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INSIDE, 4A

The News-Star

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Melissa Scarborough is the owner of the Tasting Room of Louisiana located in Downtown Alexandria. She is also Louisiana's lone whiskey sommelier. MELINDA MARTINEZ/THE TOWN TALK

Alexandria bar named one of the best in the US

OUR REVIEW

Melinda Martinez Alexandria Town Talk | USA TODAY NETWORK

The Tasting Room of Louisiana is a whiskey bar in downtown Alexandria owned by Louisiana's only whiskey sommelier. It's an area destination for people in search of a good selection of whiskey, and where they can meet up with friends, grab a bite to eat, and listen to live music by local bands. • Now, it has made national news. USA TODAY has named this Central Louisiana bar as one of USA Today's Bars of the Year for 2025. • "We wouldn't be where we are without the astounding support we've been shown by the community. It's truly been so incredible. And now being chosen as one 2025's Bars of the Year by USA Today is such an honor," said owner and whiskey sommelier Melissa Scarborough. "It really means so much, because the recognition also goes to celebrate our dedicated staff, our incredible patrons, and everyone who has allowed us to share our vision with them, one dream at a time."

What makes the Tasting Room of Louisiana stand out

The Tasting Room of Louisiana looks almost out of place in this small Southern town with its green exterior brick and thick, heavy wooden door with a decorative cherub and horseshoe across the top of the doorframe. A small window in the middle of the door almost suggests you need to know a password to get in. But no worries. You don't.

Inside, the place resembles a mix of an Irish

pub, a New Orleans-style bar, and a church.

It was an Irish pub called Finnegans Wake before it became the Tasting Room of Louisiana in 2021, so it still retains a lot of that energy. But when Scarborough took over, she wanted to make it feel more like a New Orleans-style bar. She incorporated dark colors and jazz elements. She also repurposed old church fixtures, which is why it also has a church vibe.

See **TASTING ROOM**, Page 6A

How we picked the finalists

The best bars are welcoming. They bring friends and strangers together over a drink. The food and entertainment writers of the USA TODAY Network want to invite you to their favorite bars.

We gathered their suggestions, from trendy cocktail lounges to well-worn neighborhood dives, to create the 2025 USA TODAY Bars of the Year, a companion to our Restaurants of the Year list published earlier this year.

We realize other "best bars" lists exist. What makes our list different? Our writers are not dropping into a city to check the buzziest bars. They work for our newspapers across the country. They live in these communities. And the bars they recommend are spots where they have spent more than a few late nights.

The USA TODAY Network has more than 200 sites in 42 states. We asked our experts at these publications to submit the best bars where they live. We received nearly 80 nominations.

Then a team of experienced editors and writers narrowed that list down to 29 bars, ranging from humble dives to high-end lounges.

Now, raise a glass and savor our USA TODAY Bars of the Year 2025.

Discover all 29 USA TODAY Bars of the Year

Selected by our network of food writers across the nation, the **USA TODAY Bars of the Year** represent the best neighborhood taverns, the finest cocktail meccas, the coziest wine bars and the beachiest beach bars. They're places with stories to tell, places that should be on your bucket list when you travel and your favorites list where you live.



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