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DAMON WINTER Los Angeles Times

THINK ZINC: Enjoy a cozy fire or a live NBA game on the tube in the bar at Manhattan Beach's new hotel, Shade.

THE MIXER

The early birds get the barstools here

Zinc Lounge closes at 11, which is fine for its hotel setting.

By STEVE BALTIN
Special to The Times

IT'S a bustling, 21st century lounge in a modern boutique hotel, but the Zinc Lounge is not for night owls.

Instead, the bar at Manhattan Beach's new hotel, Shade, shuts down at 11 p.m. — just about the time most trendy watering holes are hitting their stride. "If I stayed open past 11," says Michael Zislis, the hotel and lounge's founder, "I would affect my guests, and my guests are my No. 1 priority."

His second-biggest worry, then, must be keeping up with the hordes of largely upscale drinkers who have descended on the venue.

"We're over-busy," says Zislis, who has had to hire five new employees to staff the bar. "The line gets longer every weekend."

By 9:30 on a Friday night, the crowd is wall-to-wall in the lounge/hotel lobby, with a few patrons perched at one of the outside tables on the patio. Whether they are making the Zinc Lounge their only stop of the evening or it is merely a warm-up to entertainment elsewhere, the place has struck a chord with the locals.

Heavy on steel and Formica, with futuristic-looking columns showcasing flames (think lava lamp meets fire pit) flanking the bar, and a plasma TV embedded into the wall behind the bar and tuned to whatever NBA game is on that night, the Zinc Lounge screams sleek and modern.

Regardless though of the décor, ambiance and the selection of gourmet appetizers, which include sushi cones, fondue, oysters and mini-grilled cheese sandwiches, a bar remains a bar remains a bar.

"This is a great social hangout," says Elizabeth Cadanova, who, having snagged a coveted barstool, has the perfect view to watch the night's action unfold. "It's a really enjoyable addition to the South Bay."

She also recommends the wine selection and martinis. Among the specialties of the house are the Key West Lime martini and the Martini Lunch, which is served with bacon and feta-stuffed olives.

Zislis, who has lived in the South Bay for 12 years, has run two restaurants in Manhattan Beach, and has 51 investors, all from the South Bay. He's happy with his role in the local nightlife.

"Our philosophy has always been come here, have a little appetizer, then head to downtown Manhattan Beach," he says. "It's all about the community."

Steve Baltin may be reached at weekend@latimes.com.

The Zinc Lounge

Where: Shade Hotel, 1221 N. Valley Drive, Manhattan Beach

When: 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 5 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Price: Tapas, \$10-15; beer, \$5-\$6; mixed cocktails, \$8-\$12.

Info: (310) 546-4995