

## FOCUS

# Halifax bar scene changing

*Bartenders notice a shift in  
customer wants*

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So we set out one Monday night to find the perfect drink to make a shitty day a little better.

The wind was blowing hard and the rain was pelting down on us — making us wet and feeling even worse than we already did — as we trudged downtown.

It's amazing what a couple of frustrated, stressed out students will do to get a drink.

Actually, that wasn't our plan at all.

We recently discovered that Halifax does not have the most bars per capita in Canada, as so many Maritimers claim.

But we do know that Halifax has one hell of a nightlife. So we sat down and tried to figure out which were the four most diverse bars in Halifax.

After talking to friends and getting their input, we decided to

give the Velvet Olive, Reflections, the Seahorse and Maxwell's Plum a try.

And we thought who better to talk to than the bartenders and the people who go there.

The bartenders. They stand behind the bar every week when we go out, know all of the good drinks and new dances before anyone else. And at the end of the night, they still remember what happened.

And the frequenters. Sometimes you think about some seedy old man smoking his cigarette in the corner, looking at every young woman who passes by.

Or maybe the obnoxious, drunken tudent.

Or the business person who stops by every night after work.

Whoever you think of — these are the people who show up at bars almost as much as the bartenders themselves.

On our quest to find out what makes Halifax's downtown so



PLUM LOCATION: a large selection of beers and not just to get drunk with.

great, we talked to the employees of such establishments.

We wanted to know what they felt set their bar apart from the rest.

Gord Hannah and Greg White of The Velvet Olive say their bar is quite different from the competition.

Hannah, winner of the Beefeater Gin Atlantic Canadian bartending competition, and White, voted best barkeep according to a readers poll in *the Coast*, feel that the Olive's relaxed, easy going atmosphere is what sets it apart from the rest.

"There's more here than just

fixing a quick drink," said Hannah.

"It's a close knit community here", adds White "We treat people with respect and they treat us the same way."

These sentiments are shared with their clientele.

"The Olive is a place to relax and mingle with friends. It has a good crowd and an unimposing atmosphere," said Brent Van Buskirk, a fourth-year nursing student.

Reflections, who attract a different clientele — people who want to drink cheaply and dance — also feel its atmosphere gives it a

sense of community.

"Being a gay bar, it's like a community," said Leigh Brown, a Reflections bartender. "It's like Cheers, where everybody knows your name."

Natalie Robinson, a second-year international development studies and spanish student, shares Brown's sentiments.

"It's the best place to dance in Halifax. It has a relaxed, semi-formal atmosphere with great music and good drinks."

Unlike Reflections, the Seahorse attracts a clientele who want to sit down and just have a few drinks, surrounded by a sense of history.

"[Halifax doesn't] have a lot of bars like us," said Steve, a bartender at the Seahorse.

"We're the oldest bar in Nova Scotia, possibly east of Montreal."

And finally we ended up at Maxwell's Plum, to try one of their many beers on tap.

Maxwell's Plum attracts people who enjoy drinking beer, but not for the sole purpose of getting drunk.

"A lot of people come in for the large beer selection," said Bob MacPherson, a bartender at the Plum.

Matt Cameron, a third-year english and history student, agrees that the Plum's extensive beer selection is a bonus, but enjoys the atmosphere as well.

"It's a good atmosphere to talk, socialize and have a few beer. Plus it's fun to throw a few peanut shells on the floor."

And so ended our night.

Staggering back home in the rain, we decided that all of the bars we had seen each have their own characteristics that keep them as popular as they are.

But, we have to say the Midtown Tavern is our fave place to go. The ambience, the generosity, the love. You can catch us there every Friday night, hunkered over the bar, getting the shakedown on the next day's hot and sexy lunch specials.

Cheers.



BLOW IT OUT YER FACE BUDDY: drinkers burn booze spray without crisping their faces, another fine social talent.