

PortlandTribune

Imbibe in style at H50 (just eat first)

Bar Review • Décor and drinks – but not bar's prices – recall a mod past

By Anne Marie DiStefano

The Portland Tribune, Oct 2, 2008

Despite its high-concept name, H50 is stylish rather than trendy, and it's a refreshingly peaceful spot to grab a drink in the middle of downtown.

The bar and bistro serves as the living room of the new Hotel Fifty – formerly a Sheraton – a 140-room hotel just south of the on-ramp to the Morrison Bridge. You can see traffic streaming onto the bridge, as well as a bit of the greenery of Gov. Tom McCall Waterfront Park, from the huge windows of the bar.

A sleek, freestanding fireplace divides the lounge into two areas. On one side is a little den full of banquettes and throw pillows, with a strange white coffee table that sports a human face. On the other side, a bar runs along one wall. There's a long communal table, a few two-tops, and a movable set of low seats and cube-shaped cocktail tables.

The cocktail menu offers modish tweaks on the standards. There's a margarita spiced up with Thai chilis and galangal; a Negroni with blood orange; and a sidecar served with sugar caramelized onto the glass.

A gin-based drink called the Sapphire Cloud hearkens back to a less sophisticated era in cocktails. It's electric blue and not very tasty. The bar seems to do better with whiskey. The Old Fashioned is great and the Fall in Manhattan, featuring bourbon infused with peach and vanilla, is liquid consolation.

Guests from the upstairs hotel wander through. Business people and a few scattered couples chat over beer and wine. Chances are good that anyone who orders food here is on an expense account – the options on the bar menu are all extremely dainty, and quite pricey.

The bigeye tuna tartar is delicious, but it's \$9 for an *amuse-bouche*-size portion. Pasta with truffles, also \$9, is just slightly less petite.

During happy hour (3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and all day Sunday) all "morsels," as the bar snacks are called, are \$3 off. But it would be nice to be able to order something a little cheaper and more filling during the main part of the evening.

The dinner menu also is extremely upscale (a \$40 rib-eye steak, foie gras, lobster, even pheasant) which may explain why the dining room has been totally empty on recent visits.

That doesn't keep the bar from feeling cheerful and relaxed, a conversation-friendly alternative to the downtown's dives and dance clubs.

2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday, noon to 10 p.m. Sunday, 50 S.W. Morrison St., 503-484-1415, www.h5obistro.com

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Mod style extends from the atmosphere to the cocktails at H50, with options like (from left) the Pom Pilot, the Sapphire Cloud, and the Negroni.