

GP

Stephen Blank & Justine Copley

No, not the Grand Prix - the GIN PALACE. Where you can sip on a 'Winston Churchill' and smoke one too. Step into Vernon Chalker's softly lit den and step back in time. GP is the type of place where you'd expect to see James Bond and Major Anthony Nelson sharing a martini. Which martini? Well, there is, of course, the James Bond, the Luis Bunel, the Fin de Siecle, the Winston Churchill, the Classic "In and Out" - a whole menu of them in fact.

Gin Palace is the child of Melbourne entrepreneur Vernon Chalker. Vernon is a delightful host, ably assisted by Murray Pitman, Peter Collinson and possibly the best staff in Melbourne, with a finely tuned sense of sophisticated decadence. He knows his martinis and god help the poor fool who challenges him to a drinking competition. Apparently the original Gin Palace was a sordid establishment which was closed down on 18 October 1870 by Melbourne's Chief Magistrate for being in a dilapidated condition and unfit for human occupation. It was, by all accounts, corrupt and debauched. The staff will tell you that the debauchery is still there, but the decor has been replaced by cleaner lines with a great deal more sophistication.

The perfect environment for your next soiree, tête a tête, or simply to chill out while sipping on one of the many martinis on offer. The staff clad in their purple and gold vests will welcome you to the Gin Palace experience, seat you at a red velvet covered chez longe or "smoking chair" and present you with an extensive menu to tantalise and cater to your every drinking pleasure, from the Dean Martin to a Stella Artois, a VB to a Bourbon on the rocks.



Should you fancy a puff, the staff will assist you by producing a humidor with cubans and dominicans for your selection. Once seated at a table, lying in a lounge, or standing by the bar, you can engage in heated debate with colleagues or kick back and enjoy the ambience. For the seasoned barfly, purveying the scenery may be more apt (standing three feet from Helena Christiansen and Larry, of U2 fame, generally provides a good subject).

Where is it? Positioned unobtrusively in Russell Place, a lane running between Little Collins Street and Bourke Street, opposite the Village Cinemas, Gin Palace is open 7 evenings a week. You will wait a few minutes at the door on Friday and Saturday, as can be expected at any popular venue. Enjoy the Gin Palace experience.