

## Dive Bar's Changes Before Inevitable Closure

By Jenna Haines

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Passerby in the East Village can easily recognize Mars Bar by its graffiti-coated walls, a painted shrine signifying one of the last and fleeting dive bars in the area. Though the date is undecided, the Community District 3 board ordered Mars Bar's two-year closing for building renovations this spring on Dec. 8, 2010.

Though the bartender declined to comment on the closing date, Wayne Kral, a weekly attendee for 21 years, said, based on the gradual digression of supplies, it would be sooner than later. “You could have looked over there and seen 2 more rows of boxes of beers behind the bar,” said Kral. “There were 4 more next to the jukebox.”

Popularly known for its punk rocker and gothic scene, the crowd—lively but not overflowing—seemed to be a fairly average assortment of bar-going types. Troy Romanski, a semi-frequent, young visitor of the bar, commented on the changes. Besides an apparent missing Chucky-like doll that had previously hung from the wall, he said the atmosphere had undergone some adjustments.

“Last time I was here, the bartender asked if we wanted to drink, laid shot glasses across the table and took a shot with us,” said Romanski. The current bartender, in contrast, seemed to make little conversation and hurriedly went about her drink-pouring duties.

This lack of familiarity by the bartender could be attributed to a shift in crowd, according to Kral. Current business was reportedly fairly steady, but the crowd itself had experienced a radical change. “Once it was in the paper that it was going out of business, it has never been the same,” said Kral. “Everyone just wants to be apart of its last kick.”

Appealing to new and younger clientele because of attention from the press, Mars Bar has experienced a fresh wave of college students, looking for an icon of an older New York before its close. “I thought it would be cool, and the people were quite eccentric,” said Jose Olivio, a sophomore at NYU, who visited the bar with a group of university peers. “Cheap, cheap, cheap! It cost nothing and the bartenders were nice, but the building was dirty.”

The reputation of the bar’s dirtiness was widely accepted among those asked about their experience. These assertions were backed by three critical health code violations, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in Apr. 2010. However, the total violations points, 21, were not close to threatening closure, and personal assessment this week found the bar to uphold a clean environment.

Though Mars Bar seems to be cleaning up in literal and metaphoric ways, some elements of the bar’s culture remain the same. Romanski, after finishing his whiskey and grievances of the bar’s changes, was greeted by a woman in black who belted Bruno Mars’ song “Grenade” before tripping over the barstool into her Harley Davidson-wearing, boyfriend’s arms.