

Greener Pasteur

Pasteur may not attract the hordes of drinkers that Pham Ngu Lao does, but times are swiftly changing. With a new wave of venues, both new and familiar, opening up within the last few months, there's something of a revolution afoot. Words by Will Peach. Photos by Rico Gonzales.

IT SEEMS THAT PEOPLE ARE ONLY JUST waking up to the potential of Pasteur – the bottom end, that is. But while cheaper rents appear the deciding factor for setting up a business here, the stretch itself has a lot to offer. In terms of nightlife the place is beginning to boom, offering a great series of bars, all in walking distance.

• City Stalwarts

Most of the action can be found between the short stretch of road that leads from number 20 Pasteur, just at the edge of the river, up towards number 120, just before the intersection with Le Loi.

Here sit a glittering array of bars and restaurants just begging for your after-hours carcass to prop upon a bar stool and hit the pop. More a café selling ice-cream and French pâtisseries than a bar, **X Café** (63 Huynh Thuc Khang, Q1) was the first foreign-run venue to make its way down this end of town. Second and perhaps the most visible of all the bars here, is **Cantina Central** (51 Ton That Thiep).

Having endured a lengthy tenure (in this

city at least) of two years, this Mexican-themed venue is one of Pasteur's mainstays on the nightlife scene. Serving cool margarita's (VND85,000), mini tacos and a range of Mexican street fare, it's open, two-floored drinking space has a great balcony from which to view life below.

Owner Othello Khanh responds to leading the way on Pasteur by saying "we are happy to have more restaurants and bars in the street. Most of the owners are my friends." He even suggests "making a bar marathon", which will only come as music to night crawlers' ears.

Also on Ton That Thiep, just around the corner from Pasteur, sits another of the city's stalwart venues in **FTV Bar** (21-27 Ton That Thiep). Host to recent events like the Urban United Hip Hop Party, Miami Horror and catwalk shows, FTV Bar is where the city's most image-conscious populous can be found congregating and posing.

Opposite is the newly opened sports bar and grill, **Phatty's** (46-48 Ton That Thiep), while the popular **Voodoo Lounge** (92 Ho

Tung Mau) sits a street down.

• New Players

Perhaps a more savoury option and far more low-key is the recently opened **Qing** (110 Pasteur). Having moved from its location on Dong Du, Qing reached fame for being the first wine bar in town.

But manager Tony Fox is just as keen to sing the new site's praises. "This area of Pasteur is becoming a hub. It will only take maybe two more bars and a couple of restaurants, and it will become the go-to area," he says.

Qing itself appears largely the same as its previous incarnation. Complete with classical red décor, atmospheric lighting and a narrow but comfortable eating space, the extensive wine list and revamped menu (now featuring gourmet pizzas and more Asian tapas) makes it a great after-work or quiet daytime spot.

Similarly Tristan Ngo's new venture, **The Elbow Room** (52 Pasteur), an "up-scale diner-cum-bistro", provides a family-friendly atmosphere in walking distance of the other bars.





Rather than follow other restaurants over, Ngo claims he found the site by chance. "We were looking for a venue and it just happened that it was on Pasteur," he explains.

The Elbow Room's airy, two-storey space is narrow but fresh from its recent fitting and features, a nice bar space to idle up to and enjoy great smoothies (VND55,000), shakes and other soft drinks. A little top end in terms of food (mains range from VND180,000 to VND300,000), it still adds diversity to the scene in terms of its broad culinary menu.

Next door to The Elbow Room is the long-running **Mogambo** (50 Pasteur) which moved to Pasteur from its previous spot on Thi Sach last year. A favourite among expat lifers (yes, you know who you are!), Mogambo is the place to head for some of the finest burgers, breakfasts and Tex-Mex in town.

Owner Lani is also a fan of Pasteur, praising its "clean and pleasant sidewalks". Mogambo, though, is a reason alone to head to Pasteur. Featuring a comfortable ground floor bar, complete with large screen TV's, a glittering array of beverages and a slightly African feel, it's no wonder this Saigon institution has lasted this long.

◦ Boys Night Out

Elsewhere on Pasteur sit another series of bars catering for large groups of gentlemen frayed from a hard-day's work.

No. 5 Bar (44 Pasteur), which opens early evening and closes late-night, is unique for being one of the few spaces in town to feature a round bar, making it a great place for conversation. Having been around in various guises for a number of years, owner Heinz seems to have finally settled on this neat spot. Offering a larger floor space than nearby Moon Bar, No 5 is home to city golf and darts teams, and prides itself on its big-

screen sport. It also puts on the occasional bout of live music.

The owners of **Moon Bar** (70 Pasteur) however, a kind of Vietnamese equivalent of Hooters, clearly hold features like décor and ambience of scant importance. Zebra print tiles line the floor while two further back-rooms host a pool table and a dart board respectively. Draft beer flows on tap and happy hours from 4pm to 7pm bring in large groups of customers taking advantage of the buy-one-get-one-free deal on draft San Miguel.

◦ Further Afield

But where Pasteur has plenty to offer, no serious bar hopping would be complete without a trip to the nearby **Kool Beer Store** (corner of Ham Nghi and Pho Duc Chinh) and **Oasis** (29 Pham Ngu Lao just opposite the Ben Thanh market bus station).

The Kool Beer Store provides an off-the-beaten track guide to city drinking, crammed with locals until the late hours, and full of revelers enjoying copious amounts of export beer unavailable elsewhere in the city. Included on their beer list is Fullers London Pride, Coopers Pale Ale, Moa Blanc, Adelscott, Chimay and Stella (all ranging from around VND75,000).

Oasis has a different theme, posturing itself, both by name and by location, as a bar just slightly out of the way. Imagine a pub crawl from FTV to the backpackers' area. Oasis is the watering hole bang in between. And with its pool table, darts, dark UV lighting and friendly hostesses, it's certainly a place worth stopping off at.

With places like these cramming together in one spot, from having a fragmented bar scene, suddenly Saigon has a new area to go to. Let's just hope that the rents don't go insane. **WV**