

Human Factors Study - The Brig Bar // Craig Millman and Scott Nazarian

The Brig is an upscale watering hole on Abbott-Kinney, near Venice Blvd. The decoration is trendy and modernist, post-Martini with vestiges of the building's history in previous incarnations evident in the exposed heating system, a main table near the door that wheels out using a crank, the marquee at front with an antique image of a boxer and a faux-vintage mural at the side of the building.

The interior consists of a single rectangular room with a single long bar, rectangular furniture, a raised pool table area, dedicated dj booth and detached bathrooms near the back.

The bar is popular with locals who visit it during the week to socialize. The average age is 25-40. There is a wireless Internet connection and some patrons arrive early to work or browse the Internet. On weekends the bar attracts crowds of attractive, young hipsters that fill it to capacity. There is live music on. And djs spin records during

The bar serves cocktails and bottled beverages. There is no beer on draft. Appetizers like nuts and popcorn are available, but there is no kitchen. One bartender mans bar during slow hours. At busy times two bartenders and bar back are employed.

The place can get very crowded with a line forming outside.

The Users

We will follow the progress of two typical patrons to the Brig in order to address human factors issues at the bar.

Nina Persson, 27, lives in Silverlake

Nina is a 27 year-old Dutch cool-hunter. She works for Urban Outfitters as a buyer. It is her responsibility to stay atop trends in fashion and culture, to discover products that appeal to the vanguard of young people UO targets as customers.

Nina was born in the suburbs of Amsterdam, Holland but has spent lots of time in America. Her father was himself a US citizen. She speaks English well, but with a strong accent. She still has trouble understanding some people, especially in crowded noisy rooms.

She's quite attractive in a quiet way and a bit shy. Because of this some men perceive her as aloof. They tend to be a bit afraid to talk to her and discouraged when she has trouble understanding them. Others have become really taken with and fascinated by her in a puppy dog way. She doesn't currently have a boyfriend.

Nina likes to lose herself in the music or just watching the crowd. She enjoys atmosphere more than anything.

Nina is quite stylish. She makes her own clothing and is always looking around for ideas. That's one of the reasons she visits trendy bars. She smokes but doesn't drink a lot. She tends to stick with Soda water and Vanilla Stoli.

Sean Riley, 35, Venice

Sean is a 35-year-old local patron of the bar who lives just around the corner. He owns a nearby bookstore/small press that does fairly well. He also does some freelance writing that further supplements his income. Sean is very popular with a crowd of writers and artists that frequent the bar. Since the place is so crowded they usually cluster around some chairs or a couch, which makes it easier to find a place to sit.

Sean loves to socialize and make connections with other artists. He's a bit of a bachelor and likes meeting women at the bar. He's stylish, creative, intelligent, witty, balding and attractive.

Needs

Nina

Keep up with and discover trends in art and fashion

Lose her self in the music/atmosphere

Relax

Enjoy

Use bathroom

Comfort

Excitement

Sean

Socialize – strengthen community

Make new connections

Meet women

Relax

Enjoy

Use bathroom

Comfort

Excitement

Use the Internet – when he is by himself

Tasks

Nina

Locate the bar

Find parking

Enter the bar

Find a place to sit

Order a drink

Listen to the music

Talk with people

Observe fashion

Use the bathroom

Find the bathroom

Determine if it's the women's bathroom

Determine if it's occupied

Enter the bathroom

Cover the seat

Use the toilet

Flush the toilet

Wash her hands

Check her appearance

Leave the bathroom

She turns her cell phone off

Sean

Locate the bar

Enter the bar

Find his friends

Find a place to sit

Order a drink

Listen to the music

Talk with people

Meet new friends

Use the bathroom

Find the bathroom

Determine if it's the men's bathroom

Determine if it's occupied

Enter the bathroom
Cover the seat
Use the toilet
Flush the toilet
Wash her hands
Check her appearance
Leave the bathroom
Use his cell phone

The scenario - Friday, November 14th. Both Sean and Nina visit the bar, arriving separately and unaware of one another.

Sean is making one of his weekly visits to the bar. He looks to socialize, meet new people and enjoy the scene.

Sean doesn't have an issue with parking or finding the bar. He lives a few blocks away so he can come and go as he pleases.

Sean has many friends at The Brig that return on a consistent basis and they tend to assist one another in locating a place to sit and converse. On this Friday Sean headed over about 9pm. The music hadn't really gotten going and there was no line at the door. For Sean the line isn't an issue. He knows the bouncers well and enters the bar at will.

The bar itself was not overly crowded. Sean headed towards the East side of the bar, near the bathrooms, waving and nodding at a few acquaintances. He located a small contingent of friends there: Kyle, a 28 year-old writer/marketing guy, Janey, a 30 year-old designer/artist and Mike a 34 year-old guitarist in a local band.

The bartenders know Sean by name. When they see him near the bar they generally ask him if he wants his usual, a Sapphire Gin Martini. Generally Sean agrees but on occasion he'll ask for a beer. Tonight he went with the Martini.

In general there are few real human factors issues for Sean. He has no trouble getting into the bar, locating a place to stand or sit, finding people to talk with and ordering a drink. If someone spills a drink on his clothing, he can walk across the street and change into something new. He can run a tab without presenting id or a credit card. The bartenders keep track of what he orders.

Since he has so many friends at the bar, he stands out as one of the "cool locals". This focuses attention on him and makes it easier for him to meet people. When a woman digs his vibe, they don't have far to go to "head back to his place".

On the downside, it's also not that difficult to find him. Sean's not a heartthrob, but he has picked up a few women at the bar. Once or twice things didn't work out all that well and it got a bit uncomfortable for him. Since he has so many friends at The Brig it was easier for him to play it cool and avoid any real confrontations.

When it's really crowded and the music is loud, Sean does have trouble engaging in conversation. At those times he relies on mugging and hand gestures to get his points across. During lulls in the music he engages in more direct conversation.

This Friday, Sean chatted with Janey, Mike and Kyle. They enjoyed the music. He had two martinis and got a little more buzzed than usual. This made him a bit anxious when the line at the bathroom stall backed up a bit.

Sean has used the facilities at The Brig on several occasions, so he's already familiar with the use of the faucets and toilet. He thinks they're attractive and likes the design though he did notice at first that they were a bit difficult to use.

On weekdays when it's quiet Sean plays pool with his friends. On weekends he doesn't bother. The pool table is close to a bank of seats and it's difficult to wield a cue properly with people sitting

on them. Oddly, the seats are arranged so that people sitting on them facing the center of the bar are dangling over the edge of a depression in the dancing/music area. Once Sean saw a pretty drunk blonde topple over the edge and land in the pit. She wasn't injured but it made a funny scene.

The seats in the bar aren't that comfortable. Sean eschews the sofa like seats in the center of the room for the raised chairs at the bar and the bank of seating around the pool table. People congregate here, it's cozy and easy to chat.

On occasion when he has a large group of friends and they get the table, they'll sit at the large table at the front of the bar. It's cold and concrete, not that appealing. During the summer they wheel it out front and it's a nice place to sit and enjoy a drink in the sun.

Enter Nina

A few weeks ago Nina visited the Brig with her sister and a friend. She had heard of it before and really liked the atmosphere. She decided to return by herself and get lost in the experience.

Nina had no trouble finding the bar this time. The first time she met her sister there she was confused because there is no name on the marquee outside. She drove past it and then realized her mistake and returned.

Nina arrived at 10:15. The bar was already quite packed and most of the street parking was taken. She drove around the corner and down a few blocks before finding something. The streets are fairly dark, but she's quite comfortable walking alone.

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At about 10:30 Sean noticed an attractive blonde standing near the bar looking for a place to sit down and perhaps trying to order a drink. He turned to her and asked her if she would like to sit down in his chair, but she appeared disinterested or not to hear him. The music was pretty loud and he tried again. This time she smiled a bit shyly and nodded, taking a seat at the bar and turning towards the center of the room.

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At the door she had to wait briefly while a bouncer checked her id. The entranceway was crowded and the seating was occupied. She made her way through a tight crowd of people over to where she could see the hybrid DJ/rock ensemble playing. The music was a little too loud and she had just noticed that there was a man trying to talk to her - somewhat unsuccessfully since she didn't do that well in English speaking conversation, let alone in a loud bar with nowhere to sit. She was agitated. It had taken her almost half an hour to find parking in the neighborhood. But the man had an earnest look about him and apparently wanted to buy her a drink. She needed to relax and enjoy the scene here. As she turned to look at her suitor, who presented her with a wry smile, she was noticing a sweet pair of boots worn by an occupant two bar-chairs down. She made a mental note to ask her where she had gotten them.

"Can I buy you a drink?", Sean asked. The girl responded, "I'm doing great" in a Nordic or Dutch accent.

"No, can I buy you a drink?" he repeated. "Yes, Vanilla Stoli and tonic" she replied.

Sean easily got the attention of Morgan, the bartender, and ordered the woman's drink. "I'm Sean" "I'm Nina... You know this bar?"

"Sure I do, I come here all the time - hey, do you want to sit over there where it's a little quieter?"

Agreeing to do so, Nina follows Sean to a pair of seats under a window, atop a couple of dias-like steps. Sean tells her that he and his buddies like to hang out in this area on busy nights like this one, sitting on chairs and steps alike. It felt very casual. From their new perch, Nina began noticing the space, as she was wont to do, Sean rambling on in the background. He seemed nice.

Immediately she saw the veritable bottleneck bar space they had just come from - no wonder she had been agitated! There were two wooden posts placed at twelve-foot intervals just three feet out

from the bar. This created a terrible traffic flow condition as people had to push those waiting for a drink out of the way to get by on their way to the bathrooms. And, away from the underlet skirt around the barstools, she was actually able to see other people's features. This might be intentional, she thought. Just then, Sean suggested they have a game of Pool.

On their way to the raised platform where the Pool table was, Nina was dismayed to find that they had to run a gamut of extruding limbs (nice bracelet, though!) radiating at all angles from the suspended bench than ran the circumference of the raised platform. When they got to the top, Nina saw that the bench was meant to service Pool players and observers, and not necessarily folks interacting with the rest of the bar environment. Even so, Nina noticed that even partial occupancy of this bench, used in the correct manner, would severely inhibit the movements of even the most lithe Pool shark. Now she was not in the mood to play. Lucky for her, her host spotted some friends and suggested that they socialize instead. Taking a last look out over the main space from their elevated perspective, Nina was intrigued to see a man cranking a large metal wheel near the entrance, causing a central table to move along a track and part-way out of a slot in the wall. Several smokers retired outside to make use of the sand ashtray situated at the end of the table.

"That's quite thoughtful", she remarked to Sean as his friends made a space for them at the central table, immediately regretting her impulse to light up. Perhaps another Vanilla Stoli –
"Sean, would you mind? Here's ten. My treat. I have to pee."
"Absolutely."

Nina became temporarily disoriented when, after stopping to ask the girl with the nice boots where she had acquired them, it was not immediately apparent where, exactly, the washroom was. In front of her was the stylish, chitinous silver mosaic of the bar's back wall - or was it? As she drew closer, she noticed that actually there were two modes of access, at the left and the right of the decorative wall, to a kind of back hallway which contained two Emergency exits and, as it turned out two unmarked washrooms. While she had the misfortune to choose the side containing the urinal, it apparently made no difference which you used, as long as you locked the door. The sink in the washroom was of a modernist bent with an ambiguous temperature and flow 'stick-shift' control and a basin which was at once much too shallow and poorly angled to the flow of water from the faucet. The basin seemed in fact designed to jettison the water out onto the floor - or all over whomever was using it! She really did need that drink now.

Mildly soaked, she made her way back to the long table but was intercepted by a mischievous looking Sean, who handed her a drink and thanked her for his.

"What happened to you?"

"Oh, I fell in, of course", she mocked back at him. The crowd was beginning to thin out a little. Much better, she thought. This place had a pretty good vibe when it wasn't so crowded. The strains of ABBA remixed with The Jurassic Five floated asymmetrically past them out into the Venice night.