

The secret life

The best bars are the ones that are hardest to find – and Melbourne's CBD specialises in them. Here's 15 you didn't know about.

DOUBLE HAPPINESS

21 Liverpool Street. Tel: 9650 4488



Relying on a dash of feng shui and a whole lot of Chinese superstitions, Double Happiness combines Chinese pop-culture, retro-communist icons and traditional herbal remedies (responsibly offering hangover cures). Sample the beverage equivalent of yum cha with steamer baskets of shots — possibly plum wine, apple liqueur and squishy coconut. The propaganda cocktails may also influence your palate; try the "Great Leap Forward" or "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". This is a bar you can make your own and many regulars do with the bottle-keep service.

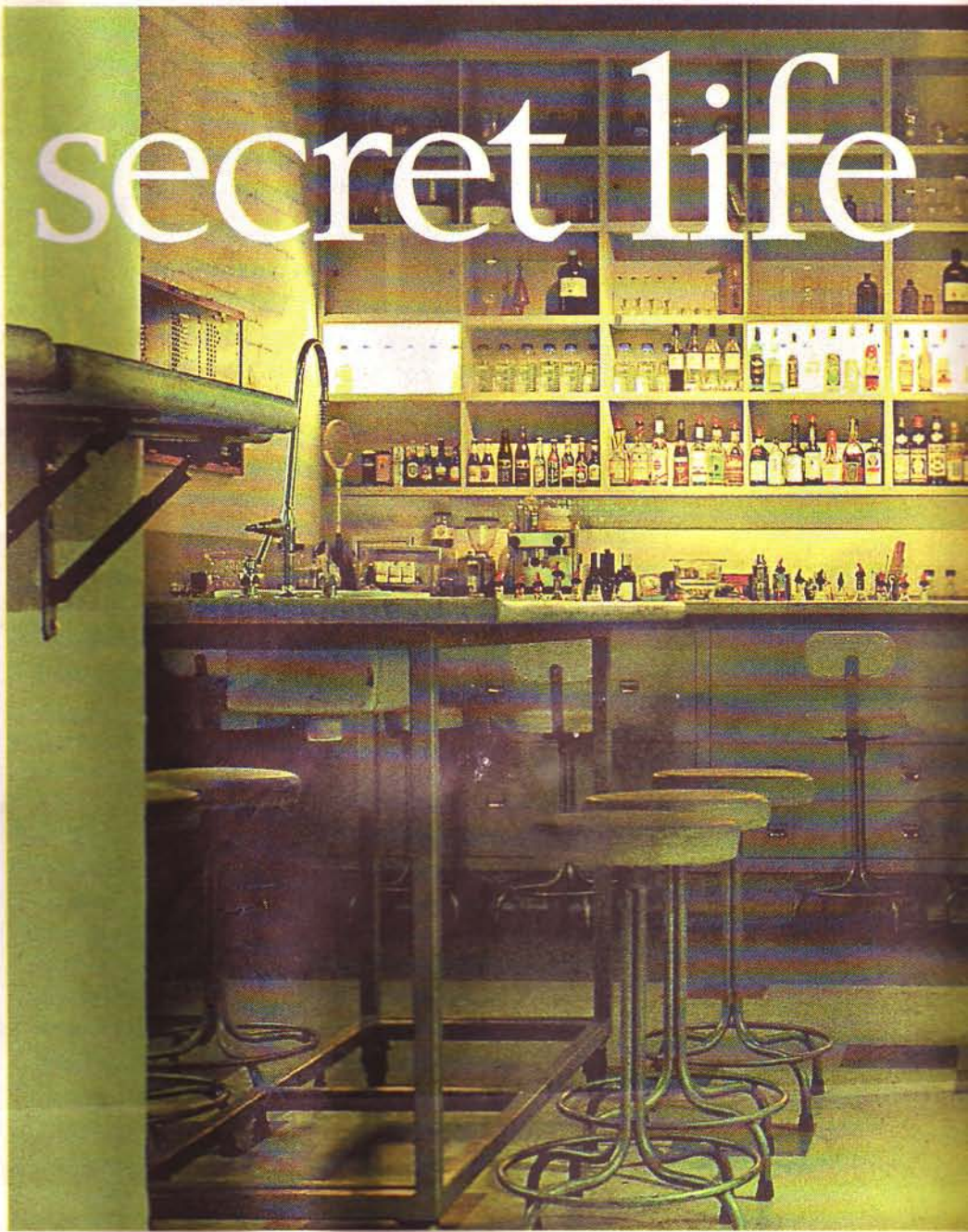
Michelle Matthews

DING DONG LOUNGE

18 Market Lane. Tel: 9662 1020



Few bars sport a legitimate New York pedigree but the Ding Dong Lounge is the real deal, sister venue to the original rock lair on Columbus Avenue. Rediscovering rock in this pop, trance, dance era is an unexpected comfort and the Ding Dong Lounge certainly exudes a relaxed "it's all about the



simpatico you'll be rewarded inside with panoramic views of city icons such as the MCG. If the interior decorators were on acid then Honkytonks would make sense. It's got suggestions of everything from the tropics, to autumn, the Scottish highland and Vegas — but is ever a work in progress. The cocktail list refers to snacks as "solids", so it's no surprise to find six kinds of absinthe, while established and resident DJs provide the soundtrack.

Michelle Matthews

LOOP

23 Meyers Place. Tel: 9654 0500



CHERRY

103 Flinders Lane. Tel: 9639 8122



Tucked away down one of the CBD's alleyways, Cherry is trendy without being exclusive and spins decent tunes — loud enough to find a table for anyone, part-owner Bill Ryan rotates the resident DJ regularly to avoid any sonic staleness. The red graffiti-style counter is a cool touch and there's plenty of space to dance, or just take the best drinker's round-the-world tour with a bar that offers the likes of Mexico Negroni.

the stairs and descend steeply to discover a spacious basement transformation. The interior fit-out has obvious oriental influences, with clever use of mirrors, discreet downlighting and candles at every table. There is a calming Zen-like quality to this stylish sanctuary. Ambient tunes add to the transcendental mood.

Staff are friendly and efficient and will happily guide you through an impressive array of exotic cocktails. Light snacks with an Asian flavour are available until late.

Steven J. Hass

WILBUR'S

100 Market Lane. Tel: 9654 9744