

Restaurants + Bars

Where to drink this week: Maison Premiere

Jordana Rothman



New Orleans is perhaps the most protean of American cities, attracting in near equal measure folks you'd kill to break bread with and folks you'd break a commandment to kill: For every Kermit Ruffins, there's a hurricane-swilling, chest-baring trollop leaving evidence of her last po' boy in a pile on Bourbon Street. And it's a shame that so many of NYC's NOLA-inspired haunts accommodate the latter sort, snubbing the romance found in the Crescent City's historic bars. Elegantly shifting the paradigm is [Maison Premiere](#). Scuffed into submission by owner Joshua Boissy and the designers behind nearby Moto, this gorgeous salon—its green walls fogged with a faux patina that suggests decades of Gauloises smoke—is devoted to the twin pleasures of oysters and absinthe: two French Quarter staples with plenty of appeal in Brooklyn.

DRINK THIS: Absinthe, that mythical anise-flavored liqueur, is the obvious choice. There are 19 international varieties of the stuff, best enjoyed as an opalescent brew made by slow-dripping ice water over a sugar cube. But there's even greater sorcery to be found on the trim list of cerebral cocktails from barkeep Maxwell Britten (Freemans, Jack the Horse). Aquavit forms an herbaceous backbone for the Saint Helena, a delicate drink sweetened with cane syrup and topped with bubbly and mild yellow chartreuse. A San Domingo Julep mellowly rich Venezuelan rum with gomme syrup (a thick simple syrup that gives drinks a smooth viscosity), crushed ice and fragrant plumes of mint. The Carondelet, meanwhile, deploys gin, orange-flower water, citrus and Maldon salt—the salinity draws out the drink's vanilla and honey notes, and makes it a fine match for briny oysters.

GOOD FOR: Sealing the deal with a new flame. It's dangerously easy to be seduced sitting round the oval, marble-topped bar, emptying beau soleil and belon shells—even if the sensuous atmosphere occasionally borders on parody (see: pull-chain toilets in the loo).

THE CLINCHER: Though it's not yet open, consider Maison Premiere's forthcoming 1,000-square-foot garden your secret weapon come summer. Iron tables, an outdoor oyster bar, creeping vines, and a garden sprouting wormwood and hyssop will ensure that the sunny space doesn't break character. A Bloody Mary menu (look for riffs made with ingredients such as Ardbeg Scotch, shrimp stock and yellow tomatoes) is in the works for your day-drinking pleasure. 298 Bedford Ave between Grand and South 1st Sts, Williamsburg, Brooklyn (347-335-0446)

[See more bar profiles](#)

April 4, 2011