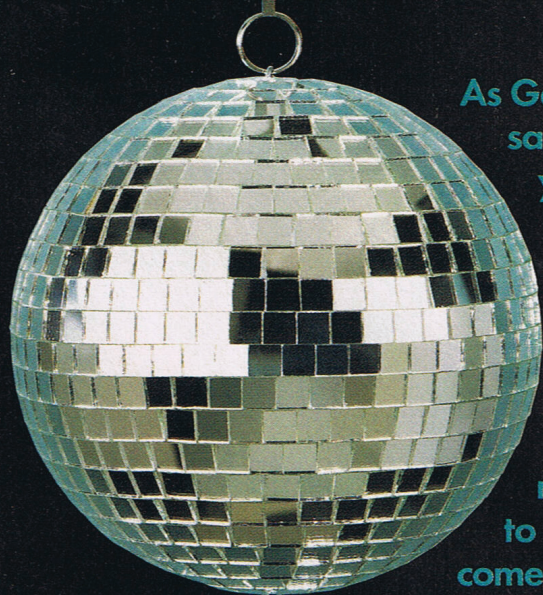


# nights out

**A field guide to  
the city's best after-hours destinations**



As Georgia's native son Ray Charles famously said, nighttime really is the right time. Whether you want to bar hop and party down or soak up some jazz and sip fine wine, Atlanta nightlife offers after-dark venues to match your every mood. We've canvassed the town to assemble this guide to our favorite late-night attractions in the city's busiest entertainment districts. So when next weekend rolls around, don't whine to us that you don't have anything to do—come join us at happy hour!

**By Selena Lawson & Chandra R. Thomas // Photography by Jonathan Hollada**



# buckhead

flashy sexy flirty crunk swanky

NIGHTLIFE

## The Tavern at Phipps, Friday, 6:35 p.m.

Which one is supposed to be Carrie? It's hard to tell, but clearly this is a gathering straight out of *Sex and the City*. Why else would a group of attractive women in their late 20s be huddled together sipping cosmos on a Friday night? Before you can say "Big," a cascade of white napkins comes raining down on their table like snowflakes in a New York City blizzard (how appropriate). They squeal as the bartender, who is responsible for the "snowstorm," begins handing out free shots—a courtesy extended to all single women at The Tavern's happy hour. ★ From a keyboard tucked in the corner, a Michael Bolton look-alike belts out the sounds of Simply Red and U2 as a bright light beams on his frizzy locks. Weaving through the standing-room-only crowd, waitresses in midriff-baring black uniforms and high-heeled boots double as eye candy. A group of Budweiser-sipping fellas does a double take as a hot blonde in a denim mini-skirt squeezes past. ★ Their rubbernecking is interrupted by a scene straight from the eighties Tom Cruise

flick *Cocktail*. To the beat of Usher's "Yeah," the bartenders erupt into an impromptu show. One balances a bottle on his finger. Another spins a bottle and cocktail shaker around his head and neck. A third balances a stack of liquor-filled shot glasses so long it resembles a snake. His production is cut short by the sound of the shot glasses crashing to the floor, immediately followed by thunderous applause. (Phipps Plaza, 404-814-9640, [thetavernatphipps.com](http://thetavernatphipps.com))

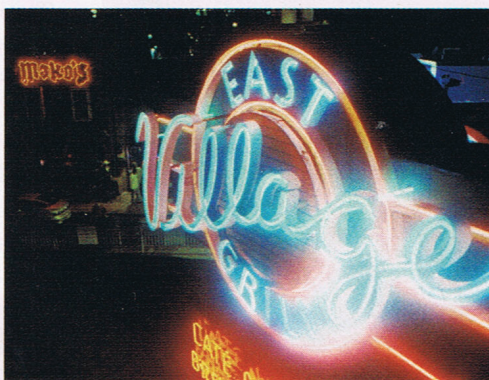
## Twist, Friday, 7:28 p.m.

It's a restaurant. No, it's a bar. Actually, it's a restaurant and a bar, but the outrageously long line snaking across the patio emits a definite club vibe. A few flashy "baller"

types, decked out in Kenneth Cole shoes and expensive slacks, shell out the \$20 required to bypass the wait. ★ This is where Atlanta's young professionals come to play. Inside, a diverse mix of music—from vintage Michael Jackson to pulsating house beats—pipes softly in the background, as Atlanta's fashion-

forward and upwardly mobile singles schmooze in the dimly lit, contemporary interior. Groups of giggling Bebe- and Prada-clad females share dating war stories over martinis and red wine. Co-workers kick off the weekend with sushi and cocktails. Singles are clearly here to "see and be seen." They come dressed in their designer best and don't hide their intentions. ★ The NBA game projected onto a massive wall is no competition for the live show that intrigues the men gathered around the bar. They gawk as well-coifed and highlighted 20-something women in form-fitting jeans and low-cut tops stand around contemplating which lucky guys will be leaving tonight with their cell phone numbers. (Phipps Plaza, 404-869-1191, [heretoserverestaurants.com](http://heretoserverestaurants.com))

**BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY** In Atlanta, nightlife has become almost synonymous with Buckhead. With some 100 bars and restaurants in just a few blocks, popular clubs like Bell Bottoms, left, are always crowded—not to mention the busy streets.





## Sambuca Jazz Cafe, Saturday, 8:20 p.m.

The vibe is smooth and classy, like top-shelf liquor, as the jazz band roars on the small stage with a blast of vibrant, colored lights beaming onto the curtains behind them.

The sound of Miles Davis drifts through the air, past the white-cloth-covered tables in this loft-like version of an upscale supper club. \*Beads of sweat drip down the saxophone player's forehead as he leans into the notes. The guitar player closes her eyes, meditating on the melody. The piano player looks like your high school math teacher, graying at the temples, his glasses settling on the tip of his nose.

\*Likewise, the crowd is mature and genteel, 35-and-up professional types who relish the jazz riffs as they sip wine and savor classic entrees like almond-encrusted grouper and New York strip steak. There are a few families with young children at tables, but mostly the crowd consists of well-dressed couples in search of a romantic, relaxing evening. Some singles gather at the bar, sipping cocktails and talking quietly over appetizers.

It's hard to tell whether the entertainment or the food is the prime draw, but the mood is definitely mellow and sophisticated. (3102 Piedmont Road, 404-237-5299, sambucarestaurant.com)

## Beluga, Saturday, 10:45 p.m.

The bling is blinding. It sparkles and shines on the lounge singer's hat, neck and wrists as she belts out the classic hit "Fever" between cigarette puffs, intensifying the already smoky atmosphere. Well, it's not *real* bling, but the rhinestones don't bother this crowd. That's a term that only their children would know. \*This is old-school Buckhead's hangout. They roll up in Porsches and Range Rovers, ready to sip on deliciously strong martinis (none of those juvenile novelty cocktails here) and hear live music in a laid-back yet lively atmosphere. The illuminated cocktail glass out front is the tip-off to the extensive martini menu. \*An array of catcalls emanates from the polished, urbane crowd gathered around the songstress as

the band cruises through a medley of show tunes. A guy who looks an awful lot like Andy Warhol wearing a tweed jacket cheers them on from a corner. \*Posters of Van Gogh's "Cafe Terrace at Night," Marilyn Monroe and other Hollywood stars of yesteryear plaster the walls of this converted bungalow. The casually elegant upper-crust regulars weave through the maze of quaint rooms, slink into the velvet couches and enjoy the intimate ambience.

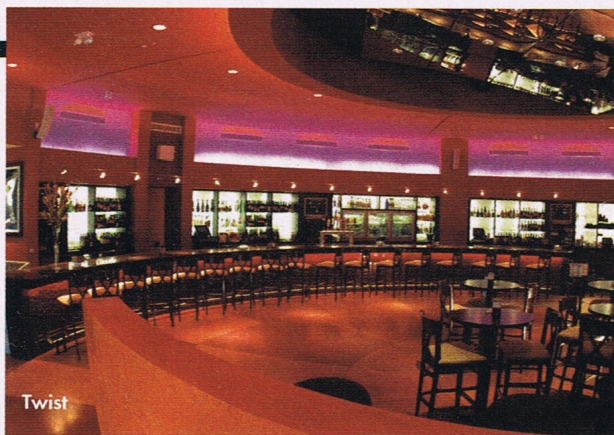
(3115 Piedmont Road, 404-869-1090, beluga-martinibar.com)

**party favor**  
The free "Buc" shuttle around the malls and Piedmont Center runs weekdays from 7 a.m.—10 p.m.



**RAW TALENT** Mix sushi rolls with names like "Mr. Roboto" and "Orgasm," martinis and high-tech decor, and you have Buckhead's newest concept, Aiko, left and above.





Twist

## Bell Bottoms, Saturday, 11:35 p.m.

Psychedelic neon posters under black lights, peace signs and the club's name suggest a seventies theme, but it looks like the eighties babies—the generation raised on jellies, break dancing, studded belts and Mr. T—have taken over. Caught up in a wave of nostalgia, the racially diverse, mostly 30-something crowd writhes and gyrates to the likes of Cameo, Cyndi Lauper and *Like a Virgin*-era Madonna. It's all about *Thriller* and *Purple Rain*. ★ As “Billie Jean” blares over the speakers, a group of girls circles a guy trying to moonwalk. A shirtless guy with tattoos on both shoulders (and a slight potbelly) “freaks” his female companion from behind. Beads of sweat drip from his forehead, glistening under the flash of colorful lights beaming above an illuminated dance floor that's reminiscent of *Dance Fever*. It's a 30-something party animal's fantasy. (225 Pharr Road, 404-816-9669, bellbottomsatl.com)

## the vibe

**the crowd**// At its vortex, the intersection of East Paces Ferry and Peachtree, you'll find rowdy, barely legal party animals itching to people-watch and posture as they partake in their first-ever taste of city nightlife. Think “Girls Gone Wild” meets MTV.  
**what to wear**// Girls: midriff-baring, low-cut spandex tops with leg-baring micro-minis and color-coordinated stilettos. Guys: Jeans, baggy urban gear, team jerseys or anything that'll show off your tattoos.

**what to drink**// Beer, fruity cocktails, martinis and high-end champagne (like Dom Perignon and Moët) to add to the illusion of wealth and status.

**when to go**// Expect mayhem inside and outside of all clubs and bars on Friday and Saturday nights, especially when the weather's warm. For some weekday action, try Latin Wednesday nights at Tongue & Groove, featuring free salsa dance lessons. The same night lures an upscale crowd to Brio.

**where to go if you're over 35**// Fans of the Ritz-Carlton Buckhead's Lobby Lounge will likewise enjoy the pricey, swanky XO Bar at the new InterContinental.

**insider tip**// With some 100 bars and restaurants within two and a half blocks, you'll do most of your club-hopping on foot. Lots charge anywhere from \$5 to \$10, so drive around before deciding where to park. If you start having queasy flashbacks of college spring break or you tire of that Coyote Ugly tie-snipping shtick, check out Sambuca Jazz Cafe or Beluga for more grown-up entertainment.

## THE HIT LIST

**Aiko** (128 East Andrews Drive, 404-869-4800, aikoatlanta.com) Come for half-price sushi rolls from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m., then dance the night away after the restaurant turns into a techno club at 11.

**Andrews Upstairs** (56 East Andrews Drive, 404-467-1600, andrewsupstairs.com) Music junkies get their fix in this intimate setting with some of Atlanta's favorite local and regional acts like The Pierces, Ian Moore and John Pringle.

**Brio Tuscan Grille** (2964 Peachtree Road, 404-601-5555, bestitalianusa.com) The over-30 singles crowd flocks to the bar area (especially on Wednesdays) for happy hour drink specials and Italian fare.

**Cafe Intermezzo** (1845 Peachtree Road, 404-355-0411, cafeintermezzo.com) This cozy late-night coffeehouse/bar is perfect for a romantic rendezvous.

**Club 112** (1055 Peachtree St., 404-607-7277, club112atl.com) Now in its new Peachtree Street location, this is the place

where flashy hip-hop types party 'til the wee hours and show off their bling-bling.

**Dantanna's** (3400 Around Lenox Road, 404-760-8873, dantannas.com) This is the place to watch the big game and one of just five bars in Atlanta that carries the new Stoli Elite Vodka.

**Fado Irish Pub** (3035 Peachtree Road, 404-841-0666, fadoirishpub.com) Buckhead's 20-somethings gather here for a pint of Guinness and live Irish music.

**The Grape** (Phipps Plaza, 678-990-9463, yourgrape.com) Head here for a glass of wine and a Mediterranean-style Brie quesadilla. If you're not a connoisseur, the taster chart will help you order.

**Justin's Restaurant & Bar** (2200 Peachtree Road, 404-603-5353, justins-restaurant.com) Atlanta's buppies crowd this restaurant/bar owned by über producer Sean “P. Diddy” Combs.

**Landmark Diner** (3652 Roswell Road, 404-816-9090, landmarkdiner.com) Celebrity spotting is the draw here.

**Lobby Lounge at the Ritz-Carlton** (181 Peachtree St., 404-659-0400, ritz-carlton.com) Settle into one of the plush sofas, sip an expensive glass of champagne and wait for the A-listers to arrive.

**Tongue & Groove** (3055 Peachtree Road, 404-261-2325, tongueand-grooveonline.com) Shake your groove thing as a mix of hip-hop and Latin beats blasts from huge speakers. Don't forget the Wednesday night salsa lessons.

**The Sanctuary** (3209 Paces Ferry Place, 404-262-1377, sanctuarynightclub.com) Perfect your salsa moves on the ballroom-worthy dance floor. There are free dance lessons on Friday nights.

**The Treehouse** (7 Kings Circle, 404-266-2732, treehouseatlanta.com) Eat on the deck or enjoy the cozy fireplace.

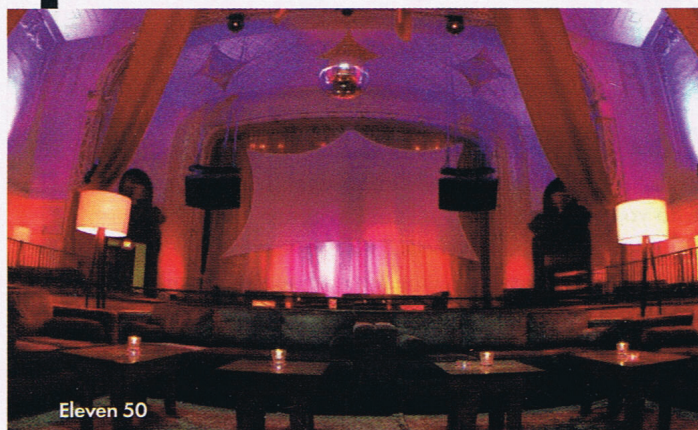
**XO Bar, InterContinental Buckhead** (3315 Peachtree Road, 404-946-9000, ichotels.com) The bar at Atlanta's newest luxury hotel gives the Ritz's Lobby Lounge a run for its money.



# midtown

fresh smooth savvy funky glam

NIGHTLIFE



Eleven 50

## Shout, Friday, 10:17 p.m.

The place has barely cut its teeth on the Midtown party circuit, but already the space is crawling with Atlanta's "it" crowd. On the main level, a diverse assortment of Atlanta's hottest singles settles into the candlelit, avant-garde decor. Hip young lovers dine in velvety red booths with funky chandeliers hovering above; groups of women sporting expensive pumps with color-coordinated Kate Spade handbags snack on gourmet pizza at a table set behind a cascade of silver, seventies-style beaded curtains. ★ In the crowded bar area, a clean-shaven yuppie flirts relentlessly with a buxom blonde standing near a massive circular bar with funky psychedelic shelving. She doubles over in laughter, her bountiful bosom oozing out of her rose-covered bustier. He seems pleased with the view. ★ A mix of eighties and nineties hits thumps at a comfortable decibel level from the DJ's perch near the dramatic winding staircase. The upstairs area feels more like a bar than a restaurant, with sleek wicker furniture set around a fireplace. Hip-hoppers huddle in private booths, each curtained off with sheer drapery and equipped with its own television. A stuffy 50-something professor-type in a stiff blazer seems out of place sitting at a table amid the youthful crowd. Some partiers step onto the tiled rooftop bar and huddle over a mini bonfire or settle into cabanas enshrouded with curtains. Women on the prowl peer over the railing to scope

**NEON NIGHTS** Eleven 50's dramatic main room, above, is a big draw, though the club's patio—with its private cabanas, available for reservation, and bed-sized lounge chairs—sets the scene for hot summer nights.

who's stepping out of the Maybachs and Mercedes lined up at the valet stand. Talk about sibling rivalry; this sister venue to Twist (Twist and Shout, get it?) may ultimately end up being the favored daughter. (1197 Peachtree St., 404-364-9360, [heretoserverestaurants.com](http://heretoserverestaurants.com))

## Red Chair, Saturday, 11 p.m.

As Janet Jackson dances across the video screen overhead, the bartender serves a Red Bull and vodka to a well-manicured man dressed in black loafers, tight jeans and a closely fitted black shirt. It is hard to tell whether he wanted the drink or the server. A woman dressed in hip-huggers and a tube top sips a glass of red wine and squeezes the hand of her lady friend. They rest on a raised black bench pressed against the mirrored wall and watch the scene. ★ Everything about this place screams hookup. Red neon lights wrapped around the pillars above the bar illuminate the well-defined muscles protruding from the black sleeveless shirts worn by the bartenders. Red painted walls adorned with mirrors, screens or surreal artwork surround the 20-something crowd, and the videos—everything from dance to rock—give them a sexy backdrop for mingling. "Dip It Low" begins to play like a partygoers' anthem: "Dip it low/Pick it up slow/Roll it all around/Poke it out like your back broke." (550-C Amsterdam Ave., 404-870-0532, [redchairatlanta.com](http://redchairatlanta.com))

## Eleven 50, Saturday, 11:05 p.m.

She wears a hot-pink top, black miniskirt and a pair of black high heels. He looks like he's been handpicked out of a Brad Pitt look-alike contest. In fact, there are beautiful people at every turn. Neon lights surround them like halos, and hard-hitting techno beats keep the rhythm as the glam crowd weaves between plush, red velvet couches. ★ Silver taffeta curtains serve as the backdrop for a group of Midtown vixens searching for refuge from the sea of bobbing heads and weaving arms on the dance floor. But they aren't able to escape the dancers this time, as they discover that a couple has already retreated to the room in search of an

COURTESY OF ELEVEN 50



intimate setting. ★ Upstairs, the balcony is the perfect nesting spot for voyeurs. There, onlookers carefully sip martinis and watch as the sweaty, scantily clad bodies flow around one another on the stage below. Amid the hedonistic daydream, the DJ, a San Franciscan who could easily have been voted “Most Likely to Go to Prom Alone,” creates the soundtrack for this socialite rave. (1150 Peachtree St., 404-874-3006, [eleven50.com](http://eleven50.com))

## Loca Luna, Friday, 12:19 a.m.

“Ah-ah-aye, ah-ah-aye,” the crowd yells, following the band’s lead, as the dance floor erupts into synchronized Latin steps. The tropical island motif of the wall mural seems to be a metaphor for the patrons here—a sea of bodies of all colors, wriggling their hips and spinning to the Brazilian beat of a Rua 6 song. ★ “This place rocks,” a 25-ish guy with a long ponytail yells, pumping his fist toward the galaxy of neon stars painted on the purple ceiling above the dance floor. Meanwhile, a glassy-eyed girl grabs her dance partner and vigorously grinds her body all over his. An Asian couple leans against a column, staring into each other’s eyes as they gyrate their hips in unison. ★ In the narrow hallway across from the back bar, a guy uses the proxim-

ity of the men’s and women’s restrooms to his advantage, striking up a conversation with a mousy brunette as they both wait their turns. ★ The patio area, with its bubbling fountain, lush greenery and Guara-po bar, resembles an island retreat. Frat boy types and Antonio Banderas look-alikes stand around sipping beers while tipsy women in skintight jeans and sexy spandex tops down fruity cocktails in plastic cups and chow down on Latin fare. The only thing to say is “Viva, Atlanta!” (836 Juniper St., 404-875-4494, [loca-luna.com](http://loca-luna.com))

**party favor**  
At press time, the popular Vision nightclub, closed for renovation, was due to reopen in early summer.

## Django, Sunday, 1:35 a.m.

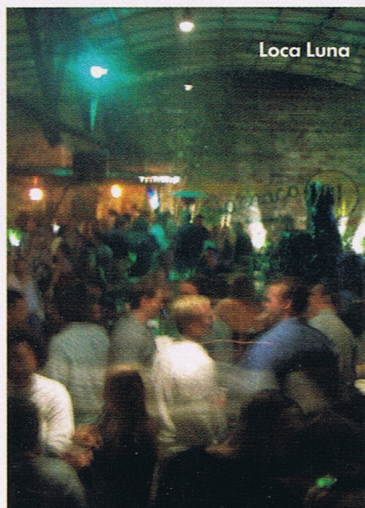
“L.L. Cool J. is hard as hell/Battle anybody I don’t care who you tell/I excel, they all fail/I’m gonna crack shells/Double-L must rock the bells.” As the beat kicks in, the crowd, now a mass of flailing arms, shouts the familiar lyrics to this classic hip-hop hit. They’re not paying homage to the sexy 40-something rapper he’s become today; they’re conjuring up images of the baby-faced (and considerably less muscular) L.L. who exploded onto the rap scene when they, too, were teens. ★ The diverse 25-and-up crowd, a mix of Atlanta natives and Atlanta University Center transplants, are united in their love for old school hip-hop in this downstairs club, which is a cross

**MIDTOWN MAGIC**  
Sometimes the sequel eclipses the original. With its splendid rooftop terrace and glamorous indoor spaces, this page, Shout threatens to outdo its sister property, über popular Twist. Colony Square hasn’t been this cool in decades.



ILLUSTRATION BY JIM WORMOLD





COURTESY OF LOCA LUNA

Loca Luna

between your parents' basement and a luxurious Buckhead loft. Decked out mostly in jeans and the latest trendy gear—from saggy urban wear and impeccable sneakers to sparkly sequin tops and Phat Pharm jeans—they squeeze onto the jam-packed dance floor and bounce and swing to the sounds of hip-hop artists from Doug E. Fresh and

M.C. Lyte to 50 Cent and Lil' Jon & The East Side Boyz. In a dark corner near the bar, a few clearly inebriated blondes erupt into a bootylicious dance that they could've learned down the street at The Cheetah. ★ The upper level offers quite a different vibe, more laid-back and bohemian. Now that the restaurant crowd has cleared, the dimly lit dining area looks more like a lounge. A couple nuzzles in the corner, locked in an embrace, while a group of men in their 40s strategically position themselves at the bar. Here, the DJ provides an eclectic soundtrack, spinning a mix of music that could only be described as a cross between house and neo-soul. Now that's diversity.

(495 Peachtree St., 404-347-8648, [djangatlanta.com](http://djangatlanta.com))

## the vibe

**the crowd**// Fiercely hip 25-and-up professionals, metrosexuals and openly gay men and women who've graduated from Buckhead's boisterous dance clubs and now prefer a more intimate, chic lounge scene.

**what to wear**// For men and women: designer jeans, funky shoes and the latest must-have accessories.

**what to drink**// Specialty cocktails—fruit-flavored martinis and exotic bellinis—held oh-so suavely in one hand while your pinky points outward.

**when to go**// Try to arrive around 11 p.m. on weekends to scope out your destination and move somewhere else if it's not to your liking. Monday night trivia at Twisted Taco is a fun diversion. Thursday is urban poetry night at Leopard Lounge.

**where to go if you're over 35**// There's live jazz almost nightly at Churchill Grounds. Check out Tuesday's amateur jam sessions. Eno is the place for fine wine and conversation.

**insider tip**// The art of negotiation is critical with cover charges in Midtown. Front door folks will sometimes cut you a deal. Crescent Avenue is the main drag, but if you plan to bounce around, consider taking cabs. If not, try the parking deck across from Front Page News and the lot next to Eleven 50.

## THE HIT LIST

**Apres Diem** (931 Monroe Drive, 404-872-3333, [apresdiem.com](http://apresdiem.com)) Stop by this Euro-chic coffeehouse for a drink and a bite after a movie or enjoy the free jazz performances on Wednesday nights.

**Bulldogs** (893 Peachtree St., 404-872-3025) This Midtown gay bar is known to attract both hip-hop and dance music fans.

**Cherry** (1051 West Peachtree St., 404-872-2020, [aboutcherry.com](http://aboutcherry.com)) Join the rest of the hip Midtown crowd for sushi upstairs or Asian-inspired cuisine downstairs.

**Cosmopolitan** (45 13th St., 404-873-6189, [cosmolava.com](http://cosmolava.com)) Midtown's 20-something crowd meets here to sip martinis on the Tropical Deck or lounge on the plush velvet couches.

**Cheetah** (887 Spring St., 404-892-3037, [thecheetah.com](http://thecheetah.com)) Not your typical strip joint, this gentlemen's club features glamorously gorgeous dancers and a gourmet restaurant.

**Churchill Grounds** (666 Peachtree St., 404-876-3030, [churchillgrounds.com](http://churchillgrounds.com)) Die-hard jazz fans frequent this live music club located next door to the Fox. Try

your luck (or just watch) at Tuesday's jam session for amateurs.

**Dragonfly** (67 12th St., 404-875-7473) These two remodeled bungalows are an alternative for Midtown partiers who love house and hip-hop but are tired of the larger club scene.

**Eno** (800 Peachtree St., 404-685-3191, [eno-atlanta.com](http://eno-atlanta.com)) Soft jazz music plays as patrons enjoy Mediterranean-style cuisine and an extensive wine menu.

**Front Page News** (1104 Crescent Ave., 404-897-3500, [newsyoucanswallow.com](http://newsyoucanswallow.com)) Midtown's trendy crowd hangs out here for the make-your-own Bloody Mary bar and live music.

**Halo** (817 West Peachtree St., Suite E-100, 404-962-7333, [halolounge.com](http://halolounge.com)) Here, Atlanta's "beautiful people" enjoy a varied soundtrack as they mingle and sip expensive martinis.

**Lava Lounge** (57 13th St., 404-873-6189, [cosmolava.com](http://cosmolava.com)) More glitzy than Cosmopolitan, its sister club, the futuristic Lava Lounge attracts a similar crowd. Dance to DJs from across the country or sip cocktails on the Tropical Deck.

**Leopard Lounge** (84 12th St., 404-874-2704, [leopardlounge.biz](http://leopardlounge.biz)) Leopard spots set the stage for the DJs spinning techno music upstairs and downstairs, but head out onto the deck for mingling.

**Majestic Diner** (1031 Ponce de Leon Ave., 404-875-0276) After a night of blues, head to this Poncey-Highland fixture for a great cup of joe and an omelette.

**MJQ Concourse** (736 Ponce de Leon Ave., 404-870-0575, [mjqatlanta.com](http://mjqatlanta.com)) Check out the best in disco and underground hip-hop as you wander through this off-the-beaten-path destination for folks who care more about having fun than flash and pretense.

**Twisted Taco** (66 12th St., 404-607-8771, [twistedtaco.com](http://twistedtaco.com)) The sports bar, a cool deck, tacos with a kick and 50 kinds of tequila all make for a fun, casual spot to unwind.

**Two Urban Licks** (820 Ralph McGill Blvd., 404-522-4622, [twourbanlicks.com](http://twourbanlicks.com)) It may be a restaurant, but the swanky decor, live music, innovative American cuisine and glorious cocktails attract Atlanta's insatiably stylish trend-chasers nightly to this Poncey-Highland eatery.



# downtown

spicy jazzy fierce sultry sleek

NIGHTLIFE

## Latin Sol, Friday, 2:23 a.m.

The action on the massive, crowded dance floor is a cross between *Dirty Dancing* and *Lambada* (the forbidden dance). Sure, there are a few clearly self-conscious novices stiffly swiveling their hips in dark corners, but from all appearances, this place is for folks who are serious about their salsa. The crowd ranges from young Latinos to 40-something suburbanites checking out Underground's latest incarnation. ★ A deep passion for Latin rhythms brings them together under a splash of colorful lights. Men in designer jeans and chic, fitted shirts twirl and dip women in clingy party dresses, halter-tops and strappy sandals. A young African-American man deftly whirls his companion around, crouches to the floor and leaps back up. Nearby, a middle-aged guy in a blazer and Gucci loafers keeps his eyes glued to the competition as he attempts to emulate

their sexy moves. ★ Voyeuristic patrons (and those taking a breather) settle onto vibrant, velvety red seats encircled by swaths of sheer drapery. Fuchsia and cobalt lights flashing beneath the two well-stocked bars serve as beacons for those seeking hydration or a tequila fix. (50 Upper Alabama St., Suite 18, 678-904-4357, [latinsolatlanta.com](http://latinsolatlanta.com))

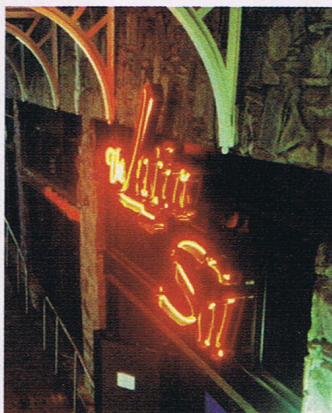
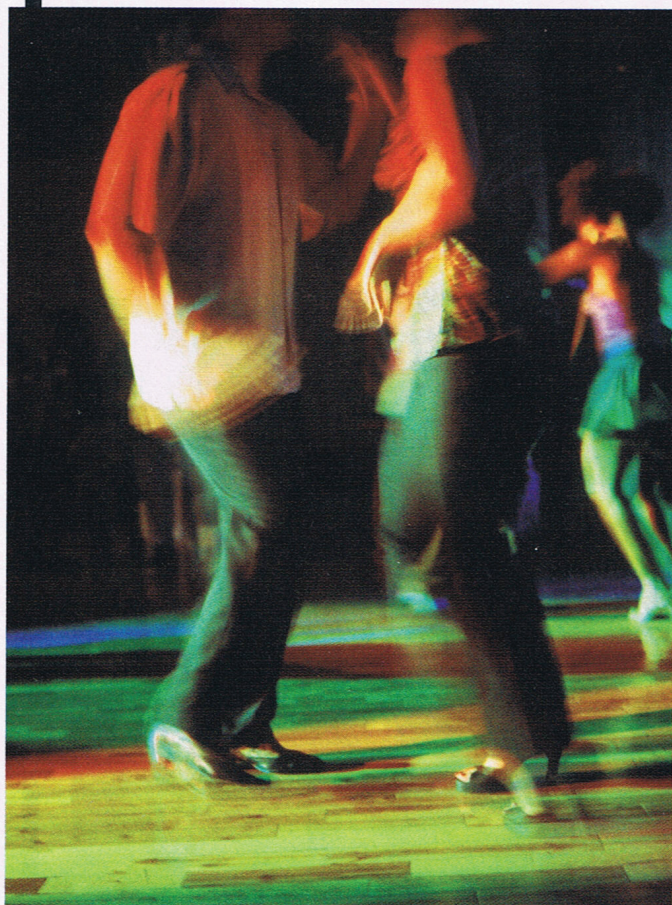
## Charlie Brown's Cabaret, Saturday, 3:15 a.m.

The honey-blond on stage bears an uncanny resemblance to singer Toni Braxton. She shimmies and struts in a glittery thong and bra set and black patent leather boots. Before long, an overzealous 20-something patron, huddled with friends at a front table, playfully waves a crisp greenback in the air. The performer swiftly kneels down on the edge of the stage and yanks down the sparkly bra as the audience member stuffs a \$5 bill into a mound of cafe au lait-colored cleavage. ★ This may sound like a typical strip club scene, but the dancer with killer abs is really a man and the tipper is a woman. This club is clearly not for the weak-hearted or easily offended. The popular cabaret, previously located on the top floor of the legendary but now-defunct gay club Backstreet, seems to have found a comfortable new home at

Underground Atlanta.

With its dim lighting, intimate round tables and ornate staircases and railings, the place looks like a typical burlesque hall, but with a twist. Gays, lesbians and curious heterosexuals all come for the bawdy lip-syncing review. Charlie Brown, the owner and self-proclaimed "madam of this joint," takes the stage between acts, telling off-color jokes and taking jabs at

**SASSY SALSA** Latin Sol, left and this page, became an instant favorite among the swanky new clubs at Kenny's Alley in Underground Atlanta.





spectators. As Charlie walks off, a cloud of smoke fills the stage, and then it's on to the next gender-bending performance. (Kenny's Alley at Underground Atlanta, 678-904-4512, charliebrowns cabaret.net)

## Compound, Sunday, 12:22 a.m.

The nearly block-long line out front is the first hint that this club is the place to be. Entered through a dramatic Japanese garden with a reflecting pool and lush landscaping, this avant-garde enclave feels like an exclusive club from L.A. or New York. As house music thumps in the background, Atlanta hotties mingle, with Coronas and cosmos in hand. Tonight's theme is "blend," and blend they do as they lounge poolside on streamlined patio furniture. ★ Facial expressions range from anxious to annoyed among those stuck in yet another long line that has formed to enter the sleek, smoke-free lounge known as MB1. There, the DJ, a 20-something black guy with a Mr. T. mohawk, dangles headphones over one ear as he fidgets with complicated knobs on the computerized sound system. The cramped quarters don't seem to bother these hip-hop fans as they squirm and gyrate to the blasting sounds of Snoop and The Game. ★ The spacious lounge out back, dubbed "Ride," is more airy and open.

**party favor**  
Paid admission to Latin Sol, Future or Charlie Brown's includes a wristband for entry into all three.

Plush, nearly bed-sized chaises line the roped-off VIP section, and silver champagne chillers sparkle under flashing lights. Techno beats bounce off walls displaying more than a dozen massive video screens. Here, the "blend" theme plays out among the crowd. Somehow, an Asian woman in a micro-mini skirt and rabbit coat, an androgynous-looking bald guy in a pantsuit and strappy sandals and a thuggish dude wearing a backwards baseball cap and gaudy gold jewelry all seem to feel at home. (1008 Brady Ave., 404-872-4621, compoundatl.com)

## The Mark Ultralounge, Sunday, 2:20 a.m.

The DJ near the long carpeted staircase that spills into the front lounge looks like a cross between R&B crooner Maxwell and rapper Busta Rhymes. His swarthy skin, puffy seventies-style Afro, tinted sunglasses and black T-shirt emblazoned with the word "soul" set the tone here. Oddly, his look represents the flamboyant, wet-behind-the-ears crowd. They strut like peacocks in their colorful ensembles—hats cocked rakishly to the side, fifties-style rolled-up jeans and costume jewelry. The rest of the folks are hardcore urbanites sporting "throwback" team jerseys, sagging Rocawear jeans, high-priced sneakers, heavy platinum jewelry and whatever else rappers wear these days. ★



Kenny's Alley  
at Underground Atlanta

ILLUSTRATION BY JIM WORMOLD





### COSMO COOL

Compound, an enclave of spaces with enigmatic names like "Ride," gives Atlantans a taste of L.A. or New York.

About a dozen fans bob their heads as the Maxwell/Busta look-alike delivers a heaping mix of neo-soul tracks. Nearby, a tall, lanky guy nurses a glass of cognac and puffs a cigar. He lounges on a beige leather sofa next to a couple playfully whispering into each other's ears. A petite young woman in white boots and matching miniskirt is so enraptured by the beat that she leaps from her chair and vigorously dodders her ample derriere right in the middle of the walkway. Another young lady with corn-rowed hair and a low-cut top rolls her eyes at the impromptu show as she slinks past the bar and steps down onto the dance floor, immediately getting swept into the basement party, which is in full swing. ★ The stony walls and exposed ductwork contrast with the sleek contemporary decor in the lounge areas, creating an industrial feel. The crowd is so dense that it's hard to so much as wriggle your hips to the DJ's musical journey from hip-hop to eighties pop, a splash of reggae and then finally to house. (79 Poplar St., 678-904-0050, [themarkatlanta.com](http://themarkatlanta.com))

## the vibe

**the crowd**// Thanks mostly to Underground Atlanta's latest rebirth, it's a melting pot of cultures and crowds—from high-wheeling "suits" in search of an after-work stress-buster to die-hard club hoppers.

**what to wear**// After-work gear, sassy club attire and stylish shoes made for navigating the concrete jungle.

**what to drink**// A little of everything—frozen daiquiris, Caribbean spirits, margaritas and imported beer.

**when to go**// There's a place for every taste at Underground, from "disco Fridays" at the Irish Bred Pub to Saturday "fetish nights" at Future (which is run by the same company that owned the now-defunct Chamber).

**where to go if you're over 35**// The cigar bar trend has dropped off considerably in recent years, but the lower level of Dailey's restaurant provides a comfortable cigar-friendly atmosphere. Icon Bar & Bistro caters to a mature crowd. Barley's Billiards and The Jazz Loft are also new options on the downtown scene.

**insider tip**// There's plenty of free street parking if you're willing to walk, but deck parking is \$8 max and feels safer during the evening hours. Several bars offer valet services. There is a \$5 cover charge to enter the Kenny's Alley area of Underground Atlanta, but you'll get a voucher for that amount that you can use for discount admission to the clubs that charge a cover. Underground's special zoning designation allows bars to pour until 4 a.m., and the open-container provision means you can walk around with your drinks.

# THE HIT LIST

**Barley's Billiards** (338 Peachtree St., 404-522-2522, [barleysbilliards.com](http://barleysbilliards.com)) This cross between an upscale pool hall and a sprawling two-story sports bar has live music on weekends.

**Dailey's Downstairs** (17 International Blvd., 404-681-3303, [daileysrestaurant.com](http://daileysrestaurant.com)) At this after-work bar, gray-templed executives and tourists enjoy live music, martinis and about 20 different cigars.

**Future** (Kenny's Alley, Underground Atlanta, 678-904-2457, [futureatlanta.com](http://futureatlanta.com)) The pulsating techno beats, slick aluminum decor and live S&M stage attract a pierced, tattooed and leather-clad clientele to this knockoff of The Chamber.

**Irish Bred Pub & Grill** (Kenny's Alley, Underground Atlanta, 404-524-5722) Sure, there's a lot of lager, but with a diverse crowd, disco music and a dance floor, this place is hardly a typical Irish pub.

**Island Oasis** (Kenny's Alley, Underground Atlanta, 678-904-5138, [islandoasisatl.com](http://islandoasisatl.com)) Fans of Underground's now-defunct Fat Tuesdays can once again get their fruity daiquiris at this quaint nook with live acoustic music. If you're lucky, you'll get a coveted spot on the patio that overlooks the alley action.

**Jamaica Jamaica** (Kenny's Alley, Underground Atlanta, 404-526-6467, [jamaicajamaicafoods.com](http://jamaicajamaicafoods.com)) Caribbean transplants and wannabes retreat to this dimly lit hideaway to savor authentic native cuisine and butterfly all night to the island beats.

**Icon Bar & Bistro** (85 Poplar St., 404-827-0040, [iconbarandbistro.com](http://iconbarandbistro.com)) Join the downtown crowd for live jazz, martinis, great food and a cozy atmosphere.

**Koco's Latin Restaurant and Bar** (Kenny's Alley, Underground Atlanta, 404-588-5331) Karaoke fans munch on Latin fare and consume liquid courage before taking to the mic. The high-tech audio system can access practically any song ever recorded.

**Melody's of Atlanta** (768 Marietta St., 404-221-0101, [melodysofatlanta.com](http://melodysofatlanta.com)) Serving three meals a day, Melody's is a new hangout for downtowners. Cuisine is a blend of San Francisco and Old South. Located under the Hotel Roxy Lofts.

**The Alley Cat** (Underground Atlanta, 678-904-2514, [alleycatatlanta.com](http://alleycatatlanta.com)) Live rock music, vintage Aerosmith album covers plastered on the walls and hot waitresses dressed in black vinyl hot-pants and cat ears make this a classic-rock fan's dream.

**The Jazz Loft** (201 Courtland St., 404-519-8220, [thejazzloft.com](http://thejazzloft.com)) An over-30 crowd flocks to the former home of the 201 Courtland Club for live music, cocktails and a full-course dinner menu.



# va-highland

boho playful bluesy prep mellow

NIGHTLIFE

## Atkins Park, Friday, 6:46 p.m.

In the smoky bar of this Atlanta institution, the city's oldest continuously operated tavern, singles in everything from college T-shirts and ball caps to work gear sip mugs of Guinness as they flirt with the opposite sex and snack on deep-fried appetizers. The sounds of Iggy Pop emanate throughout as everyone leaves the worries of the office behind and kicks off the weekend. ★ The motive is the same, but the scene is quite different for the patrons gathered in the serene, dimly lit dining area in the next room. A family—mom, dad, grandma and a mix of other relatives—sits around a long table, gleefully chatting over New Orleans-themed entrees: jambalaya, po' boy sandwiches, gumbo and the like. A few feet away, a spiky-haired toddler in a frilly fuchsia dress and shiny patent leather shoes busily shuffles through the colorful toys strewn about the designated children's play area. Thirty-ish couples and groups of girlfriends sip wine and nod to the mellow jazz piping through the

**LADY SINGS THE BLUES** Francine Reed gets the crowd on its feet at Blind Willie's, left. Below, another scene from Atlanta's legendary juke joint and blues club.



speakers. ★ Back in the bar, the decibel level continues to rise as a mix of worker bees, aging frat boys and recent college grads continues to pour into the watering hole. A 30-something biker dude (one of the more mature people in this area) with a white bandanna wrapped around his head, a silver hoop earring in his left ear and tattoos etched onto both of his biceps edges his way through the crowd to deliver a pitcher of foamy beer to his new “friends”—a table of young hotties huddled together in one of the dark-wood booths across from the bar. Meanwhile, an all-out testosterone-fest is underway at the dartboard. (794 North Highland Ave., 404-876-7249, [atkinspark.com](http://atkinspark.com))

## Neighbors, Friday, 7:47 p.m.

“Please seat yourself, we’ll be right with you,” reads the sign near the front door. Although perfunctory, the display also summarizes the ambience here—comfortable, casual and laid-back, like your favorite pair of old jeans. No one is dressed up or too trendy; they seem to have outgrown that scene. These folks have reached their 30s, and they’re not here to pick up or to be picked up. Instead, they come to socialize with co-workers or catch up with old friends over chicken wings and pitchers of brew. ★ In a corner near the bar, a clean-shaven, baby-faced guy jerks and grunts as he gets lost in the “Golden Tee” video game. A guy who could be the love child of Tom Cruise and David Letterman (if that were possible) entertains his friends at a table by playing “air guitar” to the Rolling Stones tune that thumps in the background. The giant poster of a young Elvis seems very appropriate, as the track switches to “Heartbreak Hotel.” ★ The



full-service bar is stocked with 13 beers on tap and 15 bottled ales. Exposed ductwork, well-worn wooden tables and unfinished hardwood floors add to the relaxed atmosphere. The patio, twinkling with strings of white Christmas lights, is crowded with groups of friends at tables, snacking on burgers and drinking (what else?) beer. Groups of women sip wine as they gossip about last weekend's date. (752 North Highland Ave., Suite C, 404-872-5440, neighborsatlanta.com)

## Hand in Hand, Friday, 9:12 p.m.

The colorful knobs on the beer taps, bearing names like Tetley's English Ale, Strongbow, Stella Artois and Bodington's, betray this place's British heritage. A dark wood-paneled bar and cozy gaslight lamps add to the pub-like ambience. The happy hour crowd has died down, and the place is alive with a mix of young adults, from average Joes to movers and shakers and even a celebrity. That's Atlanta-based interior designer Vern Yip of *Trading Spaces* fame perched on a bar stool, laughing and chatting it up with a group of friends. ★ He's not the only interesting person in the room though. Near the front door, there's a baby-faced guy in a backwards baseball cap and a T-shirt with the word "INsecurity" plastered across the front. He gestures animatedly as he shares witty stories with a group of beer-sipping guys. A bushy-haired woman who resembles Glenn Close in her *Fatal Attraction* days leans on the bar, seemingly waiting to be picked up. In a corner, a blonde woman and a guy with spiky, moussed hair gaze at each other from two bar stools with their legs intertwined. ★ The outdoor patio is packed with groups of friends



**HIGH TIMES** The cozy bars lining the streets of Virginia-Highland are rich with character. Atkins Park is the city's oldest continuously operated tavern. Fontaine's is a popular oyster bar.

sharing pitchers and chowing down on British fare, including Indian-spiced chips. Ponytailed waitresses in white button-down shirts bob through the crowd as "Livin' la Vida Loca" pipes through the speakers... so much for the pub theme. (752 North Highland Ave., 404-872-1001)

## Blind Willie's, Friday, 10:38 p.m.

"Where are you, Orlando?" Sandra "The Empress of Blues" Hall barks into the microphone, her eyes carefully scanning the crowd. The busty black woman's eyes zero in on the stiff nerdy white guy at a rear table who had earlier mentioned that he was from Florida. "Come on up," she yells as the audience cheers him onto the stage. "Have you ever held a whopper before?" she asks coyly. Before he can answer, she interjects, "Well, I got something for ya!" and places both of his hands onto her butt cheeks. "Get a good grip, honey, cuz I don't want you to slip," she quips as she vigorously jiggles her cleavage in his face. The crowd of mostly 30- and 40-something revelers, packed into a sea of tiny circular wooden tables, goes wild, whistling and clapping at the fish-out-of-water scene. ★ They sip Amstel Light and Jack Daniels and Coke as they revel in the



party favor  
Virginia-Highland's  
"Summerfest" street  
festival will be held  
June 4 and 5.



ILLUSTRATION BY JIM WORMOLD



kitschy decor, which includes colorful strings of Christmas lights, James Brown and Louis Armstrong bobble heads and a splash of multicolored Mardi Gras beads dangling above the bar. Framed photos of blues performers—Snooky Pryor, David “Honeyboy” Edwards, Sleepy LaBeef and Moses Rascie—add to the juke joint ambience. ★ As music fills the smoky room, a curly-haired blonde in a lacy sage-green camisole drags her male companion to the tiny dance floor. A man with an ebony complexion closes his eyes and concentrates on the sultry blues music, seemingly oblivious to their re-enactment of the famous dance scene in *Pulp Fiction*. (828 North Highland Ave., 404-873-2583, blindwilliesblues.com)

## the vibe

**the crowd**// Recent college grads to 30-somethings (and a few baby boomers) who still yearn for the smoky bar and pub scene they enjoyed as coeds.

**what to wear**// Nothing too trendy—jeans and whatever’s comfortable for bar-hopping.

**what to drink**// Beer, beer and more beer! From a pitcher of Bud to imported brews, it’s a beer connoisseur’s dream.

**when to go**// Whenever the weather’s nice, expect a crowd. The area usually gets jammed at the first hint of spring, but tends to die down when the steamy summer weather hits.

Most bars get packed later in the evening, so arrive during happy hour if you want to get a seat.

**where to go if you’re over 35**// Blind Willie’s and Hand in Hand tend to cater to more mature crowds, but expect a smoky environment.

**insider tip**// Grab a bite to eat or enjoy window-shopping in the early evening hours if you want to nab the limited free street parking, then stick around for the late-night bar crowds. If you park illegally, you will be towed or booted!

Hand in Hand



COURTESY OF HAND IN HAND

## THE HIT LIST

**The Cavern** (1035 North Highland Ave., 404-873-4449) Usually considerably less crowded than other nearby bars, the former Gecko Lounge features cheap but exquisite house margaritas, available by the pitcher.

**Dark Horse Tavern & Grill** (816 North Highland Ave., 404-873-3607, darkhorseatlanta.com) This place is known for its singles scene, but if mingling is not your thing, head downstairs to **10 High** for live rock music by local bands like Second Shift, Trances Are and Hot Young Priest.

**Fontaine’s Oyster Bar** (1026 North Highland Ave., 404-872-0869) In this long, narrow oyster house, the bar stretches from the entrance to the deck—and it’s lined with the Highland’s posh and beautiful. Stay inside to mingle, or retreat outside to the patio.

**Harry & Sons** (820 North Highland Ave., 404-873-2009) Dress up or just wear jeans when you head to this reliable, convivial stop for some of the area’s favorite Thai food, sushi and sake.

**Highland Tap** (1026 North Highland Ave., 404-875-3673) Atlanta’s hip 20-somethings gather around the wooden bar to get their martini fix—mimicking the experienced 30-something crowds elsewhere.

**Java Vino** (579 North Highland Ave., 404-577-8673, javavino.com) This cozy, Latin-themed coffeehouse/wine bar is a welcome alternative to the usual bar scene. The menu features a wide selection of specialty coffees and fine vintages.

**Limerick Junction** (822 North Highland Ave., 404-874-7147, limerickjunction-pub.com) The Highland’s pub crawlers stop into Atlanta’s oldest Irish pub for live Gaelic music, beer, shooters and free popcorn.

**Moe’s & Joe’s Bar & Grill** (1033 North Highland Ave., 404-873-6090) It’s a cash-only, beer-only joint that only locals would love, and they do. The wooden booths, worn walls and antique cash register give this bar a feel that its regulars call home.

**Pura Vida** (656 North Highland Ave., 404-870-9797, puravidatapas.com) Trendy Highlanders come here for tapas and mojitos. On Fridays, a DJ spins salsa, mambo and merengue.

**Sala Sabor de Mexico** (1186 North Highland Ave., 404-872-7203, sala-atlanta.com) Much hipper than the typical Mexican restaurant, this gourmet Southwestern cafe attracts a sexy, savvy clientele.

**Taco Mac** (1006 North Highland Ave., 404-873-6529, tacomac.com) With 25 beers on tap and 140 in bottles, Taco Mac helped define the Virginia-Highland scene. The deck is a great place to sit and watch partygoers. ★