

STAFF ONLY CLUB

Like most speakeasies worth their salt, the first rule of Staff Only Club was, “do not tell anyone.” But good news travels fast, and soon after opening late last year, this members-only club became Taipei’s worst-kept secret. Set against a backdrop of rickety dwellings in an unlikely corner of the Zhongsheng suburb, its team has transformed a former soy-sauce factory into a Gatsby-esque hideout, replete with plush velvet couches and copper chandeliers. The cocktail menu (presented in vintage pop-up books) focuses on elevated takes on tried-and-tested classics, and locally inspired mixtures. Signature drink Navy Club, for example, combines kaffir leaf-infused gin, house-made oleo-saccharum, peppery capsicum juice, and saline solution into a punchy drink, perfectly capturing the local palate for salty-and-sour. The list extends during the monthly “Part Time Bartender Project,” which sees the movers and shakers of Taipei’s cocktail scene whipping up their signature drinks during guest shifts. There is a strict “no card, no entry” policy, but out-of-towners can call ahead for a travelers’ pass (NT\$2,000 for a week). [staffonlyclub.com](#); cocktails from N\$430.



Staff Only Club’s signature Navy Club. LEFT: Buy a travelers’ pass to this members’ club.



TAIPEI NEW CAPITAL OF COOL

Hidden above coffee shops and behind pizza parlors, Taipei’s drinking dens are pushing the cocktail envelope. Get on-trend tipsy in the Taiwanese capital.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS SCHALKX



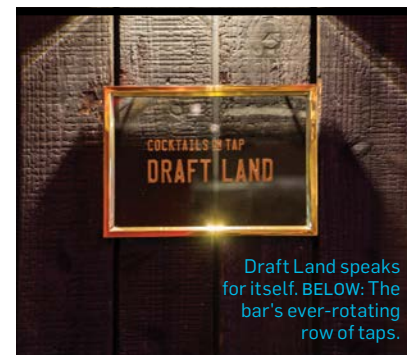
Heading for the tiny kitchen of Room by Le Kief. LEFT: Owner Seven Yi.

ROOM BY LE KIEF

This tiny cocktail kitchen in buzzy Da’an district actually serves up a full culinary experience. In his space of dimly lit booths around a stage-like bar, owner Seven Yi takes guests on a two-hour tasting journey. As a chef at Joël Robuchon’s kitchen in Taipei, Yi didn’t just pick up a French cadence; he also learned to push his ingredients to perfection. From his lab, he concocts wildly creative spirits, redistilling them with such items as toasted bread, kombu and grass. The menu rotates with the season and combines matching canapés, ever-changing decor, and music to hit all the senses. Yi took inspiration for his latest menu from A-sha instant noodles, a brand that lies deep in the country’s collective nostalgia. Each drink is named after a sauce: The Sesame tastes like a comforting bowl of *ma jiang mien* (spicy sesame noodles), derived by redistilling gin with sesame, and garnished with a fruit leather-like sheet of dehydrated pickle juice; the Tomato is a clarified Bloody Mary infused with Sichuan peppercorn that delivers a tongue-numbing hit. There are two seatings per night (from 8 p.m.), and booking ahead is highly recommended. [fb.com/lekief.00](#); NT\$1,200 for flight of three drinks and three canapes.

DRAFT LAND

“We make cocktails for people who usually order beer,” says Angus Zou, the brains behind Draft Land. After building a name for himself at Alchemy, a trailblazer in Taipei’s speakeasy scene, he opened this taproom in 2018 to take the fuss out of ordering a mixed drink. “I try to avoid the often-dreaded ‘What are you in the mood for?’” he says. All drinks served in this utilitarian-looking space are tapped straight from the keg. The ever-rotating drink list spans fizzes to cobbler, all served sans gimmicks or garnishes. Patrons are encouraged to sample a sip before committing to full pours—which start at a dangerously affordable NT\$200 a pop. Upstairs, The Testing Room functions as a sandbox for new concoctions. Here, Zou collaborates with pioneering local restaurants such as Gen Creative to develop new drinks. After each two- to three-month sprint, the favorite recipes are made into keg-ready batches (a process involving clarification and carbonation) to be served from one of the 18 valves downstairs. [draftland.tw](#).



Draft Land speaks for itself. BELOW: The bar’s ever-rotating row of taps.



Eurasian-fusion cocktails at The Tavernist. ABOVE: Clubby and photogenic.

THE TAVERNIST

Occupying the 12th floor of the recently opened Kimpton Da’an hotel, restaurant-slash-bar The Tavernist offers yet another reason to venture around this district after dark. For their first opening in Asia, Kimpton has tapped into the cocktail knowledge of James Barker, the Hong Kong-based British bar manager at institutions like Duddell’s and Potato Head. “The drink list brings together the best of British and Taiwanese ingredients,” Barker says. Relying heavily on both local whiskies and Scotch, the signature cocktails deliver flashbacks of childhood memories with witty English names like the Taking the Biscuit, a combination of peaty Scotch, dry sherry and tropical fruit that hints of Taiwanese pineapple cake. Or try the Savory Sour, which combines two Macallan single malts with Earl Grey tea and house-made scallop powder. [thetavernist.com](#); cocktails from NT\$400.

CÉ LA VI

With last year’s completion of Nan Shan Plaza, Taipei 101 is no longer the only tower poking through the clouds on a foggy night. Perched on Nan Shan’s 48th floor is Cé La Vi, a ritzy rooftop lounge attracting the city’s young, hip and well-heeled like bees to a nine-meter-long copper-clad bar. Snug, sunken seating booths dot the semi-open-air skydeck on all sides, each equipped with climate control units to offer comfort year-round. Bottle service (starting at NT\$5,500) is the name of the game here, but that doesn’t make the cocktail menu any less creative. Signature drinks include a grown-up spin on Taiwan’s ubiquitous bubble tea (black tea-infused vodka, honey, milk and herb jelly), or a riff on the Old Fashioned, given a local touch with Taiwanese tea-infused bourbon and orange bitters. Award-winning local Kavalan whiskey shines in the Dancing Bird, a sweet number with plum liquor, white wine and pineapple juice. [tw.celavi.com](#); cocktails from NT\$400.

