

RANCH & COAST

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The Food
Issue

The Dish on
Downtown



Bottega Americano,
East Village

But the GQ revolution isn't spinning exclusively at techno speed.

Union Kitchen & Tap's Fifth Avenue location just up the street from the Convention Center sits just right for general manager Johnny Leal, who opened in the Gaslamp in April (the other Union Kitchen & Tap is in Encinitas). Leal calls his Gaslamp place "a Chargers bar," and he's not competing with the massive, bottle-service nightclubs. "We have a lot of regulars from the Encinitas location and a lot of locals coming by. We're very inviting."

Like Leal, Nicole Dahm, who operates the Lucky Bastard Saloon in the north Gaslamp on Fifth, is happy running a sports bar specializing in burgers. "I don't feel like I'm being overlooked for the big clubs because it's such a different demographic they pull from and world they're running. It's great that the Gaslamp is creating a melting pot of different things. I welcome them all because it means more foot traffic."

Then there's Damon Barone, whose restaurant company runs an underground speakeasy beneath the (temporarily) closed Nicky Rotten's that doesn't even have a sign advertising it. (Hint: Look for the door bearing the words "Law Offices of Eddie O'Hare.") But word of mouth is making Prohibition a hot spot in the Gaslamp Quarter. Reminiscent of the illicit speakeasies of the '20s, Prohibition serves up drinks and live music (primarily jazz, blues, and soul) three nights a week. "It's off the beaten path," Barone says of Prohibition. He also says: "It's never dull."

Megaclubs. Sports bars. Speakeasies. All neighbors in San Diego's most happening neighborhood. "The success of the Gaslamp is that it can be a lot of different things to a lot of



Union Kitchen & Tap

different people," says Jimmy Parker, executive director of the Gaslamp Quarter Association. "The Gaslamp *is* this region's downtown."

Parker won't reveal all that's still to come in the Gaslamp, but he will say: "There are a lot of things on the drawing board."

Today, the drawing board. Tomorrow, get in line.

DAVID L. COODEN

