

The secret's out on Atlanta's speakeasy bars

Bars relive spirit of the 1920s with secret doors, locations, numbers.

By Bob Townsend
For the AJC

In November, a new bar called The Fred opened at the Prado in Sandy Springs.

Unless you know a thing or two, though, you probably won't be able to find it. And even if you do, you might not be able to get in the door.

The same goes for the up-and-partying Prohibition in Buckhead, where to gain entry you must step into a red London-style phone booth outside and dial a secret phone number.

Both The Fred and Prohibition are examples of a happening nightlife trend — bars that mimic a secret 1920s speakeasy.

New York City can lay claim to the contemporary archetype. At PDT (Please Don't Tell) on St. Marks Place in the East Village, the entrance is through a phone booth at Crif Dogs, a hipster hot dog spot.

But from Varnish in Los Angeles and Bourbon & Branch in San Francisco to Tavern Law in Seattle and The Violet Hour in Chicago, places serving drinks in an atmosphere that exudes some sort of underground mystique have cropped up all over the country.

We take a glimpse inside Prohibition and The Fred, plus three more Atlanta spots that conjure memories of long-ago speakeasies.



Becky Stein, Special

Unlike other speakeasy-type bars in the area, Ormsby's is open to the public, but it keeps the spirit of Prohibition alive with its hard-to-find entrance.

Ormsby's, Westside

Ormsby's only looks like a speakeasy; it's open to the public. But you have to go below ground level in the White Provision building to discover the hidden-in-plain-sight door to this new Westside tavern — the brainchild of bar man Warren Bruno of Atkins Park and former Sweetwater brewing sales dude Mike Goot. Together they've created a place that features an extensive craft beer selection, plus classic cocktails and some imaginative pub grub.

But it's the secret lodge-meets-rumpus room setting that makes Ormsby's so much fun. The upstairs bar and dining room is a warm and woody space. Downstairs, there's another, more secluded bar, and a lounge area with backgammon, darts, pool, shuffleboard, and even an indoor bocce court. Game on.

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