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THE ATOMIC BAR & LOUNGE | Birmingham, Alabama
Whatever pretension that's left in the cocktail world gets blown to smithereens at the Atomic, a downtown bar that feels like walking into a 1950s house party thrown by your weirdest friend. For example, the bar has its own "costume menu," a list of full-body costumes that guests can wear while they drink, and each cocktail on the menu is named after one of the joint's regulars, like the James Sears—a rye drink described as "aggressive, dark, and rich."

GET INKED Atomic's signature drink is the Sex Panther, a bourbon and rum cocktail that comes with a temporary panther tattoo for you to sport throughout the night.

restaurants, like the Wallingford Dram's sister spot, Anju Noodle Bar, before grabbing a cocktail. Kittery's little restaurants fill up quickly in season.

5 Seymour's

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

It's taken time for even Palm Springs natives to find this joint, hidden behind a velvet curtain at the city's institutional steakhouse, Mr. Lyons. A side room of the restaurant was recently renovated with a decor that's something like 19th-century chophouse meets Rat Pack. Swingin' Palm Springs was overdue for a cocktail renaissance, and with options like the gin-heavy Backhand, Seymour's is leading the way.

PLAY DJ Dust off your records, because on Wednesday nights guests can spin their own LPs.

6 Cardinal Spirits

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

State law prohibits the bar at the Cardinal Spirits distillery from serving beer, or anything else not made

on premises—which sounds like a death sentence for a business in a quintessential college town like Bloomington. But a loyal crowd of coeds, profs, and townies fill the bar's sprawling deck for the simple cocktails using house spirits that average \$8 a pop. Also, the bartenders are wildly creative—they hosted a "Tiki Tuesday" night for months before they had access to rum. Now Cardinal makes two.

ORDER Anything that features Cardinal's Lake House Spiced Rum, like the juicy, spicy Point Break.

7 The Bookstore

BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

Behind a gray metal door on the south side of Bethlehem awaits a speakeasy like you've always imagined: red velvet curtains, gilded mirrors, servers in flapper dresses, and good-enough-for-Granddad cocktails. Brother-sister team Linda and Sean Barsik opened the Bookstore in 2008, the early days of the cocktail revolution, and it took a few years for their joint to catch on in the beer-soaked Rust Belt, but now it's thriving. With live music three nights a week, the Bookstore is also a legit jazz club, and a popular stop

for acts en route to New York or Philly.

PLAN AHEAD Make a reservation online—with only 17 tables, the club fills up quickly on weekends.

8 Brix & Rye

GREENPORT, NEW YORK

Walking through the former whaling village of Greenport, on the far end of Long Island, it wouldn't be hard to miss Brix & Rye, located beneath the wildly popular 1943 Pizza Bar, in the basement of a colonial-style house. But downstairs, behind a narrow wooden bar, owner Evan Bucholz holds court, slinging booze-forward cocktails like the Backsliding Presbyterian (bourbon, Campari, lemon, and ginger) to both summer tourists and salty East Enders. When the bar gets crowded, sneak up to the parlor level for people-watching on Main Street and a game of shuffleboard.

PRO TIP You can order a pie from upstairs (get the Clams Casino) to be delivered to the bar.

9 The Dogwood

CRESTED BUTTE, COLORADO

Tucked away in an 1891 miner's cabin on a side street, the Dogwood has been expanding the cocktail horizons of locals and tourists for nearly 10 years. With a main bar up front and small rooms, each with their own subtle design, in back, everything about the place feels cozy, including the excellent cocktails, like the whiskey and pear drink Au Pear. On Thursdays, townies come out for locals' night (happy hour all evening), and the timber beams strain under the weight of all the fun.

ORDER Down the Hatch, a margarita with Hatch chile, orange, and peach.

10 Rocket Surgery

TRAVELERS REST, SOUTH CAROLINA

Andy O'Mara moved to Travelers Rest planning to relocate his custom-canoe factory. Instead, he and his partner, Loren Frant, opened a pizza place and, last year, this friendly little bar. The first-time restaurateurs have made this small town in the Blue Ridge



FROM TOP: THE ATOMIC BAR & LOUNGE; MATTHEW BLUM/THE BOOKSTORE

foothills a dining destination, and Rocket Surgery the unofficial cocktail capital of upstate South Carolina. Andy's cousin Casey mans the bar, convincing locals to break away from the regular bourbon-and-beer rut with drinks like the Gabrielle, a gin-based ode to spring with gentian and elderflower liqueurs and honey.

PRE-DRINK FUN If you're in nearby Greenville, grab a bike and hop on the Swamp Rabbit Trail, a biking path converted from an abandoned railway. It's an easy 10 miles on rolling hills from downtown to the front door of Rocket Surgery.

11 815

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

In true speakeasy fashion, this dark Prohibition-themed bar requires a password for entry—just pick up the phone at the top of the stairs behind the glass doors at 815 Elm Street and give the magic word. Will they turn you away should you forget it? "No," says co-owner Ryan McCabe, "but it does add a little intrigue to the experience." McCabe opened 815 with veteran bartender and tattoo model Sarah Maillet in 2015, and they've been cranking out cocktails like the No Chance for Snow—made with rum, pear juice, and coconut water—ever since.

OPEN SESAME Follow the bar on social media to get the week's password.

12 Paramount Ballroom

CHEYENNE, WYOMING

A century ago, Wyoming's oil and cattle barons mingled with the common folk at the Capitol Avenue Theatre, in the heart of downtown Cheyenne. Today, in the theater's old lobby and upper floors, you'll find the 21st-century equivalent of a commons—a coffee shop below a co-working space and a bright, welcoming cocktail bar in between, with big picture windows to the street. The whole complex is owned by Renee and Jon Jelinek, locals who placed heavy bets on the revival of the neighborhood and are drawing crowds with drinks named after plays that the theater hosted, like the Negroni send-up Modern Eve, with Contortionist Gin from the nearby town of Mills.

PRO TIP Do your drinking early, since the bar closes before midnight. According to Jon, "Not much good happens in a bar in Cheyenne after 11 p.m."

13 Cure

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

There's more to Java's, the little coffee shop and bakery in the Rochester Public Market, than meets the eye. "It's like a Transformer," says general manager Donny Clutterbuck. "At night, it changes into a French restaurant that takes risks." That's Cure, a pet project of local restaurateurs, where country pâtés and rillettes are paired with Clutterbuck's ambitious cocktail list. Previously Clutterbuck worked with Dave Arnold, the godfather of "molecular mixology," and, in Arnold's tradition, he uses a Spinzzall—a culinary centrifuge that

MIX YOUR OWN



LONG WAY HOME

Evan Bucholz, the master of ceremonies at Brix & Rye, in Greenport, New York, serves this hard-hitting nightcap.

2 oz high-proof bourbon,
like Old Forester Signature
¾ oz Amaro Sibilla
¾ oz Luxardo Maraschino

Stir over ice and strain into a rocks glass. Garnish with an orange twist.



GABRIELLE

This is the most popular cocktail at Rocket Surgery, in Travelers Rest, South Carolina.

1¼ oz Plymouth gin
¾ oz St-Germain
¾ oz Suze
¾ oz lemon juice
¾ oz honey syrup (equal parts honey and water)
3 dashes Peychaud's bitters

Shake over ice and strain into a cocktail glass.



FRANCOISE BONNAIRE

Every drink at Birmingham's Atomic Bar & Lounge is named after a regular, including this riff on the classic Negroni.

1 oz mezcal
1 oz Campari
1 oz Bond

Stir in a mixing glass with ice. Strain into a coupe, twist an orange peel over the cocktail, and discard the peel.

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THE GUEST ROOM

Starkville, Mississippi

If you look down the unnamed alley in Starkville that leads to the back of the police station and you see a light on in the building before it, that's how you know the Guest Room is open for business. Ty Thames and Brian Kelley, college roommates and now small-town restaurateurs, opened this snug bar underneath their already successful Restaurant Tyler. It took four months of working pickaxes and wheelbarrows to dig out the basement so a man could stand up in it. But now, thanks to some sophisticated design work, it's one of the coziest bars around, serving southern comfort food and inventive cocktails such as a peach-infused rum drink with blackberry shrub.

ORDER The Cruel Eugene, made with bourbon, maple syrup, and ancho chilies.

