

Basement Bar

A refurbishment and a greater focus on cocktails have breathed new life into a popular Edinburgh bar

Now in its 20th year, the Basement Bar in Edinburgh's Broughton Street has been refurbished by its latest owners, Signature Pub Group. Rather than change a well-loved bar, they have come up with a new look that remains true to its Mexican and bohemian roots, and introduced a greater emphasis on premium spirits and cocktails, including barrel-ageing.

The redesign was led by Adam Tibbatts from design practice Tibbatts Abel which has worked on top London clubs such as Buddha-Bar as well as Signature Pub Group's bar The Huxley at Edinburgh's Rutland Hotel. Split into bar and dining areas, the Basement Bar is filled with eclectic details from a wall filled with potted plants to reclaimed furniture painted in a variety of colourful designs. A wall that separated off a private area has been replaced by a large wrought-iron cage that not only makes the room more appealing but also showcases the bar's expanded spirits collection.

Another addition is bright timber panels and shutters that are drawn back in the evening to transform the lounge bar and seating area into a darker, more intimate space, with quirky Mexican Day of the Dead images and darker colours. "We feel that we enhanced and brought the 'original' venue back to life," Adam says. "We tried to be true to its original form but working with local artists, developing bespoke furniture and lighting."

Artwork is used throughout, including a ceiling hand-painted by artist Lynsey Jean Henderson using logos and label designs from Mexican beers and tequilas. Under area manager Hazel Ward, the bar is building on its specialisation in Mexican food and drink. The bar team, led by general manager Nicky Craig, have created a new drinks menu which offers 16 cocktails, of which eight use tequila, mostly priced between £5.50 and £7. They include a tequila twist on a Manhattan called a Mexican Stand Off which is made with Herradura reposado, Cherry Marnier, Punt e Mes sweet vermouth and plum bitters, all rested in a Kentucky bourbon oak barrel.

Nicky says they now have about 26



tequilas, plus two mezcal, but plan to add more in the future. They also offer sangrita, the traditional Mexican chaser that is made with spices and juices, and have created three recipes based on pomegranate, tomato or apple. "We are trying to encourage people into sipping tequila as they would their whiskies," Nicky says. "It's a bit of a battle at the moment but serving it with sangrita is a good way to get people to enjoy it."

The list of non-tequila cocktails features original recipes and twisted classics such as Smokey and the Maker which is made by shaking Maker's Mark bourbon with fresh lemon and chipotle-infused agave and pouring it into a glass with a smoky Laphroaig whisky rinse. Alongside a short list of wines, there is a strong selection of beers, with 10 on draught – served from a customised set of fonts in a wooden frame. They include US ale Sam Adams, Franciscan Well Rebel Red Ale from Ireland and Joker IPA and Black Ball Stout from Scotland's Williams Bros. The bottled selection features Pacifico, Modelo and Red Pig from Mexico, as well as the likes of Anchor Steam, Lone Star and Odell IPA from the US, Weihenstephan and Erdinger from Germany and Barney's Red Rye and Eden Bourbon Cask from Scotland.

The food menu has had an overhaul but aims to remain as authentically Mexican as possible, with guacamole made from scratch at the table. Dishes include the Chilli Negra, which is chunks of beef slow-cooked with

Where to find it

10a-12a Broughton Street
Edinburgh EH1 3RH
Tel: 0131 557 0097
www.basement-bar-edinburgh.co.uk

Who did it

Design and architectural consultant:
Tibbatts Abel
Main contractor: WFC
Furniture: Room Food



Modelo Negra beer, tomato, ancho chillies and dark chocolate, served with green rice and jalapeños, and the Cochinita Pilbil – slow-cooked pork belly, pulled pork, chorizo and morcilla with pinto beans and pickled red onion. The new menus and revamped look have gone down well with returning customers, Nicky says. "We wanted to keep a lot of the vibe of the old bar but give it a new life."