

Mayfair Lounge owner, turning 89, celebrates 40th anniversary of owning dive bar

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By Laura Testino | Posted October 05, 2018 at 06:00 AM



Miss Gertie (a.k.a Gertrude Mayfield) stands beneath a portrait of Mick Jagger hung on the ceiling as she prepares to celebrate her 89th birthday at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street which she has owned since 1978. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

While Uriah Hilton was outside tending to one of the trees in front of the Mayfair Lounge, his grandmother, Miss Gertie, was inside tending to one of the Hot Roll Poker machines. She "invented leopard print" and turns 89 on Oct. 11. On Aug. 1, she celebrated her 40th anniversary of owning the Mayfair Lounge.

The Uptown dive bar at 1505 Amelia St. employs a buzzer out front, back from the days before Gertrude Mayfield bought the place with her husband Ernest, and it was a much more stifled hangout. Now the mirrors behind the bar reflect a smattering of Mardi Gras throws and a gold spray-painted taxidermied crocodile and cigarette-smoking faux goldfish, inside jokes and conversation starters that dangle from bedsprings rigged to the ceiling.

On the far-left mirror, there's a piece of paper taped up, announcing Saturday's (Oct. 6) big celebration: "Save the Date" it reads, in sparkling lavender paint. "Miss Gerties Birthday Party" follows in glittery fuchsia. Then more lavender clarifiers: "Sat., Oct 6th 3 p.m. Potluck Music"



Miss Piggy riding a stuffed and painted crocodile hangs on the ceiling at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

Miss Gertie likes to have fun. She often dresses up in costume for her birthday party every October, but this one is extra special, with old regulars flying back to celebrate the anniversary. At the poker machine on a Friday in September, she was wearing a royal blue paisley-printed shirt with orange and yellow accents, a light blue and white striped blazer, dark pants and bright red suede ankle boots. Her pink lipstick and blue eyes popped, framed by a head of white hair and silver and turquoise dangling earrings.

"I wanted to show you this," she said, bringing a photo from the bar over to the table while her grandson Uriah Hilton was talking about the party. "Excuse me just a minute. This was my nice car I got. It's a Ferrari."

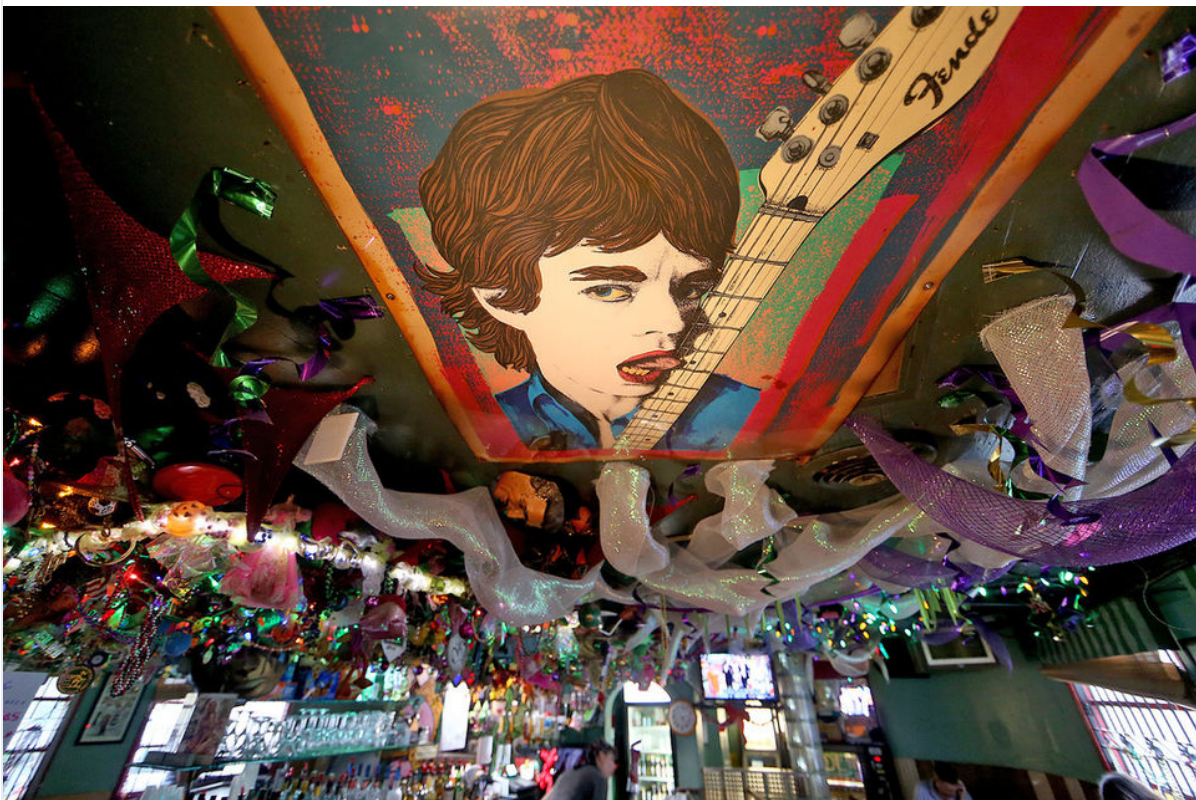
A younger Miss Gertie is wearing knee-high boots this time, the same color red as the car. The car didn't belong to her, but "this guy, he kept coming in. He's one of 'em that brags, you know," she said. "And he goes and parks it in the garage, somewhere, and they wrecked it." That really tickled her.



Shrubs frame the entrance at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

Miss Gertie's husband Ernest Mayfield died from a heart attack five years after the pair bought the bar. "I didn't even, well I didn't stop and think, when my husband died," she said. "I just thought, 'Well I need some money.'" And so she made the Mayfair the Mayfair, tending bar for the majority of the past four decades. Now, she and Uriah, 33, are in business together.

"As a grandmother, she's awesome. I think we have a special relationship," he said. "But following her steps as an owner is pretty intimidating, you know, because she was such an icon. And still is."



A portrait of Mick Jagger hangs on the ceiling at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

Glancing through a photo album of the bar from the 1980s, Miss Gertie points out former regulars ("All these people are gone. This guy right here is the one that gave me the Mick Jagger picture on the ceiling."), some of her favorite costumes (a hula girl, Medusa and a white pantsuit sparkling with gold, purple and green sequins), and that time in 1979 she buzzed into the bar Frances, a Budweiser Clydesdale.

"And I looked like a fly," she said, pointing to her small frame atop the horse in the Polaroid lodged in the bottom left slot of the old photo album. Did she enjoy it? "Well you know I did."



Miss Gertie, as viewed from the Mick Jagger portrait on the ceiling. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

The photo album may well have been housed in a family bookcase; everyone knows everyone at the Mayfair. People celebrate love and weather death there. The analogy to popular television show "Cheers" comes up often, unprompted. As open as many of them are about love for Miss Gertie, the late Wednesday afternoon crowd--many of them also decades in--don't rush to offer particulars. Many are there to take advantage of Wednesday's 50-cent pool games, teasing one another like teenage siblings, calling up friends on FaceTime to be interviewed, having long debates about which things should go on the record. Some happenings and quirks of the lounge are for the eyes and ears and noses of the loyal following of the Mayfair Lounge, is the consensus.

"It's almost like their living room," Hilton said of the bar. "They meet up with their other friends they know here, and they'll cook and bring stuff here for 'em. It's just like a -- it's like their living room."



The mural on the wall at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

About 15 years ago bartender Kayla Stitcher moved to the neighborhood and started coming to the Mayfair. She since started working there, and on Sept. 25 celebrated her 14th anniversary with husband Dave, who she met at the bar.

"I'm sitting where she's sitting," she said, gesturing to the bar stool second from the farthest right. "He's sitting over here [in the middle]," she said, talking about Dave, "and even though we both came to this bar a lot we never crossed paths. So I try to get my lighter to work and it won't work, so next thing I know this Zippo slides down the bar, makes the corner, spins and stops perfectly in front of me."



Budweiser is the only beer on tap at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

They spent the rest of the night talking and questioning Denise, another longtime bartender, about the other. She suggested they may just be perfect for one another, Kayla said, and the pair began their marriage four months later, with a party that of course ended up at the Mayfair.

The bar promotes love, Stitcher said, and she has the mirrors to thank for that in part, which were suggested by Megan Becker. Becker bartended some at the beginning, when Miss Gertie's husband Ernest was still living, and worked at the bar on-and-off for about nine years, she said. She's also the mastermind behind the ceiling décor.



Smoking fish hang on the ceiling at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

"They can look up at the ceilin' while they're drinkin' and just amuse themselves. You know, like any bar. It was pretty bare before," Becker said. "There wasn't even a mirror behind the bar. That was the first thing I said was 'Gertie ya gotta get a mirror behind the bar so people can look at themselves and look at other people down the bar.'"

Becker gleaned the idea for the bed springs from visiting Galley House bar, she said. She also designs Miss Gertie's costumes every year, a skill she honed from sewing for and with friends in Krewe of Petronius. (Many New Orleanians are probably also familiar with her Christmas décor; she designed the large Christmas displays outside Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits founder Al Copeland's home, and continues designing popular holiday displays today.)



Miss Gertie raising a toast to the Mayfair Lounge before the anniversary and birthday party on Oct. 6. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com

Becker made a Yoda costume for Hilton last year, but he's more focused on following in the footsteps of his grandmother's positivity, consistently being a light for the family she created at the Mayfair. "That's one thing I've really learned from her," he said. "She's probably the best I've ever seen at doing that."

"You can never give up. You have to keep on goin. I don't care what it takes," Miss Gertie said, enunciating each word. "Don't give up. It just don't work."



Photos and beads on the wall at the Mayfair Lounge on Amelia Street. Photographed on Wednesday, October 3, 2018. Photo by Michael DeMocker, NOLA.com