

Bar Exam

By Brian Francis Smith / Philly EDGE Correspondent

The Mermaid Inn
7673 Winston Road
Philadelphia (Chestnut Hill)

215.247.9797

Hours: Monday through
Friday- 4:30 p.m. 'til close
Saturday- 6:00 p.m. till
close; Sunday- closed



Confidential

Scene: From the outside, you might mistake this old stone structure as a residential home (I drove past it three times), but once inside there's no mistaking this pub as one of Chestnut Hill's best kept secrets.

Visitors are greeted by an archway sign proclaiming, "PEACE THROUGH MUSIC." And although the band isn't yet playing, the patrons look the part. From graybeard English professors swapping conspiracy theories to earthy 'XPN-heads sipping dark pints, this place has all the makings of a '60's hootenanny, replete with Bob Dylan posters and subversive leaflets. Six tables fill out the creaky wooden floor plan as a straight "no frills" bar runs across the back wall (imagine your buddy's basement...if your buddy had the coolest basement ever). Behind the bar, the architecture becomes markedly ornate. Stained glass mirrors intermix with intricate Gothic woodwork suggesting a vaguely religious vibe.

Needless to say, the Mermaid Inn is not a first date bar. It's a *fifth* date bar, provided your significant other doesn't watch The Bachelor or often think that everything is "weird." On this night, a singer-songwriter is scheduled to perform, but show time arrives and he's in the corner hunched over a bowl of soup. No worries, no hurries. That's just the way it is at the Mermaid Inn.

In a bar scene increasingly dominated by

trite themed pubs and homogenized grub, the Inn is a welcome relief.

Staff: Mostly middle-aged women hold down the fort. Ask them about a brew on-tap you've never heard of (an O'Reilly's Ale, for instance) and they'll explain in great detail the hop count and overall bouquet. Or, if you flirt a little, you might even swindle a sample swig.

Food: Primarily a soup and sandwich joint. For a good time, try the gazpacho.

Sounds: Live music. All kinds. Almost every night. Irish Ballads? Got 'em. Cajun Zydeco? Got that too. R & B? Yep. Old-time country? Of course. Ya feeling feisty, fella? Well, pack your own instrument and noodle away on open-jam night. A word of warning: If the set is a quiet, acoustic number, don't yammer endlessly about your fantasy baseball draft, unless you plan on getting the stink-eye from a few patrons. When people at the Mermaid Inn listen to music, they really listen to music.

Parking: Plenty along Winston Ave. or Mermaid Lane.

Most Popular Drink: Don't let the name fool you, the Arrogant Bastard Ale is a perfect gentleman.

Cost: Both drafts and bottles run \$3.50. No specific cover charge for music, but musicians may periodically pass the hat for "love donations."

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Bartender of the Week

Joanne Mekis
Mermaid Inn

