

Moolah Temple is best spot in town for cosmo

BY HOLLY SILVA
Special to the Post-Dispatch

Several years ago a girlfriend wrote a letter saying she'd met the guy who ruined her for other men; this gentleman's particular charms had taken all the enjoyment from the trial and error of dating. The tone of her letter was not blissful in her triumphant find but wistfully resigned. She'd stumbled upon her match, and now the game was over.

And so it is with me and the Moolah Temple. I've discovered the perfect environs in which to drink a cosmopolitan, and all venues henceforth will be measured against it — to their detriment.

The temple, once home to the Shriners, is a massive, festive-looking building that sat empty for decades at the corner of Vandeventer Avenue and Lindell Boulevard, near St. Louis University. It has been painstakingly transformed into a luxe movie theater, bar and lounge; a slick basement bowling alley run by Saratoga Lanes' Jim Barton; and upscale apartments.

Walking up the grand outdoor stairway and stepping into the small lobby leaves you wanting. The Moolah looks only like a nicely renovated spot to buy popcorn — nothing special. But look up: each light fixture is a gigantic, inverted fez. Very funny. Very cool.

Now, look left: a dimly lit lounge full of comfortable brown leather sofas and small tables arranged in a half-dozen cozy arrangements. One imagines cigars and vest-pocket watches, but in actuality, there are . . . martinis!

Look right and a full bar beckons, decked out with the deft staff, varied stock and high-end décor of any such freestanding establishment.

More than 30 eclectic beer choices are divided into the affordable \$3 and \$4 categories of domestic, foreign and independent films. There is one high-budget film/beer (chimay red for \$8) as well as two (Schlafly) rough drafts for \$4.

Moolah Temple

Address: 3821 Lindell Blvd.
Phone: 314-446-6807 (bar),
314-446-6866 (bowling lanes)

Hours: Bar opens an hour before first show Monday-Thursday, 3 p.m. Friday and 12:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; bar closes an hour after last show; bowling lane hours are 11 a.m.-1 a.m. every day except Sunday, when it closes at midnight

Credit cards: All major cards accepted

Smoking: Smoking allowed throughout bowling alley; allowed at bar only in inclement weather; no smoking in theater or lounge

Wheelchair access: Street level access with elevator to upper floors

The wine choices currently number 50, with a focus on small producers and a sommelier who would like to see that list double to 100. A third of the list is available by the glass (short clips) with prices ranging from \$5.50 to \$10. Half the list is available in splits, half bottles or

carafes (full features) with prices from \$7.25-\$42. Bottles range from \$22 to a high of \$75 for a Veuve Cliquot Yellow Label sparkling. Seven movie-theme martinis (the "Pretty in Pink" cosmopolitan; gin with a splash of vermouth and olives is "The Way We Were") complete the offerings.

But you came to see a movie, didn't you? And who wants to rush through a martini in order to get a good seat? But, wait, are those people sneaking their cosmos into the theater? And that's when the enjoyment of the Moolah Temple hinted at ruining me: When the bartender handed me a "Speed" martini (vanilla vodka and espresso) in a durable, stout glass and said, "Yes, ma'am, you can take that anywhere in the building."

And so I joined the snake of couples balancing splits of wine and walked into the theater. Which is not just any old theater but an enormous screen with every kind of seating you can think of or desire — 500 seats, to be exact. Stadium seating, yes; but also an old-fashioned balcony. And several of those big brown leather couches and love

seats scattered down on the floor with end tables. And so there it is: the perfect, ruinous way to drink a cosmo. Box-office hit movie flickering on giant screen in endlessly comfortable seating. I'm done for.

If you don't want to leave when the movie ends (and you won't), you can sneak down to the perfectly designed bowling alley, which offers a more limited bar selection and a small grill menu. You can watch along the sidelines as families and dates twirl candy-colored bowling balls down the alleys.

You may run into friends of friends, who tell you of the Movie Manor Motel in Colorado, an old drive-in theater transformed with a horseshoe of rooms for rent, each one with a picture window facing the screen and an indoor speaker system. And so there is hope that a more perfect venue for a shared bottle of wine might yet exist.

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