

Shanghai's Cool Docks

Despite the fact that most of the world is tightening its financial belt, young expat Shanghai, feeling insulated from the crisis “back home”, continues the hunt for new hangouts where the cocktails are sweet and pricy and the music hot and loud. Eager to join the fray, I headed to where I hoped the trendy throngs would be gathered – The Cool Docks.

Ladies, if you have a little black dress and killer heels that you are waiting for the perfect occasion to unveil: a visit to The Cool Docks isn't it. No one will see you in your resplendent glory. On a Thursday night, the prequel to the Friday-Saturday night double bill, the place was empty. Gents, if you are planning on taking your date there, you better have oodles of charisma and witty conversation lined up because it will just be you, her and the lurking serving staff in whatever establishment you choose.

Which doesn't make sense because The Cool Docks, just a few months old, are gorgeous. Sparkly, cool, spacious, classy, glamorous, elegant - just a few of the words my bored companion came up with as I prodded for details of her first impression. As you walk around the red brick courtyard, taking in the brightly lit fountains, the opera music blaring out of invisible speakers and the glittering shop fronts with fanciful names like *Pure (Wine Bar)*, *Spring Sunrise (Sports Bar)*, *Banni (desserts)*, *Mythos (Mediterranean restaurant)* and *Caffein (café)*, you are struck by how very *un-Chinese* it all seems.

We started off in *Spring Sunrise* because it was the only place we could see with people in it. A couple were sipping their beers and staring idly at the TV screen when we walked in. They left about 5 minutes later. One green tea later, we made to leave too. As we put on our coats, the smiling waitress came and thrust a few fliers into our hands. Open bar for ladies on Christmas day. I cannot think of anything more depressing than spending Christmas in a free-drink-fuelled stupor, at a bar with multicolor brick wallpaper and no other patrons for miles around. Still, the night was young and you never know, so I slipped the flier into my bag.

We then went to *Pure*, which instantaneously became my favorite wine bar that I'll never be able to afford to drink in. The prices are as fantastic as is the décor. Plush leather sofas, polished antique furniture, an authentic-looking gramophone and gleaming crystal cases packed with 500RMB Cigars. *Pure's* host, Jackson, was keen to assure me that, in six months, The Cool Docks would be the thriving entertainment hub that their location deserved.

The Cool Docks can be found at 505 Zhongshan Nan Lu, a stone throw from Shanghai's world-renowned Bund with its romantic views of the moonlit Huangpu River and sleepily drifting boats. Except you can't see the river from here and I wouldn't mind that so much if it didn't feel so much like an extravagantly lavish ghost town. Maybe worth a revisit in Summer 2009?