

# A Reading From the Book of Utah

Park City  
keeps the  
glasses  
full despite  
uncommon  
liquor laws

by Anthony Head

For Park City's year-round population of about 7,000, winter blows more than just snow down Main Street. It also brings an avalanche of skiers and snowboarders to this scenic mountain town, and in January the population swells with the Sundance Film Festival. Year-round, Park City welcomes more than three million visitors to the Wasatch Mountains, which frame the epic surroundings.

Along with alpine-style splendor, Utah has a "dry" reputation. This is understandable, but unfounded. You can get a drink in many locations. But Utah's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control has a pretty tight grip on the beverage business. Wine and spirits are sold only through state-owned stores at state-mandated prices.

"That's not the half of it," says Bill Shoaf, founder and Managing Director of **The Sky Lodge** ([www.theskylodge.com](http://www.theskylodge.com)), a luxury boutique hotel that opened last December. "It's also a felony for wine to be shipped directly to consumers from another state. Restaurants have to purchase their booze from state stores just like everyone else."

At the request of Robert Redford, Shoaf came to Park City in 1992, leaving Santa Barbara's San Ysidro Ranch in order to renovate the nearby Sundance Resort. As a hotelier who's written award-winning wine lists for icons like Dallas's Mansion on







Kevin Henry pushes Wasatch Brew Pub's "three-two" beer.

availability from the state."

Just a few blocks away, Kevin Henry, General Manager of **Wasatch Brew Pub** ([www.wasatchbeers.com](http://www.wasatchbeers.com)) says, "We usually go with the mainstream listings. We base our wine list on what we know is going to be there." Henry admits he isn't trying to score any wine exclusives anyway. "We push the beer."

Wasatch's Hefeweizen is the bar's bestseller, but other beers—Polygamy Porter, Evolution Amber Ale, and 1st Amendment Lager, for example—playfully poke at Utah's alcohol authority. Opened in 1985, Wasatch was the state's first microbrewery in operation since Prohibition. Today, it brews about 8,000 barrels annually, most of it consumed on-site—and each drop is "three-two." That's another thing about Utah: Beer with

Turtle Creek, Shaof laments that it's a bit of a challenge doing business in a control state, where the government maintains a monopoly over the retailing and wholesaling of alcohol. "If we want to bring in three cases of wine, the state keeps one-third of it and records it in 'the book.' If no one asks for it, we can get it back. It's convoluted."

"The book" is a 120-page-plus monthly listing of wines available from the state. Brett Clifford, Coordinator for the Wine Division of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, helps assemble the book and says the wine-purchasing process is not that draconian. "For any allocated wine sold in Utah, we allow two-thirds on premise designation by the winery or their broker, and one third must be made available retail, usually one bottle per customer. We allow on-premise accounts who did not get an allocation to buy one bottle just like any other customer. Basically, there cannot be any exclusives in Utah, but we do allow suppliers to choose their accounts."

There's another thing Clifford wants to clear up: "People are often under the impression that all wines in Utah must go through me. That is simply not the case. But I am responsible for most of the super-premium sector." As purchasing agent for the so-called "limited listings" category, Clifford's office tastes about 300 to 500 samples a month, then decides to buy or decline. He also has discretion to buy wines according to his own subjective

interpretations of reviews from prominent wine publications. "Highly sought-after and allocated wines such as Cristal, Shafer Hillside, DuMol, etc., do not have to go through either process but are bought yearly at my discretion."

Other products get into the state after being reviewed by a six-person committee. Anything on the wholesale market or from a U.S. importer not showing up in the book can be obtained with a special order. Still, that's a lot of hoops to jump through, especially when beverage professionals find something on their own. "It's a crapshoot. You're doing the work and sometimes others harvest it," says Shaof.

Craig Back, Service Manager for **Riverhorse on Main** ([www.riverhorsegroup.com](http://www.riverhorsegroup.com)), agrees: "It's impossible to have an exclusive. Once someone finds out a certain wine is in the book, it's fair game." Sitting in the dining room of this Mobil 4-star restaurant with executive chef Seth Adams, Back says Park City's growth means more calls for hard-to-find wines. "Today's sophisticated clientele is demanding more from us."

Adams concurs, adding, "The growth has allowed us to expand our American eclectic menu in exciting new ways. But predetermining wines to match a dish is virtually impossible. We're at the mercy of the



As Founder and Managing Director of The Sky Lodge, Bill Shoaf is still smiling despite Utah's curious liquor laws.



Seth Adams (left) and Craig Back look over "the book" at Riverhorse on Main.

more than 3.2% alcohol by weight (4% by volume) is only sold through the state. But that's a different chapter in the book of Utah. ■■

# The Surprise of San Antonio

At night this Texas city **comes to life**

story and photos by Anthony Head

Not so long ago, a visit to the Alamo was one of the few highlights that came with a trip to San Antonio. While that landmark still draws tourists by the millions, the rest of this city has spent the last few years blossoming like the yellow rose of Texas.

The revitalization of downtown has been assisted in equal parts by the success of the four-time NBA World Champion San Antonio Spurs, thriving convention facilities and numerous special events, such as the upcoming NCAA basketball championship in March. Most notably, though, the city has refurbished the River Walk, bringing new energy to the banks of the San Antonio River. Today, downtown San Antonio is a true world-class destination, and the bar scene is so exciting that some visitors just might—dare I say it?—forget the Alamo.

## VBar

The über-cool Hotel Valencia Riverwalk may at first seem out of place in Central Texas, but it actually fits right in with the new hip hotels sprouting up around town. Inside, Vbar features a sleek but warm interior and hosts all sorts of events that attract locals and tourists alike. Fashiontini Thursdays feature red-carpet runway fashion shows, and on



San Antonio's River Walk glows at night.

PHOTO: SACHAL RENDON



Richard Ramos says vodka rules at VBar.

Stiletto Fridays there's a discount (\$1 per inch of heel) for the first drink.

Bar Supervisor Richard Ramos, a San Antonio native, says that bringing back the locals, especially the younger crowds, has been key to the bar's success. "Downtown is really a hot tourist spot now," he says. "Four years ago, there were only a couple destination bars around here. Now you see lines out the doors on weekend nights all over the place."

At Vbar, hotel guests dominate the lounge during the week, but on the weekends 95 percent of the crowd is local. "Liquor sales seem to be bigger then," says Ramos as he mixes a signature Valencia Dementia. "Vodka is really popular and Grey Goose is the call of choice."

150 East Houston St., 210-230-8410  
www.hotelvalencia.com

## SoHo Wine & Martini Bar

Open for less than a year, SoHo Wine & Martini Bar has already been discovered by





**Theresa Goldbach with local Drippings Springs vodka.**

downtown's working professionals. Although this former San Antonio Loan & Trust Co. building is on the National Register of Historic Places, the vibe inside the long, slender lounge skews younger, especially as the night gets older.

The smell of fine cigar smoke gently permeates the three individual rooms, dominated by a central bar, sleek furniture and polished hardwood floors. The old bank vault, dating to 1901, has been converted into a wine vault, housing dozens of selections. Return visitors usually spot something different on the wine list, too. "We're still pretty new, so we're seeing what works and what to drop," says Managing Bartender Theresa Goldbach. "Right now we're fine-tuning the reds."

Depending on the crowd, liquor and beer sales can outpace wines here. SoHo's extensive drink menu features several specialty Martinis made with ingredients as diverse as ginger, espresso and caramel apple. A current favorite is the CucumberTini, mixed with Drippings Springs vodka, a popular local spirit produced in the Texas Hill Country.

214 W Crockett St., 210-444-1000  
www.sohomartinibar.com

## Acenar

With more theaters opening throughout San Antonio, an energetic nightlife culture has been the driving force behind success of restaurants like Houston Street's Acenar. Inside this modern Tex-Mex establishment the dedicated bar space—called Atomar—attracts its own following.

Head bartender Albert Cancino whips up a signature Mojito made with 10 Cane rum and blood orange purée. He says that when special events are happening (which is all the time), Atomar's location puts it right in the

heart of the action. "When the city hosted the Big 12 college football championship game, we had a weekend filled with Oklahoma and Missouri fans. We doubled the take."

General Manager Dave Davis says the restaurant and bar opened about three years ago as part of a wave of similar properties that really raised the area's profile. "This whole street has been revitalized with new businesses, residential properties and theaters," he says. "Both locals and out-of-towners are down here every single night."

146 East Houston Street, 210-222-1512  
www.acenar.com

## Zinc Champagne & Wine Bar

"We move a lot of champagne; it's my favorite thing to sell," says Jackie Davis, Cocktail Manager at Zinc. That makes sense, too, because this chic destination bar has eight champagnes and sparklers available by the glass and more than 50 by the bottle, including Roederer Cristal, Krug Grande Cuvée and Dom Pérignon Brut.

With champagne's soaring popularity, it's no wonder Zinc has the energy and buzz of a new place. But it's actually been around for eight years and has developed a very loyal following, not only from a regular crowd of city officials and law office workers, but also from others in the hospitality industry.

The emphasis may be on the bubbly, but Zinc also boasts one of the top wine lists in town, with bottles from as close as Fredericksburg, Texas, to as far away as Marlborough, New Zealand. ■■

207 N Presa, 210-224-2900  
www.zincwine.com



**Head bartender Alberto Cancino at Acenar.**



**Champagne is a favorite at Zinc, says Jackie Davis.**