

# BAR STOOL



**T**he heat in Ho Chi Minh City can often feel oppressive, so visiting a bar to escape it all while being accompanied by that most refreshing of drinks — the gin and tonic — sounds like a great fit. **The Gin House** is the first bar in the city to specialise in the spirit and has been opening its doors to a wide array of gin-based drinks and cocktails since August 2016.

Opening at 6pm every evening, it offers 18 different flavours, but there's no need to worry, says owner and head bartender Luan. "If you can't look at the menu and choose

your favourite cocktail, talk to the bartender and let them take you on a journey."

Long day at work? Try the refreshing green tea and pomegranate gin infusion and tonic. Wanting to kick-start a party? Go for the heavy duty vanilla and orchid and tonic. Happy hour daily from 6pm to 8pm offers these gin infusion and tonics for VND75,000.

Gin has had a chequered history, and in recent years has had a serious revival. Luan is part of the gin vanguard in Ho Chi Minh City. New distributors are popping up all the time in the country. "I'm excited by the prospect of gin's upward trend," says Luan.

## Essentials

Gone are the days of the humble G&T with ice and a slice, and Luan is passionate about bringing the drink into the 21st century. He says adapting the drink to fit the customer's needs will be essential to the success of the bar.

When designing the menu Luan was meticulous in choosing the herbs and fruity flavours that accompany the London Dry Gin which forms the basis of all the gin and tonic infusions. I try the Swiss apple gin infusion and tonic which is a refreshing treat, and the super berry

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PHOTOS BY MIKE PALUMBO

infusion G&T (VND130,000) is even better, with the hint of raspberry feeling like a tickle. It is delicious.

A congenial atmosphere between bartender and customer is encouraged which is as refreshing as the drinks that are served up. Luan even invites customers to try their hand behind the bar and fulfil any Tom Cruise in *Cocktail* fantasies they might have. "Anyone can come behind the bar here," he says. Well-coiffured expats mix with stylish locals at the tastefully lit bar, as bartenders show off their flair on the other side.

## Spirit of the Times

The gin infusion is The Gin House's bread and butter, but there is also a separate menu offering traditional cocktails with a twist (VND180,000), as well as the Gin House's own signatures, the centrepiece of which is the Ben Thanh (VND150,000). With the famous market a few blocks away, Luan wanted to recreate its spirit in drink form.

He chose ingredients from all over Vietnam, including berries from the north, apricots from the centre, cilantro leaf from the south. "Ingredients and culture combine

together" to create the drink, Luan tells me. It sounds like a fitting end to the hustle and bustle of shopping in the market.

In designing the decor for The Gin House, Luan was inspired by the speakeasies of prohibition-era United States. It's tasteful and the vintage style has soul and purpose. Perky modern day swing music comes out of the speakers. With a mezzanine level with extra seating due to open soon, exciting times are ahead for this 21st century gin palace. — **Thomas Barrett**

*The Gin House is located at 28/3A Ton That Tung, Q1, HCMC* 