with friends. Delicious pizzas like the Salsiccia and Formaggio, as well as beer from local purveyor Four Peaks, pepper the menu. Bottle service is offered from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m., inviting guests to engage in some late- night fun. bottledblondeaz.com.

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BEST COUNTRY MUSIC BAR AND BEST DANCE FLOOR

>>DIERKS BENTLEY'S WHISKEY ROW

In many ways, Dierks Bentley's Whiskey Row is not the average country bar, yet in the most important ways, it is: live music, a high-energy dance floor and lots of cold beer. One innovation that regularly wows guests are the three beer taps and one liquor tap at each booth table, allowing customers to pour their own beverages. An American gastropub menu and talented local country bands keep Valley residents coming back, whether for a chill happy hour or all-night birthday party complete with bottle service. dierkswhiskeyrow.com.

BEST DIVE BAR

>>COACH HOUSE

Opened by Bob and Mary Brower in 1959, this family-owned business in Old Town Scottsdale is a true staple of the Southwest, having been awarded an official landmark by the City of Scottsdale in 1998. With its no-frills attitude and affordable drinks, Coach House has been the locals' favorite watering hole for decades, offering free barbecue every Sunday for patrons from 2 to 4 p.m. coachhousescottsdale.com.

BEST HIPSTER BAR

>>LUX CENTRAL

Established in 2005, this stylish eatery in the heart of Downtown Phoenix has one mission: to provide high-quality food, drink and service while maintaining an atmosphere that encourages a love for art, music, design and culture in the Valley. A changing daily menu is posted on Lux Central's Facebook page, but guests can expect such delicacies as a New York strip with lemon-parmesan asparagus, a Yorkshire pudding burger and garlic-gruyere scones with marmalade. luxcoffee.com.

BEST COCKTAILS

>>THE BREADFRUIT & RUM BAR

This award-winning restaurant in Downtown Phoenix is known for its eclectic and exciting cocktail menu, one that offers more than 150 carefully-curated cigars and rums. Guests can enjoy Jamaican-themed fare highlighted by sustainably- grown seafood, organic produce and locally-raised meats in an understated, elegant atmosphere. Memorable drink choices include Hemingway's Daiquiri, with Matusalem Platino Rum, maraschino liqueur, grapefruit, lime and demerara sugar, and the Rhum Alexander, with Clément V.S.O.P. Vieux Rhum, house crème de cacao, coconut and nutmeg. thebreadfruit.com.

BEST COUGAR BAR

>>BLUE MARTINI

This trendy nightclub in North Phoenix has a reputation for delicious drinks, talented live entertainment and an ever-growing bevy of attractive Phoenicians dancing the night away. With a drink list of 40-plus signature martinis, Blue Martini's massive patio and dance floor are perfect for guests looking for an evening of excitement. Various weekly events like Latin Night and Girls' Night Out ensure there's never a dull moment at this favorite of Scottsdale's elite. bluemartinilounge.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST COMEDY CLUB

>>TEMPE IMPROV

This hallmark comedy club in Tempe has reopened its doors, and the results are better than ever. Located right across from Arizona State University's campus, Tempe Improv is exactly the type of atmosphere you'd expect from a heralded comedy club: lots of seating for great views, a lengthy drink menu, and the funniest comedians around. Guests can expect the likes of Wayne Brady, Jo Koy and Kevin Nealon to grace the Tempe Improv stage. tempeimprov.com.

BEST PUB

>>RULA BULA

Located in the historic Andre building on Mill Avenue in Tempe, this Irish pub evokes the feel of a restaurant right in the heart of Ireland. Bric-a-brac, flooring and lighting create a rustic atmosphere punctuated by a large garden patio, outside bar and indoor stage for live performances. A menu with loads of traditional fare—fish and chips, shepherd's pie, Guinness and beef pie with puff pastry—and tasty craft brews bring locals and visitors together for some authentic Irish celebration. rulabula.com.

BEST TRIVIA NIGHT

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>>BOULDERS ON BROADWAY

Opened by an avid adventurer and rock climber, Boulders on Broadway is that favorite neighborhood bar encouraging outdoor excursions and indoor togetherness. With 30 craft beers on draft and 70 in the bottle, Boulders on Broadway ensures that during a lively game of trivia, any style of beer is available to enjoy. Though the restaurant is known for its specialty pizzas, patrons can order comfort bar fare, like the hearty guacamole dip or creative “pizza nuggets.” bouldersonbroadway.com.

FAVORITE DJ

>>PHILLIP THOMAS

Beginning his career at the ripe old age of 16, Phillip Thomas has built a successful business as an international DJ, performing around the state of Arizona and abroad for the last five years. After a jam-packed 2014 schedule filled with tours, major releases and amassing sponsors, Thomas expects this to be an even busier year. Though he has grown a bevy of fans through appearances and social media, Thomas prefers to call them “friends he hasn’t met yet,” and makes it a point to mentor and introduce new DJ’s in the Phoenix scene. djphillipthomas.com.



BEST WINE BAR

>>POSTINO WINECAFE

Built in strategically-placed, historical buildings in blossoming neighborhoods across the Valley, Postino Winecafe has established itself as the go- to neighborhood wine bar for understated, hip atmospheres and scrumptious Italian cuisine— and amazing weekend brunch. Guests can enjoy carefully-curated wine lists and local craft beers, and delight in such menu items as the bruschetta (choices include brie and apples with fig spread and smoked salmon with pesto), salads and paninis. Desserts include the memorable salted caramel sundae and crème brûlée for a fantastic finish. postinowinecafe.com

2014 WINNER

BEST GAY BAR

>>KOBALT

Filling a much-needed niche in the Phoenix community since 2006, Kobalt has grown into a preferred spot for Friday happy hours, karaoke and quirky events like Showtune Night and dart tournaments. Daily specials, trivia nights and weekly revues keep the crowd constantly entertained, with many guests invited to join in on the performances. The second-Saturday-of- the-month drag show features the best performers in the Valley—and there’s never a cover. kobaltbarphoenix.com.

BEST KARAOKE NIGHT

>>GEISHA A GO GO

Geisha A Go Go makes a point of bringing Japanese culture to the Valley, offering Phoenicians an authentic sushi menu, extensive song list and private karaoke rooms to perform in. Staples like veggie lettuce wraps and yakisoba noodles tantalize the taste buds, while cocktails like the Hello Kitty (a mix of citrus vodka and fruit-infused sake) are available to calm the nerves of shy singers. A large karaoke room, complete with stage and disco ball, is available for reservation to make the night truly memorable. geishaagogo.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST LATE-NIGHT MUNCHIES

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>>AZ88

Although this Scottsdale bar is stark, chic and modern, AZ88's menu offers a plethora of sensational choices for foodies to dig into. Food is served until 12:30 a.m., with appetizers including galette flatbreads in the French bistro style, homemade chips with blue cheese and hot sauce and a refreshing shrimp ceviche. A lengthy entrée menu including burgers and sandwiches ensures that AZ88 has a choice for everyone. az88.com.

BEST SALOON

>>GREASEWOOD FLAT

For those who want to experience a truly "rustic" atmosphere, go no farther than Greasewood Flat. Housed in a 130-year-old bunkhouse and serving hearty burgers and no-frills libations since 1975, Greasewood Flat has been a regular stop for bikers, tourists and locals alike over the decades. With seating for more than 1,000 guests, an outdoor dance floor and live music daily, Greasewood Flat is the perfect location for private parties, weddings and events. greasewoodflat.net.

2014 WINNER

BEST LOCAL DJ

>>DJ ELITE

Winning this category for the third year in a row, DJ Elite is the premier choice for emcee and event services here in the Valley. A dedicated staff and the highest quality of lighting, speakers and sound systems available sets DJ Elite apart from the competition, as evidenced by its extensive prior client list including NFL, Audi and more. There is no limit to the size or type of event, although DJ Elite is most often booked for weddings, corporate events and private functions. djeliteaz.com.

BEST NIGHTLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER

>>PETER SPEYER

Since 2011, Peter Speyer has specialized in nightlife photography and event work, although he also does portrait work with models throughout the Valley. Speyer's goal with every shoot is to capture the raw emotion of people, and he is always pushing the envelope to grow in his craft and set his style apart. Speyer is not only well-known for his inventive photography and his residences at El Hefe, The Chive's Arizona Chapter and Dierks Bentley's Whiskey Row in Scottsdale, but also for another unique asset: his beard. speyerone.com.

BEST PLACE TO BUY BOOZE

>>TOTAL WINE & MORE

As the nation's largest retailer of fine wines, Total Wine & More has something for every palate. A typical location boasts more than 8,000 wines from every wine-producing region in the world, as well as 2,500 styles of beers and 3,000 kinds of spirits. Staff is knowledgeable and educated, fulfilling Total Wine & More's motto to demystify the wine-buying experience and help customers find the perfect bottle. totalwine.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST PLACE TO DISCOVER NEW MUSIC

>>CRESCENT BALLROOM

This mid-size music venue in Downtown Phoenix has been wowing guests with its lineup, signature drinks and restaurant menu for several years. At the helm of Crescent Ballroom's locally-sourced Cocina 10 is Chris Bianco, cooking up memorable items like the blackened salmon salad and barbacoa torta, with a mouthwatering cocina chocolate bark for dessert. Music buffs can enjoy a never-ending list of alternative artists like George Ezra, The Weepies and Joshua Radin. crescentphx.com.

2014 WINNER

BEST POOL PARTY

>>HOTEL VALLEY HO

With a unique Hollywood history and a reputation for being one of the most well-preserved mid-century modern hotels in the country, Hotel Valley Ho has been a destination for splendor since reopening in 2005. Guests can relax in one of the 191 rooms of this urban retreat, dine at renowned restaurant ZuZu or relax in the pool at OH Pool Bar + Cabanas. Plus, live music is a regular occurrence. hotelvalleyho.com.

BEST ROOFTOP BAR

>>THE LUSTRE ROOFTOP GARDEN AT HOTEL PALOMAR PHOENIX

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This rooftop bar perched on the third floor of Downtown Phoenix's Hotel Palomar is an oasis in the desert. Fresh-squeezed juices and handmade cocktails abound, with guests invited to peruse the gardens and perhaps engage in a little game of "champong" (like the traditional beer pong, but a tad classier with a bottle of bubbly). When hunger strikes, a locally-sourced menu with indulgent items such as pork belly mac and cheese and wild mushroom flatbread can be served poolside. lustrerooftopgarden.com.