



BY SIMON MCGORAM

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Opened in October '09, 24 Moons occupies the space that once held Alley Bar on ACDC Lane – a long time bastion for some of Melbourne's hippest venues. While the days of Honkytonks are no more, the laneway continues to ooze that Melbourne cool that other State capitals still fail to grasp. I mean check out this alleyway - Melbourne's street artists, illicit or otherwise are just of superior quality. Hell, even the garbage seems like it is part of an installation.

Once the red light is located and you find yourself climbing a winding set of stairs the sounds of the forest and birdsong flood over you in stark contrast to the ultra-urban surroundings. 24 Moons

certainly attempts to take its patrons on a journey and not just by being off the beaten track.

Inside, the dimly lit lounge bar is themed like a night-time forest scene with graphics of darkened woods providing the only outlook from the windows. Birdsong gives way to subdued tunes which ramp up over the weekends and black wooden panelling has been expertly routed to give the impression of foliage, tree trunks, butterflies and birds. Lighting emits a soft moonlit glow completing the night-time forest effect. You are now one with nature and ready to wolf down a cocktail or two if not howl at the moon.



## Bar Profile



This project is a meeting of the minds between some pretty serious hospitality personalities in the Melbourne industry: Marcus Motteram (Mr. Delicious), Boris Von Rechenberg (Mr. Creative), Simon Digby (Mr. Music) and Mr. Hospitality, Michael Christadoulou.

Marcus is best known as an award winning cocktail bartender, trainer, mentor and as the part owner of **F4** (which has just re-launched **New Guernica** – see openings), as well as a two year stint being the founder and co-owner of **The Auction Rooms** café and coffee roastery.

Michael Christadoulou has an impressive CV having managed **Pharmacy** in Notting Hill for Damien Hirst and Matthew Freud for five years. He even served Madge on his first shift. As **24 Moons** has evolved, however, Mr Hospitality will be taking a back seat with the group bringing on board a new team member to manage the venue.

Marcus has known Mr. Creative, Boris Von Rechenberg, for years: Boris was the genius behind **16 Ellis Street** – a revolutionary reservation only cocktail lounge – that he sold only recently.

Whilst in discussions about a new venture with Boris, Marcus was also acquainted with Simon Digby, part owner and GM of Melbourne nightclub institution **Alumbra**. They hit it off and in turn started talking business opportunities.

"So I had Boris and Simon talking to me about these different places and I thought this is all too hard" Marcus tells us. "So I



was very honest with them both and said how about we all get together."

Well they gelled so the trio started looking for a venue. What they came across was a site with a two year 'death sentence' hanging over it – 24 phases of the moon to be exact.

"We only have the space for two years – it's actually like a perpetual two years – until we hear otherwise" explains Marcus. "It will take the owners of this building two years from putting in a planning permit. So we'll definitely know once they've put that planning permit in, hence the name **24 Moons**..."

When we first spoke about it we thought about just making it a club space - it is sound insulated and we thought with Simon's contacts and my contacts we might just use that to milk it and make ▶



money out of it quickly. That idea then changed when it was suggested that we could try to do a cocktail bar, because you can go from a cocktail bar to a club, but you can't go the other way around."

Well before this midnight forest gets knocked down it might well be worth popping in for a gander. The trio tell us they're here for a good time and not for a long one and apart from the excellent creative execution this venue packs a serious drinks offering thanks to the likes of Mr. Delicious himself and Mr. Bar-Nerd, Kane Daniel (ex- **Gin Palace** amongst others).

"Concise has been the watchword as far as the drink selection is concerned" says

**"Climbing a winding set of stairs the sounds of the forest and birdsong flood over you in stark contrast to the ultra-urban surroundings."**

Marcus. "We have passed up a voluminous, encyclopaedic back bar in preference for single expressions of individual styles... Our cocktail list is extremely lean [six cocktails], but constantly updated. It has been written in order to place emphasis on customer interaction and tailoring of drink requirements to the individual's palate."

Beverages like their "Second Degree Shrub" (Appleton Estate V/X rum, mixed berry compote, apple cider vinegar and Angostura bitters) look incredibly tempting amongst an equally concise, but tasty gathering of intelligent wines (think Albarinos and Tempranillos) and beer

(think Jamieson 'The Beast' IPA). But apart from threatening beverages of mass seduction a splash of molecular mixology has been thrown into the mix thanks to the bars access to a kitchen from the neighbouring hospitality school. Being a good bunch they even let the school use the bar for training during the day.

Marcus notes that a lot of customers are still a little timid when it comes to the whole molecular thing – hell a lot of bartenders are too – but Marcus plans to slowly increase the offering as the bar progresses.

"When we first opened up we were serving up little foams on a spoon so that people could actually taste those as a palate cleanser. We've done some things like faux olives; kind of like little raviolis of an olive juice which is made of blended up olives. They're just a full olive flavour, but it bursts into your mouth, and looks like an olive and we even sit them in rosemary oil... With the kitchen out the back there we've got the ability to create different things; we create all our own syrups and cordials. Having that ability to create these things means that we can make drinks here that other people can't make elsewhere."



If eating molecular olive ravioli is just not on your radar 24 Moons offers a few dishes that whilst not space age do look out of this world if you have a beverage in front of you. Their short contemporary list of edibles sized in line with Tapas, with more of an Asian feel features the likes of steamed char sui duck buns with XO sauce and a more traditional tapas spread of Jamon, Spanish olives, manchego cheese and olive bread.

Whilst the venue remains a cocktail space early to mid-week the team has taken a realistic approach to this project.

"So we thought we'd give it a couple of months to sort of see how it panned out. We could see fairly early on that it really wasn't going to pay for itself within the time frame so it is a matter of changing it up."

Marcus tells us to expect a bit of live theatre and even the odd club night.

"I still do believe that we can have the best of both worlds – we can still be a great cocktail bar and make great drinks and keep a fine drinks selection and still do nights." ▼

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