

NYC's coolest new bar: The Alley Cat Amateur Theatre

New York (CNN) — Debating between a night on Broadway or hitting the Manhattan bar scene? Now you may be able to enjoy a bit of both with a new speakeasy opening in what used to be New York City's old theater district.

You can always go downtown



The Alley Cat Amateur Theatre is a rare jewel in modern Manhattan, a new bar with all the old-world charm of what it once used to be, in one of the richest historic districts of the city.

Tucked away on a small street called Theatre Alley, the speakeasy is set in the cellar of the historic Beekman Hotel.

A blue neon cat is the tell-tale sign above an otherwise nondescript door that, once opened, transports you to what feels like backstage at a theater.

A 2,500-square-foot industrial space is decorated with mannequins and parts of props. Exposed pipes and brick seamlessly mix with plush velvet stools and the original plaster wall that's still intact from the 1800s. A classic piano sits in the middle, with turntables attached as the venue plans to host both impromptu performances and intimate concerts.

Serge Becker, the nightlife impresario behind the space (you might recognize his name from early-2000s hot spot The Box) wanted to create a new kind of lounge that was both sophisticated yet relaxed, loosely inspired by the legendary Café Carlyle cabaret club uptown.

"I just wanted to create a place that I want to go to personally and feel comfortable and bring my friends," Becker tells CNN Travel. "The basement was very raw, so I wanted to keep some of that character."

"I'd like it to be somewhat of an oasis, a kind of getaway from a busy hectic city," he adds.

From Manhattan to Tokyo



TV star and chef Tom Colicchio, who has a restaurant upstairs in the hotel, is providing the food alongside Tamiyo Hasegawa. The menu draws on influences from Tokyo's vibrant nightlife and from American cocktail clubs. The Japanese theme was Becker's idea, and Colicchio put his stamp on it.

"I'm not trying to do Japanese food, but I'm using ingredients that are clearly Japanese," Colicchio says. "Instead of using salt, I'm using soy, instead of olive oil we're using sesame oil, we're using things like sea urchin and Kobe beef... There's a way to move things around that still feels authentic to me."

Cocktails like Spaghetti Eastern and Head in the Clouds start at \$16, and the bar has an impressive list of Japanese whiskeys.

Upstairs, the hotel itself is steeped in history. The building dates to 1883 and was one of Manhattan's first skyscrapers. The landmark Queen Anne--style building sat empty for years before being refurbished as the Beekman hotel, part of the Thompson Hotels group.

From the architectural turrets on the outside to the nine-story Victorian atrium on the inside, the hotel is reminiscent of an English parlor with grand bookshelves.

Start at one of the hotel's two restaurants or its bar if you want to make a night of it.



