

BARS & TAVERNS

Shaking It Up in the District

WASHINGTON BARS OFFER A CUSTOM CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

by Kelly A. Magyarics

All eyes are on Washington, D.C. right now, and it's not all because of health care reform or the economy. The District's bars continue to impress with cool concepts, incredible bar talent and damn tasty beer, wine and cocktails. THE TASTING PANEL checks in with three new venues that give guests a Washington monumental bar experience.

Hophead Nirvana

Beer enthusiasts seeking pilsner paradise need look no further than **ChurchKey/Birch & Barley**, two adjoining venues in D.C.'s thriving 14th Street neighborhood that offer guests a staggering 555 different beers. Downstairs, Birch & Barley serves modern American cuisine in a casually organic, sparse yet warm environment. Upstairs, patrons can belly up to the fifty-five-foot long bar—currently the longest in D.C.—in a Victorian-meets-Gothic atmosphere, with sumptuous couches, velvet curtains, chandeliers and wall sconces.

The suds program includes 500 bottles representing 100 styles and 30 countries; 30 unique and often exclusive drafts, many of which rotate weekly; and five authentic, hand-pumped, cask-conditioned beers. Beer Director Greg Engert is a veritable encyclopedia of all things barley, malt and hops, tirelessly providing guests with flavor profiles, spot-on pairing advice and fascinating brewery back-stories. All beers are stored and poured according to brewers' specifications, thanks to a five-zone temperature-controlled system, as well as Engert's sommelier-like fanaticism about proper serving temperatures.

ChurchKey's focal point is the so-called "beer organ," whose copper pipes carry the fifty drafts from second-floor storage straight to guests' pint glasses. "ChurchKey is our attempt at a truly great bar that emphasizes the epitome of the craft beer movement," explains Engert.

www.churchkeydc.com



ChurchKey Beer Director
Greg Engert.

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