

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Is plastic classier than glass?

No longer relegated to picnics and parties, plasticware has shown up where nobody ever expected to see it: inside the country's most fashion-forward restaurants and bars. Plastic plates, plastic martini glasses and even plastic champagne flutes are --- bizarrely --- the coming rage.

"It's the trickle down and over from Miami and the whole poolside lounge thing," says restaurant consultant **Clark Wolf**. "Cocktails are supposed to be a mini vacation, and in plastic they stand out."

Um ... sorry, but plastic?????

Yes. It's all over Miami and Las Vegas according to **Wolf**, and making inroads into the cocktail culture of downtown Manhattan. Order a mojito on the outdoor patio at Ono in the Meatpacking District, and it will come in a glass that bounces when dropped.

Piebar --- Atlanta's new locus of high-decibel food mosh --- is the first place to bring the trend to Atlanta. And not everyone is charmed.

"People were a little caught off guard by it," admits Piebar owner Todd Rushing. "One woman swore up and down she'd never come and see us [because of the plastic wineglasses], but it's really sort of a non-issue now."

Other local restaurateurs aren't convinced. "We believe that the high-quality wines and spirits we pour are best enjoyed in glass," says Steve Buero, co-owner of Food 101 --- a Sandy Springs restaurant with a high-volume bar and extensive wine program. "Glass conducts temperature better so your cold drinks are properly chilled, and we think drinks taste better in glass. Serving drinks in a plastic glass just doesn't fit our concept."

At Piebar, on the other hand, Rushing and his partner Bob Amick "felt that plastic fit into the retro theme we were trying to create." The blue, stemless Mepra glasses in which Piebar serves wine are imported from Italy and cost as much as good stemware.

Then again, Rushing doesn't have to worry about breakage if one of his guests decides to pitch a glass off the raised outdoor patio. Today's trendy plasticware is made from polycarbonate, not acrylic, so it is virtually "indestructible," according to Rushing.

Putting Rushing's word to the test, we tried smashing Piebar's champagne flutes on hard surfaces, microwaving them, dropping them from heights and stomping on them full force, and we were unable to break them.

That's right: A foot brought down hard on a polycarbonate glass will only manage to injure the foot. So we have only one word of caution: Beware, Jewish grooms.

GRAPHIC: Photo: CHRIS HUNT / Staff Virtually indestructible, plasticware is becoming the rage, but not all restaurateurs or their patrons embrace it.

Photo: SARA HOPKINS / Special Pam Brown, 31, (from left) Rosi Cortes, 30, Alicia Castillo, Lisa Fernandez, 32, and Michelle Fernandez-Sills, 30, celebrate Pam's 31st birthday at Piebar, which uses polycarbonate plasticware.