

Northern Exposure

by Sara Faith Alterman | November 18, 2008

stuff@night

Malden just might be a hotspot waiting to happen.

If you've lived in the Boston area for a reasonable amount of time, chances are pretty good that you'd never expect to hear the phrases "city of Malden" and "hotbed of über-cool nightlife" together in a sentence. Au contraire, my elitist urban friends. Like other communities that exist outside the invisible boundaries laid by snobbish Bostonians, Malden is an up-and-coming destination, thanks to a growing population of young professionals who are migrating away from the city's ever-increasing cost of living.

In fact, the bar scene in Malden Center is growing consistently, developing a trendy edge without losing any of its townie-bar charm. Leading the pack is All Seasons Table (64 Pleasant Street, Malden, 781.397.8188), which sounds like it should be an Americana extravaganza but is actually a sleek and chic sushi restaurant. Modern Asian décor, cheery lighting, and wide-open space make All Seasons the place for weekend cocktails in Malden. Hell, even mid-week, the bar is hopping. And why not? The drink menu is kicky and creative and the sushi is fantastic. Sip on a Rising Sun martini (\$8.75), a pleasantly dry blend of Absolut, apple sake, and apple juice that's just apple-y enough for the fall weather without being sugary overkill. Lychee fans will marvel at the Tokyo-Politan (\$8.75), Absolut with lychee sake, cranberry juice, a hint of lime, and a plump lychee garnish.



Looking for something to nosh on while you're in cocktail mode? Sashimi is waiting for you, and in a martini glass, no less. The Salmon Sashimi Tini (\$11.95) isn't a drink but rather a glorious mound of raw salmon drizzled with sake and soy sauce and crowned with a raw quail egg. Sushi that's cheaper than a regular martini at most Boston bars? Domo arigato, All Seasons.

Up the street (actually, it's all pretty much "up the street" in Malden) at Hugh O'Neill's (45 Pleasant Street, Malden, 781.338.9977), the mood shifts from Far East to Emerald Isle. This cheerful Irish pub is as authentic as any of its downtown cousins, with several times the space (and at a fraction of the cost). On weeknights, the pub feels quaint and neighborhoody, but on the weekends, DJ Greg Wymer tears it up, playing hip-hop and dance music and packing the place to the gills. As at most pubs, the pints flow freely, but the cocktail list here is also surprisingly creative. On a recent visit, the menu was all about black cherry. Try the Eye Opener (\$5.50) — with Smirnoff Black Cherry, Sloe gin, a splash of Southern Comfort, and orange and pineapple juices — or bartender Chon-ti Alexander's Halloween-inspired creation, the Black Widow (\$5.50), made with Smirnoff Black Cherry, Chambord, and pineapple and cherry juices.

One of the coolest things about Pearl Street Station (53 Summer Street, Malden, 781.322.6410) is its architecture. The building, erected in 1891, is the former home of the Boston and Maine Railroad Station, and it still boasts the original floor-to-ceiling brick fireplace. It's easy to imagine turn-of-the-century travelers hustling and bustling through the massive depot. With this historical context (and dark wood galore), Pearl Street feels more like a stately manor than a casual bar, but it's a favorite gathering place to watch sporting events or catch up with friends. The Pumpkintini (\$7.45), featuring vanilla vodka and pumpkin spice liqueur, is reminiscent of Thanksgiving dessert. Fall drinks fade away as the days grow shorter, and this cocktail is not to be missed, especially if you've got a sweet tooth (and a thirst for booze).

Finally, the trendy Exchange Street Bistro (67 Exchange Street, Malden, 781.322.0071) is a hip and flirty spot that will indulge your inner European sophisticate. Cozy up with a date in the martini lounge; it's warmly sexy, with a coy and cosmopolitan atmosphere that doesn't feel like it's trying too hard. The drink list is devastatingly sinful, with highlights like the spiced pear martini (\$9), a winning combination of Grey Goose Pear and Goldschläger that's all lip-licking cinnamon sugar. The Babe Ruth (\$9) tastes like a liquid candy bar would, thanks to Skyy vodka, dark crème de cacao, and butterscotch schnapps. You'll be licking your fingers, and possibly even your lovah's. And why wait until the weekend? We were here on a Tuesday night, and we saw more couples making "do it to me now" eyes at each other than we usually do on a Friday night in a Faneuil Hall lust shack. Exchange Street has it going on all week long.

While Malden is still mostly off the radar for people who've never ventured north on the Orange Line, it's a slice of Boston-area life that warrants exploration. With the economy tanking, the housing market crashing, and general panic about the fiscal state of our union, modern hipsters have to make peace with geographic expansion. Our prediction is that Malden's a hotspot waiting to happen. Don't you want to be among the first to discover it for yourself?