

The Many Shapes of Art bars and Restaurant | COBO Social

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Pharmacy 2 by Damien Hirst



View of La Colonie (Courtesy of Re-voir Paris)





View of Pharmacy 2 (Courtesy of Pharmacy 2)



View of Karriere bar (Courtesy of Smart Traveling)



View of Currency Exchange Café (Courtesy of Currency Exchange Office)





View of Beverly's Bar (Courtesy of Thrillist)



View of Kedai Kebun (Courtesy of Nazura Gulfira)

29

Aug

[Naima Morelli](#)

[33](#)

70641

1730

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

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Art bars and restaurants come in all shapes and sizes; you can go from contemplating art integrated with the café design, to walking into a conceptual artwork. We have looked at some of the most interesting bars and restaurant around the world founded and operated by artists.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Internet sources

For centuries artists have gathered around food and drinks to discuss their ideas, their lives, or even fight passionately – like Modigliani and Picasso at La Rotonde in Paris. These days artists’ lives might be less bohemian, but are definitely richer in terms of possibilities. One is that of creating their own personal food establishments, integrating the art in different modalities.

The approach can also be very different. Some artists are coming into business driven by ideals; they want to create a place for the community to gather. The food in this case might not be their primary focus compared to the other activities of the space. Other artists might take the opposite approach, knowing the power of art to make any place special. They succeed in creating a cool vibe for people to drink and eat quality food being surrounded by installations and videos. Finally, there are other artists who go all the way through, and conceive the place as an artwork in itself.

Paris: La Colonie by Kader Attia

If you happen to hop down a train at la Gare du Nord station, just look for signage saying “La Colonie”. The large courtyard in 128 rue Lafayette represents a true refuge for artists – especially those of the politically engaged kind. Its founder, French artist Kader Attia, conceived it not simply as a bar. For him it is as a laboratory for thought and an agora for like-minded people.

“It is about creating a space that allows freedom by taking advantage of this formidable platform which is art,” says Attia. The artist, recipient of the [2016 Prix Marcel Duchamp](#), is mainly based in Berlin, but created the space to celebrate his important bond with la Ville Lumière. In his view, in Paris there is

celebrate his important bond with La Vigne Lannier. In his view, in Paris there is a real lack of spaces for discourses where art and politics would meet. So he decided to found his own.

While the ground floor is a bar and a restaurant, the second floor hosts artists, activists, and researchers for readings, lectures, and workshops. The third floor is an exhibiting space for contemporary art, which includes a digital database of art magazines.



View of La Colonie (Courtesy of Re-voir Paris)

London: Pharmacy 2 by Damien Hirst

Years ago the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain filed a complaint towards a restaurant called “Pharmacy” in Notting Hill, which launched in 1998. Indeed the white pristine space looked just like a real pharmacy, complete of pill bottles on display. However, the food which was served was all but pharmaceutical in taste.

This is not at all surprising, the project coming from Damien Hirst whose subtle commentaries and playing with the audience’s perceptions have always been his trademark. Indeed, Pharmacy 2 features works from some of the artist’s most iconic series including the Medicine Cabinets and the Butterfly Kaleidoscope paintings.

While the original Pharmacy restaurant was backed by PR guru Matthew Freud, the new incarnation has been launched in collaboration with English chef-star and restaurateur Mark Hix, and is part of Hirst’s Newport Street Gallery in Vauxhall, south London. Pharmacy 2 serves classic British and European food, catering for visitors to the exhibitions during the day, and evening diners when the gallery is closed.





View of Pharmacy 2 (Courtesy of Pharmacy 2)

Copenhagen: Karriere bar by Jeppe Hein

This cocktail bar and restaurant is born to be hip. Created by Danish artist Jeppe Hein, here art and design melt into one, for an exclusive ambience. The atmosphere is modern and eerie, thanks to the ufo-like lamps by Olafur Eliasson, long tables and a the bar counter with big mirrors.

Over 37 artists are represented by Karriere, and some are hidden in the most unexpected of places inside the restaurant environment. Whether you find a Rirkrit Tiravanija in the menu concept or Maurizio Cattelan in the toilets, no one walking through Karriere's door is safe from a close encounter with art from the most celebrated artists in the world.

In this way Karriere succeed establishing itself as the place to be in the Meatpacking district of Copenhagen. It goes without saying that the audience coming to this bar and restaurant is young and trendy. They first come attracted by the buzz, and they keep on returning on Friday and Saturday, when the DJs rock up the evening.



View of Karriere bar (Courtesy of Smart Traveling)

Chicago: Currency Exchange Café by Theaster Gates

We already pointed out how the best discussions often happen around a dinner table, and sometimes even originates from some particular food itself. With this intuition in mind artist Theaster Gates created the Currency Exchange Café. Like the name suggests this is a former currency exchange which has been decorated with salvaged pieces and serves a mix of American, Mexican and Filipino food.

The Chicago artist conceived the bar as part of his artistic projects. During the 2008 financial crisis, Gates decided to focus on fostering improvement through art. Starting in his own neighborhood and expanding to other communities, he rejuvenated numerous abandoned buildings, transforming them into social and cultural hubs.

This has been the case with Currency Exchange Café, which became a central part of Gates' Arts Block project, a partnership which includes a wide range of cultural, civic, and commercial spaces. Even though the café can be considered an artwork in itself, the space doesn't present actual pieces by other artists.



View of Currency Exchange Café (Courtesy of Currency Exchange Office)

New York: Beverly's Bar by Leah Dixon

It was high time for the art and fashion people of New York's Lower East Side to finally find their new place. The Beverly's bar, founded in 2013, welcomes this demographic as well as the more left-wing, political crowd.

"It is people who are very conscious of their place in history, whether they're artists, younger people who work in fashion, or simply people who just want to know what's going on in nightlife," says artist Leah Dixon who founded the space. "They are the kind of people that make it their business to go out every night."

Although the Beverly's bar is never short of the coolest DJs, they also run a serious bimonthly exhibition program, devoted to the up-and-coming art scene. The bar itself presents a few permanent installations, such as neon-lit walls, video art and sculptures by artists such as Jayson Musson, Artie Vierkant and Cristina Tufiño.

The bar is not meant to represent a quiet hub for people to have soft-spoken conversations amongst themselves, but it is rather designed to be loud, creative and even chaotic: "The idea is that this is a space that fosters a level of activism," explains Leah Dixon.



View of Beverly's Bar (Courtesy of Thrillist)

Yogyakarta: Kedai Kebun by Agung Kurniawan

We know that the contemporary art world in Southeast Asia is a place of continuous experimentation, where the roles and identities of spaces for the arts are more fluid. In this scenario, Indonesian artist Agung Kurniawan founded the Kedai Kebun Forum in Yogyakarta.

Established in September 1996 as a simple restaurant, the space ended up serving multiple purposes. On one hand, it is a self-sufficient avenue where discussion between the local art world and the international arena can take

place. On the other hand, since the beginning it represented a safe nest for emerging artists to entering and grow in the art scene.

The place achieved all of its goals. Today at Kedai Kebun are held regular visual arts exhibitions, theatre, music and dance performances, poetry and story readings, and cultural discussions. The Kedai Kebun is composed by an exhibiting space at the ground floor, complete with a small gift shop to sell artist’s merchandising, and a restaurant-café at the first floor. The stairs are decorated with graffiti representing the local protagonists of the art scene, remarking the strong community-building character of the space.



View of Kedai Kebun (Courtesy of Nazura Gulfira)

[Check out CoBo Social’s upcoming big-scale public event Art in the Bar on 14 Sept 2017 \(Thur\) from 6pm onwards.](#)

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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