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GUIDES



QUEEN WEST II: BELLWOODS TO DUFFERIN

BY KIM BOSCH May 14, 2008 17:05

The middle child — between fashionista older sister Queen West and undisciplined younger brother Parkdale — West Queen West mostly just wants to chill out and draw in her sketchbook. The strip is mellow but full of contrast; brooding (albeit revamped) bars hang at every corner, while galleries dot the area with colour and light. To the south, barren buildings and yards give the impression that there is still work to be done. But don't let the quiet fool you: on any given Saturday, this sibling is as ready to party as the others.

OLD STANDBYS Always the leader, The Drake Hotel (1150 Queen W., 416-531-5042) wants to be friends with cool kids of all stripes. The Sky Yard rooftop patio (a mecca for skinny jeans) is so über-hip it wouldn't dare use the term "über" to describe itself, while the Café Patio (recently expanded to offer 75 seats) offers a more organic patio experience ideal for sipping wine rather than shooting Jäger. If neither of these are your bag, check out the Underground concert venue for live music.

A little farther west, you'll find Unit (1198 Queen W., 416-537-6646). In the 1900s, this space was a drinking spot for local railroad workers; now it's decked out in found-object art from the 'hood.

Unlike The Drake, The Gladstone Hotel (1214 Queen W., 416-531-4635) doesn't have a patio, but its countless exhibitions and events still make it a neighbourhood favourite. Drop in for DIY music Thursday to Saturday at the Melody Bar, when crooners and screechers alike come out to practice the fine art of karaoke.

Smaller but louder, The Beaconsfield (1154 Queen W., 416-516-2550), with its tree-dominated patio, must not be overlooked. It's a sanctuary on the days where the heat emanates from the asphalt. Settle in for a supper that's unpretentiously swanky. Stay even later to hear local DJ talent.

Equally great music drifts out onto the 12-seat patio at The Beaver (1192 Queen W., 416-537-2768) even on Sundays, when the Beav presents Bush Party featuring local DJs Hollyrock and Le Freak C'est Keek.

PUT ON A CLEAN SHIRT You'll have to make a reservation to visit pricier Noce (875 Queen W., 416-504-3463) but don't let the white linens and wine glasses scare you off — the patio is spacious and laid-back. Kitty-corner to Trinity-Bellwoods park, you'll breathe easy over your ravioli funghi. Plus, Italian all the way, it's the perfect place to score a decent glass of grappa.

A SOBER MOMENT Can't drink for a third night in a row but still feel like going out? Create your own juice at natural-nosh restaurant Fresh (894 Queen W., 416-913-2720). Savour an orange-mango blend on the patio or grab a royal jelly and ginseng concoction on your way to the club to keep you dancing all night. For those who need a little more proof in their punch (you luses!), Fresh also sells a variety of bio-dynamic wines. Or indulge in another vice: caffeine. Addis Ababa (1184 Queen W., 416-538-0059) serves freshly roasted Ethiopian coffee (with a side of incense) that is blacker than the soul of the devil. You can watch the sun go down on the impressive patio while you wait for the jitters to pass.

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