

Ruling Oakland's bar scene with good vibes, teamwork: Phat Nguyen wins 'Best Bartender'

By Jessica McKenzie, Culture Editor

Students love partying at Phat's Bar for its tasty Moscow mules, Instagrammable setting and crowded dance floor — but it's largely the passionate staff that complete the atmosphere.

Phat Nguyen, one of the bar's owners and its namesake, won "Best Bartender" after students voted in The Pitt News' annual "Best Of" survey. It's Nguyen's first time winning since the bar opened in January 2021, but he credits the bar's success to the skills he learned from his brother, Phung Nguyen, nephew Andy Do and Roman Magolon, who is the general manager of Phat's Bar.

"We've always wanted to open a bar," Nguyen said. "I've only been bartending since we've opened this place. I learned what I know from Andy, and working around here all the time."

Do and Nguyen's brother partner with him in owning and operating the bar. Do, who has worked as a bartender in various locations for about five years, moved to Pittsburgh when he discovered the opportunity to open Phat's Bar.

Nicknamed "Mr. Phat" by students and bar patrons, Nguyen also owns Ineffable Cà Phê in Lawrenceville. As an Indiana University of Pennsylvania alum, Nguyen said he's always felt familiar with Pitt's student body.

"I feel like we have a great relationship with the students, they seem to have fun," Nguyen said. "Our atmosphere really is geared towards students to see what they want and like."

Magolon, a senior business information systems major, said as a Pitt student, he tries to use his position as general manager to gauge what students enjoy.



Image courtesy of Phat Nguyen

Phat Nguyen (left), bartender and owner of Phat's in South Oakland.



Phat Nguyen (left), bartender and owner of Phat's in South Oakland. (Image courtesy of Phat Nguyen)

"We try to cater to the students, make them feel like they can come here, have a good time and party. As a student myself, I love coming here with my friends," Magolon said. "We also have events with all the frats and stuff. So the relationship with the students is pretty good."

With a strong social media presence, regular DJ nights, greenery covering the walls and a large neon pink sign in the back of the bar that reads "Be a badass with a Phat ass," the bar has become exponentially more popular since opening.

Do said he took a lot of decor inspiration from the nightlife in Atlanta, which is where he resided before moving to Pittsburgh. He added that the team added these details in an effort to help the Phat's brand stand out, but also to make students feel welcome.

"We're just setting a vibe to where people feel they can be comfortable here and just have a good time and be safe too," Do said.

"Instead of just being like, 'drink as much as you can,' that's not what we're here for. We want everyone just to have a good time. At the end of the day, that's how we view this bar."

One of Phat's Bar's signature drinks is Phat's Bomb, a \$6 shot that contains watermelon schnapps, blue curacao and Red Bull. Do said the shot is a specialty at the bar.

"We don't take ourselves too seriously. It's one of the random drinks that we made up," Do said. "I asked Phat what's his favorite color, since the bar's named after Phat. He said purple, and I was like, 'Alright, great. I'm gonna make a drink that's purple.'"

While most of the bar's drinks are named after Nguyen, bartenders can create their own cocktail and name it after themselves.

Magolon's \$8 specialty drink is called "Roman Holiday" and contains vodka, lime juice, lemon juice, blue curacao and lime soda.

Nguyen said he thinks Phat's Bar stands out in Oakland because of its personable and positive bartenders.

"Drinks, to be honest, sometimes can't be perfect, but you pay for the experience," Nguyen said. "You have someone to talk to, it's just fun and by that time it's just about having fun with someone. It's not really the drink that stands out."