

Orlando bar owner bringing hipster concept to Red River

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Chris Skyles remembers that the first time he sat down with John Gardner for drinks, Gardner's encyclopedic knowledge of music made Skyles feel like he'd stepped into the movie "High Fidelity."

Gardner, the owner of 25-year-old Independent Bar in Orlando, Fla., has set his sights on Austin and will open a new bar, Barbarella, in the former Spiros location on Red River Street. Skyles, of SkylesBayne, who represented Gardner, said the 5,000-square-foot space should be open within the next few weeks.

Perry Sharboneau represented the landlord.

Gardner describes the Orlando bar's concept, which will translate to the new, Austin location, as a club that started with the new wave craze of the 1980s and has now changed toward hipster music and trends.

"Most clubs play house, techno or '70s music, Bon Jovi, things like that. ... We like those formats, but we play bands like Passion Pit," Gardner said. "I don't think you hear those bands so much in clubs."

Skyles said Gardner and his D.J, Harvey Scott Graham are true music aficionados, much like the music-obsessed main character in "High Fidelity," letting music dominate their conversations. Barbarella — named after the 1968 movie about a scantily clad 41st century astronaut on a mission to thwart an evil scientist threatening universal peace — will help fill in an empty spot and hopefully contribute to the dynamic flow of music along Red River, he added.

Gardner said he'd considered expanding into a second city for years, and when the South By Southwest music festival started, he knew Austin would be a good option. Gardner and Graham started looking at possible spots along Austin's famed Sixth Street, he said, and finally found a fit in the Red River site.

"When I heard about [SXSW], the bands that played in that event were bands that we played in a dance-friendly environment. I knew Austin might be a good place to expand into," Gardner said.

James Moody, an owner of Mohawk on Red River and of Transmission Entertainment, said a new bar in the area could face some challenges, including learning Austin's music tastes as an out-of-towner and occupying space once inhabited by Spiro's, which was the site of a drive-by shooting.

Often businesses that come from out of town create big-market concepts that tank in Austin, like the Hard Rock Cafe, he said. But Moody said he welcomes clubs that come in with new and creative ideas that augment the area's music scene.

kharrington@bizjournals.com | (512) 494-2523

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