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Social Studies

McLeod Residence: High Style and a Stiff Drink

Written by William Crane

It's early on a Wednesday evening at the McLeod Residence when the first customers come in. This young, twenty-something group is taken aback with the flashing neon artwork bordering the lounge and stare wide-eyed at the art pieces adorning the walls. They are so intrigued by the motif of McLeod that before mentioning drinks, they quiz the bartender about the residence's history and its quirky name.

The current art pieces are a mélange of technology based exhibits like interactive bathroom mirrors, courtesy of the Barbarian Group, and others ranging from the Avant Garde to Pop Art throwbacks. In the past, this varied approach has seen names such as Jeff Bender, a celebrated photographer, to light box pieces of McLeod Member, Maggie Orth.

The point is clear that this is not your usual bar or even theme bar. It's an organic mix of high art and party-time decadence. Its young owners paint a unique and forward-looking vision. "Our focus has always been on creating something that Seattle has never seen before," explains Buster McLeod, co-owner. "Something more like an after-school hangout than a bar, something more like a cool uncle's attic than an art gallery."

Located in downtown Seattle, the McLeod Residence opened in early 2007 as a private social club and art gallery, catering to members who could interact and create together. Housed in a converted apartment building, each room is a different part of a former residence. There are multiple galleries, a dance/show floor and a lounge.

Rumors have persisted about McLeod since its inception. A supposed beheading may have occurred where the bathroom is currently housed. The building's owner is also a distant relative to Andy Warhol.

"I have had never been to a bar with more quality people in it before," remarks Josh McLeod, a loyal member. "It's very much a melting pot of the underground artistic community."

Membership has been the key to McLeod's early success. To show their commitment to this principle, Buster and Lele both legally changed their last name to McLeod and, in honor of that, each new member takes McLeod as their honorary surname as well.

"I flipped a coin between Butterfield and McLeod," says Buster on his last name. "The judge laughed when he read my request, and it was a jolly good time in that courthouse."

This buzz eventually became so great that in April 2008 that they opened their doors to extend membership to everyone. Going public has forced the McLeod Residence to reshape its focus, but it maintains a community of creativity.



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