





# gay goes mainstream

## PHOENIX'S NEWEST NIGHTLIFE TAKES A WALK ON THE BI SIDE

BY FRANK JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER SCANLON

Sick of spending your Friday and Saturday nights fending off meatheads and dodging gold diggers? Join the legions of local men and women — both gay and straight — who've learned the hottest word in nighttime fun is "mixed."

"To be honest with you, I never want to host another event at a straight club again," says StraightNoChaser's Joe DiPadova. In fact, this longtime local (and straight) performer and event promoter, who recently started holding his famed One dance parties at a high-end gay bar in Central Phoenix, says, "At Homme we're attracting the most-open minded, amazing crowds I've ever seen. They really vibe on the art, the music, everything we're offering. Most of all, everyone just wants to dance."

Welcome to the brave new world of Valley nightlife, where more and

more dancing divas (and even a few big ballas) are taking the night off from traditional hotspots to attend mixed events inside Phoenix's collection of gay and lesbian bars. Here, open-minded men and women can relax, grab a drink and get their groove on without worrying about swatting away overaggressive beefcakes or trying to explain to some haughty hottie that their Toyota Corolla is just a rental.

Besides DiPadova, whose DJ-driven world beat and house dance parties have been bringing internationally known musicians to the

Valley for over a year, other genre-bending "mixed" nights include Batucada, DJs Senbad and Pete Salaz's legendary house night, which has temporarily relocated from the popular lesbian bar, The Biz, to Next in Scottsdale while the club undergoes a wall-to-wall remodel. Says DJ Senbad, aka Sean Badger, "I think it comes down to that most Scottsdale clubs follow the same pattern, have the same look, play the same stale music, and people are getting bored. Of course, it's always the most adventurous people, call them artsy or open-minded or whatever, who are the first to get bored and want to go try something else. Gay club, straight club, mixed club, they — like me — just care about good music, and don't care where it's being played."

As for The Biz, (a.k.a. Ain't Nobody's Bizness) Badger fully expects Batucada to return there whenever the remodel and new permitting process is complete. "Absolutely, it's a great venue for us. It's centrally located, with a great sound and the right size. Real music fans don't have any problems coming to see us there."

Another gay bar that's become quite popular with straight men and women is Amsterdam in Central Phoenix, especially on First Fridays, when hipsters from across the Valley descend on downtown. A plush little lounge that was originally opened as a more intimate alternative to the nearby 1990s former super-club, Crow Bar, Amsterdam and its mostly gay patrons have seen a lot of changes over the past eight years. "When we opened, Downtown Phoenix was a ghost town after dark," says co-owner Todd Colin. "We were the only place with lights on for miles around."

As Downtown Phoenix slowly evolved into a haven for cutting-edge artists and loft-living urbanites, Colin is not surprised that more straight people have discovered Amsterdam's mellow vibe, refined décor and well-crafted cocktails. However, he emphasizes, "Amsterdam will always be a gay bar. We just happen to offer an upscale and laid-back atmosphere that appeals a lot of straight people. The right kind of straight people, that is."

## mix it up

### Amsterdam

718 N. Central Avenue, Phoenix  
602.258.6122 [www.amsterdambars.com](http://www.amsterdambars.com)

### Homme

138 W. Camelback Road, Phoenix  
602.234.3023 [www.phoenixhomme.com](http://www.phoenixhomme.com)

### The Biz

3031 E. Indian School Road, Phoenix  
602.224.9977  
[www.aintnobodysbizness-az.com](http://www.aintnobodysbizness-az.com)

Of course, he's implying the innate friction that happens whenever worlds collide. In this case, gays and lesbians can be upset that straight people are crashing their party. Meanwhile, even the most open-minded straights (especially men) might talk the talk about acceptance, but how many gold-chain-wearing Joe Scottsdale's are ready to handle being hit on by a fellow male?

Or as one anonymous local nightclub promoter puts it, "It's not like gays and straights will ever really be all Kumbaya and shit. A lot of gay guys want to go out and do their thing — have fun, get drunk, get laid — without dealing with a lot of homophobic assholes. And a lot of homophobic assholes, who are probably secretly gay anyways, want to do the same thing, without being around a bunch of gay people." What is changing, says said promoter, is that there are more and more open-minded people who are just looking for a good vibe and a nice crowd, wherever they can find it.

"Whether it's truly a growing trend, I'm not so sure," DiPadova says of the blurring of the lines between straight and gay clubgoers. "But think about the alternatives, especially for women, who out there are getting ogled and drooled on by these dudes with no concept of reality. It's pretty disgusting." Of course, he says, at a gay club it's the men who have to be prepared for a little unexpected flirtation. "Straight guys do get hit on at gay clubs," DiPadova says. "But I would hope anyone attending one of my events would be smart enough to take it as a cool compliment and move on."

Back at Amsterdam, Colin says he sees more and more women coming into his bar just to take a night off from the showy Scottsdale scene. "These are the same gorgeous women who might be sitting at Axis/Radius watching as the cars are parked up front, or checking to make sure you have the right kind of watch. But here they are just looking for a good time with friends and a chance to put their guard down a little bit."

Of course, to paraphrase the original super-tanned Joe Scottsdale-type, Chuck Woolery, love connections happen in the strangest of places. In fact, Colin regaled this reporter with the story of the single guy who came into Amsterdam with his gay brother, and started chatting up one of the female regulars. "After a while, she tells him that they are hitting it off so well and she can't believe he's gay. And he says, 'I'm not gay, I'm just here hanging out with my brother.'"

Needless to say, Colin says, "They are now married and living together in New York."

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— DJ Senbad