



LAIID BACK: The Mello bar in Allerton Road, Liverpool

# Let's hear it for the cocktail king

**T**HE first time I met Mark Lloyd, I knew he was a prince among barmen.

It was the evening of Grand National day and he had the unenviable task of staffing the bar for the Winners' Party at the Sir Thomas hotel.

That basically meant serving a bunch of people who have already been steadily enjoying themselves all afternoon and evening.

**But Mark put up with my group's various bizarre drink requests and attempts to abuse the hospitality of the organisers with good grace, and by the time we left we were on the verge of hugging him.**

The night soured after we'd moved on – when insults were traded, unwise bars were chosen and the whole night petered out – but the good memory stayed with us.

Then, he popped up again. Three of us had been out to another bar and been less impressed. So we headed to the Tea Factory and asked him to dream us up some cocktails.

As he will probably tell you, this is the thing Mark does really well. It's not arrogance,

## YourPub

**Adrian Butler tracks the city's best barman**

merely a deeply-held belief he is the best barman in Liverpool.

And after being served by so many sulky, indifferent teenagers, it's nice to chat to someone who loves the job and knows everything about it.

Straight away he had rustled my friend up a pink cherry combination that blew her socks off, along with a nice aggressive Bloody Mary for me.

Now Mark's left the city centre and headed out into the suburbs, to a new bar called Mello on the top end of Allerton Road.

It's a simply-furnished, small place with white walls and blond wood tables that seats about 30.

Elaborate little flower arrangements sit on the tables and there is a nice line in stylish Christmas decorations like a blue lit up wicker snowman.

On a recent weeknight evening it was nicely busy.

Strangest visitors by a long

way were a trio of serious-looking men in their early 30s. They sat around discussing something very intently. I heard a mobile go off, they all left straight away.

Other tables had a more run-of-the-mill mix of late-20s couples, older blokes out for a quiet pint and smaller groups.

It's a nice break from some places where the average age seems to be about 14.

One internet blogger obviously disagreed, calling the crowd at the opening night "middle aged women who looked like they'd just parked up their Chelsea tractors for an after-shopping G&T," which I thought was a bit harsh.

At the bar, my request to see the cocktail menu was met with a look of scorn from the maestro, who already knows how to make anything you'd want.

I always think the best thing is to get a good barman to surprise you – if he's worth his salt he'll ask you what you like and put something together on the spot.

**If a restaurant did the same thing with their star chef, diners would be queuing round the block.**

I saw him reach for some

bottles under the table, then did a double take when what I'd thought was a lemon was actually an egg. He gave me a reassuring look and carried on.

The result? A golden yellow potion of Amaretto, bitters, a couple of other spirits and a load of other things. Would he tell me? He wouldn't even give me the drink's name, which made ordering it again as simple as grunting "That".

My friend got a coffee the first time and then a non alcoholic special, which involved guava juice and tasted like a much-improved Five Alive. Altogether it came to £12 – not at all bad for cocktails.

The bar felt grown up and laid back, exactly what you need at a time of year when you're encouraged to be the opposite of both those things.

So whether you drive a Chelsea tractor or get the bus, this bar provided a valuable opportunity to de-stress and find the drink you've been looking for all these years. Just don't ask what went in it.

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