

MARZ

Marz offers intergalactic drinking experience, eclectic crowd

Editor's note: Today is the 11th in a series of 13 stories exploring the history of the O Street bars. The strip—which begins at 14th and O streets and runs down to Ninth and O streets—has served as a major gathering place for University of Nebraska-Lincoln students for the past 70 years.

The corner of 12th and O streets is definitely more flashy than one would initially think.

While the window displays of Sartor Hamann Jewelry house some of Lincoln's most sparkling jewels, the space directly to its west is not to be overshadowed, though its exterior is, for the most part, aesthetically nonexistent.

On a bare wall above a dark, naked door at 1140 O St. hangs a white banner with burgundy letters, which reads "Marz Intergalactic Shrimp and Martini Bar." It's an incredibly monumental name for such an incredibly uneventful sign, but like Mama always said, never judge a book by its cover.

Once again, Mama was right.

Inside Marz it is a completely different world from the one facing O street. High ceilings, rustic brick walls and tile and mirror mosaics along the walls and bar complement the vintage booths, stools and tables neatly arranged along the bar's west side.

But probably the most striking aspect of Marz's atmosphere is the lighting. Breaking through the monotony of a typically dim light scheme are about eight balls glowing with red, green and yellow illumination. Though originally a part of Peony Park in Omaha, the glowing orbs not only fit well with the bar's stellar style, they illustrate the care and time put into the bar's design by owner Jerry Luth and manager Tammy Lee.

"He just likes to go all out," said Lee. "We figured if we're going to be down here a lot, we might as well like the way it looks, and we derive a lot of pleasure from it."

"It turned out to be no small task, and when Marz opened on Nov. 13, '97, it represented two years of hard work.

Prior to being one of O street's most ornate bars, the space that now houses Marz was once Walt's Music Store and, most recently, Wallabies bar. After Luth purchased the space, it was completely gutted and redesigned. Having been a former owner and co-designer of Igman's and the Lizard Lounge, Luth was well suited for the project. Kevin Sullivan, a Marz employee and friend of Luth's, said Luth was serious about his creation.

"He really wanted the place to be polished," he said. "He's the kind of guy that goes to auctions and estate sales. He's just got a good eye for finding stuff and dusting it off."

So far, the bar's artistic appearance has done wonders for the business end of the operation.

"People have really seemed to like what we've done," Lee said. "We haven't done any advertising, and it's done really well. We've been surprised at just how well it has done."

While the bar's interior design is an easy focus for its immediate success, not to be overlooked is what is actually being served in the bar. Aside from a full bar and a number of specialty drinks, Marz offers a menu that, while not exactly being otherworldly, does include culinary elements from many of Earth's different cultures.

The flavor of Marz's grilled flatbreads include French, topped with caramelized onions and Prosciutto ham and finished with melted Romano

cheese," to Scottish, topped with roasted garlic cream, cold smoked salmon and sautéed mushrooms." The kitchen also offers "Cosmic Caviar," "Cosmic Shrimp Cocktails," chilled or grilled in six different styles, and five specialty cocktails that include calamari and Nebraska sirloin steak.

While the menu thus far consists solely of finger foods, Lee said a number of changes are being planned for Marz, both in and out of the kitchen.

"We're happy with the way things have turned out, but there's still a lot of changes we want to make," she said. "For one thing, we'll be opening for lunches, and the menu is always changing. I don't know if we'll ever have a set menu."

She said they also had toyed with the idea of remodeling the second and third floors and possibly bringing in some small two- and three-piece bands or DJs.

The bar also plans on a steady rotation of artwork and other elements in the near future.

Despite having only been open for about 6 months, enough time for most new Lincoln bars to go out of business, Marz has developed a reputation for its atmosphere, a large portion of which is a result of the Marz clientele. It is a varied crowd that almost mirrors the eclectic architecture surrounding the room, mixing older patrons with younger ones, each group boasting members of varying stages of "hipness." It is possibly the only bar on O street in which a girl with pink hair and a cowboy hat can seamlessly blend with clean-cut, aging businessmen.

For many of the bar's patrons, this symbiotic relationship between the crowd and its surroundings seems to be one of Marz's most attractive attributes. It's about the only thing that could possibly beat out the glowing balls.

"The clientele responds to the atmosphere," said Anne Alessio, one of Marz's many Saturday night customers. "The happier space creates better energy, compared to Duffy's or O'Rourke's."

Debra Lamowski/DX

