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Where to drink this week: The Tippler

This massive Meatpacking cocktail bar is imperfect—but don't hold that against it. *By Jordana Rothman*

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The Tippler

Photograph: Paul Wagtuicz

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The art of drinking well has just begun to lose its status as a niche pursuit. Serious saloons open to instant acclaim, restaurants herald pedigreed cocktail lists, and bartenders are stealing licentious groupies from chefs in staggering numbers. And yet if you were to tally up the cocktails ordered in New York City on the average weekend, Red Bull highballs would still have a Goliath-like market share. Indeed, to reach its tipping point, cocktail culture really needs a place like [The Tippler](#). The Meatpacking venture isn't always a great bar—but it is big and inclusive: Want a vodka drink without the judgmental sneer you'll get at stuffier joints? There are four of them on the menu here. Prefer 1990s hip-hop to 1890s ragtime? At the Tippler, Dignable Planets and A Tribe Called Quest bellow from the speakers. Sure, the offerings can be shaky, and the servers visibly unversed in cocktail parlance. But a peek around the space reveals patrons you'd never see at Death and Company dipping a toe into *amari*, cautiously sipping gin or otherwise testing new waters. Think of the place as a large-scale recruitment booth for curious drinkers, and suddenly the Tippler's flaws seem forgivable—even, in the right light, charming.

DRINK THIS: The long menu, from Paul Tanguay and Tad Carducci, favors complicated, multi-ingredient cocktails—stratiform experiments that baffle as frequently as they work. Beneath a header reading "Tight, rich & boozy" is the Pendennicillin—a cross between a gin-and-apricot liqueur Pendennis cocktail, and Milk & Honey's Scotch-based Penicillin. A subtitle honors the latter drink's creator—"Cheers to Mr. Ross"—but an apology would be more appropriate: The riff is a cloying muddle, its smoky notes smothered by the fruit liqueur and honey. The frozen "lushies" are equally haywire: Campari sinks beneath the slush in a poorly integrated "Snow Groni"; the "Wise Cold Sage" tastes only of herbs and sugared ice—an awful waste of rich *rhum agricole*. Still, for all the misses this spasmodic mixology yields, there are some eccentric hits. The Gin & Chronic is a cheeky winner, a gin-and-tonic variation fortified with lime, allspice liqueur and whole dried Cascade and Willamette hops, which provide a citrusy bitterness. The Improved Improved Wisecracker pits herbal amaro Meletti against chocolatey 23-year-old Ron Zacapa rum, with demerara syrup, lemon and spicy *harissa* slicing through the rich and bitter base.

GOOD FOR: Easing the soul-crushing experience that is partying in the Meatpacking District. One story underground, it is easy to forget the roving packs of club-bound numskulls and DSW Louboutins clattering overhead. The door policy is breezy even on a Friday, and the space is large enough to welcome all comers with dusty Oriental rugs, wrought-iron fixtures and other nods to the building's industrial past. With a few carefully chosen tipples down the hatch, you'll quickly warm to these pleasures, rarefied as they are in this part of town.

THE CLINCHER: While the cocktail list is daunting—with 20 drinks, plus bespoke shots,

sakes, ciders, meads, wines and beers—the food menu is comparatively trim. Pick at olives flecked with fennel seed, a soft pretzel twist speckled with Maldon salt, or white-bean puree served with fried rosemary leaves and a stack of oil-brushed toasts. In deference to its landlord Chelsea Market, the Tippler also stocks goodies from some of the retailers upstairs, such as cured meats from Buon Italia and Sour Puss pickles. 425 W 15th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves (212-206-0000)

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October 17, 2011

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