



GIVE RETRO PHOTO BOOTHS A SHOT

Candid cameras flash mobs in NYC bars



Magnolia Photo Booth Co. put a digital booth and a crew in a van — and sent it across the country. Here, it's parked outside Brooklyn Winery.

By CALLA SALINGER
and MIRIAM FURST

THE cheapest round of shots in New York doesn't have to come with a hangover — but you will walk away with a souvenir from a night spent with friends. Tucked away in dive bars and family restaurants across the city, you'll find pals piling into photo booths for a moment in the spotlight — one New York couple even used a booth to document an unforgettable event.

"We had a guy propose to his girlfriend in the booth," says Adam Burke, director of operations for the Smith, which houses a vintage black-and-white snapshot in the basement.

"The couple had their first date at the restaurant, so he decided to propose there. A series of photos came out with him proposing with the ring, right there on camera!" adds Burke.

More and more, bars and restaurants are installing photo booths to grab customers, or just to add an old-timey feel to their space. Brian Leventhal, owner of Brooklyn Winery, unveiled its photo booth at its most recent New Year's Eve party. He thought the machine would add to the vintage aesthetic of the bar and attract customers' attention. It seems to have worked: "If you read any of our customer reviews online, people always mention the photo booth," he

Nat Tocci, 34, and Sanya Levi, 27, both from Williamsburg, ham it up at the Living Room.

says. "In many cases, people come back just for the photo booth."

The bar's booth, manufactured by Kentucky-based Magnolia Photo Booth Co., takes a \$2 token. Props, such as small chalkboards, over-size clown glasses and Viking hats, add to the fun.

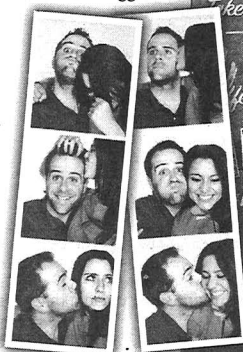
The photo booth is stationary, but Magnolia also makes one on wheels.

At the beginning of June, the Magnolia crew, including 28-year-old Victor Hicks and 31-year-old Willy Owens, installed a digital photo booth in an old Westfalia van and took it on a cross-country road trip. The project, called "Portrait of America," offered free photo-booth pictures to anyone along the way. Eventually, the team will make a coffee-table book out of the collection of snaps. On a recent Saturday, the Westfalia, dubbed "Maggie"

SAY CHEESE HERE

- **GALLERY BAR**, 120 Orchard St.; 212-529-2266; \$5 to \$7
- **BROOKLYN WINERY**, 213 N. Eighth St.; 347-763-1506, \$2
- **BUBBY'S**, 120 Hudson St.; 212-219-0666, \$1
- **MAIN ST.**, DUMBO, Brooklyn; 718-222-0666, \$3
- **LAKESIDE LOUNGE**, 162 Avenue B; 212-529-8463, \$4
- **OTTO'S SHRUNKEN HEAD**, 538 E. 14th St.; 212-228-2240, \$4
- **LIVING ROOM**, 154 Ludlow St.; 212-533-7237, \$3
- **THE SMITH**, 55 Third Ave.; 212-420-9800, \$3

PHOTOS



At Gallery Bar on the LES, Alysha Sydnor, far right, and Quinn Yavorcik pose for posterity.



A wacky good time in the Smith photo booth: (clockwise from the top) Kristen Moore, Alexis Oliver, Sara Larson, Kate Quinn and Emily Glick.

Astrid Stawiarz(2)

by Owens and Hicks (who sleep in the van when on the road), pulled into the Brooklyn Winery courtyard to celebrate the journey. Its drivers aren't the only photo-booth fans.

"We were just going on a wine tour, and stumbled across this awesome photo booth," says Anthony D'Argenzio, 24, upon seeing Maggie. "I'm really into photography, and I have photo-booth pictures all over my fridge at home. This is the perfect place to relax with some vino and take some photos."

When Bubby's pie company got its own vintage photo booth in the '90s, the owners underestimated its popularity. The booth, which shoots out faded black-and-white photos in three minutes, was originally just for show, but now loyal fans flock to the old standby.

"The photo booth is fun to use because you get out of the table, and when you get back, your food is already there," says Lyly Smith, 15, a New Jersey girl who crammed into the booth with her two sisters Bridget, 15, and Ruby, 10.

The real — and racier — fun may be found in the divier bars downtown. Warning: This foray into a photo booth

starts with a different kind of strip and flash.

"Probably the most interesting things that happen in our photo booth aren't printable in the paper," teases Alex Feldesman, a bartender at the East Village's Lakeside Lounge. "We get everything from the innocent to the seriously debauched."

There, the black-and-white booth has played home to many late-night photo shoots, images from which are often left behind.

"If we find one that's really spectacular, we'll keep it and hang it up in the bar," he says.

Just a couple of blocks away, bar hoppers find it hard to resist striking a pose for the camera after slurping down a volcano of alcohol (\$26) at the East Village tiki bar Otto's Shrunk Head.

"There's a certain exhibitionist element to taking your own photo," says Otto's owner Steve Pang.

Three years ago, the Living Room on the Lower East Side installed its own booth. Although originally opting for the old-fashioned mechanical instrument, the bar made the move to digital when the smell of developing chemicals made customers turn up their noses. Now the digital booth spits out six-photo strips without the stench.

"People come into the bar just for the photo booth," says Living Room owner Jennifer Gilson. "You'll always find friends piled in there!"