

The  
Washington  
Post



## Prime K Street Real Estate

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Washington Post Weekend Section  
Friday, November 11, 2005

The cost of living is going up in Washington, and so is the cost of going out. You're lucky if you can find a martini for less than \$10 at some of the city's better drinking establishments. For what some bars charge for a single bottle of beer, you can buy a whole six-pack at your local liquor store. And many clubs and lounges now reserve most—if not all—of their couches, tables and chairs for customers prepared to spend a few hundred dollars on a night out.

Let's say you and your friends want to go to a club to celebrate a birthday, promotion or upcoming wedding, but you'd rather not spend the night huddled in a corner of the dance floor or being jostled at

the bar. The solution is bottle service, a fancy name for table reservations.

You agree to buy full bottles of liquor from the bar—anywhere from \$200 to \$300 for top-shelf brands such as Grey Goose, Stolichnaya or Tanqueray—which arrive at your table with carafes of juices and mixers, bowls of sliced limes and stacks of tumblers. For the rest of the night, you make your own drinks. The advantage is that you don't have to fight the scrum at the bar or even hail a server when your glass is empty. You just pour yourself another, sit back and watch the action. It's like a VIP room that anyone can buy their way into—and a way to demonstrate your status.

Although upscale spots such as Ozio, Eyebar, Love and Dragonfly have always offered reservations, none made table service the primary focus—until kstreet (1301 K St. NW; 202-962-3933) opened in late August in the first floor of an office building on Franklin Park. The lounge has no dance floor. No stools sit in front of the 60-foot-long bar. Instead, one wall is lined with long, black and silver banquettes; mod, curved tables inlaid with flat-screen television monitors; and small, high-gloss laminate blocks that serve double duty as tables or chairs. Large plasma TVs hang overhead. Red velvet ropes keep interlopers out. Another row of tables and funky-shaped ottomans runs down the middle of the room.

In the rear is a cave-like space with more private seating, more plasma screens and more velvet ropes. There are 23 table areas altogether, each holding eight to 10 people and renting for a minimum of \$500 a night. Looking at the crowd on weekends, it seems like many have booked side-by-side tables, doubling their space and the price tag.

“We’re going for the luxury market,” owner David Chung says. “It’s all about the ‘wow’ factor.”

This is the second nightspot for Chung and his partners. Lawyers by day, they run the nearby Daedalus, which has developed a large following among Asian American clubgoers. When they decided to open another nightspot—Chung describes it as “a pet project”—they decided they didn’t want to be “the usual dance club.”

“People tell us that [kstreet] looks like a place that belongs in Tokyo,” he boasts, and I can see why. It’s minimalist, almost to a fault: white walls, white ceiling, white columns supporting a futuristic white floating ceiling that rises and curves over the bar. Comparisons to other white-on-white clubs such as Dragonfly, Helix or Halo are inevitable. The private service is what sets kstreet apart.

“In Korea, it’s all table service,” Chung explains. “There are no bars. Even in Vietnam—communist Vietnam!—it’s all bottle service.”

Chung proudly points out all the technology involved: Those ta-

bles with built-in televisions are modeled after some seen by a partner visiting Las Vegas and can be individually customized to show favorite movies or snapshots. Each server carries a wireless device for placing orders, so when you run out of drinks, more can be dispatched from behind the bar. Patrons can reserve individual tables online as if choosing seats on an airplane.

Thursday through Saturday, when demand is highest, those plasma screens on the walls are covered with animated graphics announcing, “This table is RESERVED” for Abdul, for Kia, for Sarra. If it’s a birthday, they can arrange to have baby pictures shown. “Everyone likes to be a star for the night,” Chung says.

Those who’ve reserved tables get all kinds of additional amenities—free valet parking, a coat check, free admission for 10 to 15 of their friends—that will make them feel like celebrities. But those who just stop by to check the place out might not feel like one.

For the first few weeks in September, when there was a lot of buzz about the new nightspot, there was even more chatter about the door policies. An electronic reservation system on <http://kstreetdc.com/> and partner sites such as <http://absoluteaddiction.com/> allow anyone to RSVP and skip the cover charge. One night, when interest was at its highest, promoters say that more than 1,200 people put their names on the guest list. The club’s capacity is 400. This led to long lines and vociferous complaints.

Chung says the club’s first priority is to take care of the customers who’ve made table reservations and paid \$100 deposits. They (and their 10 to 15 guests) get first shot at entrance. If every table is full and brings its full complement of friends, that’s 345 people in the club. Things have tailed off a bit since the early days—I made reservations online last week, then waited in line for less than 10 minutes on Saturday, alongside a young crowd dressed in fashionable jeans and blazers over T-shirts, midriff-bearing tops and ultra-tight skirts.

Once inside, the layout doesn’t lend itself to much mingling. Crowds pile up around the bar, and the room’s traffic flow is awkward, thanks to that wide row of tables in the middle of the room and the parallel lines of velvet rope running alongside. A friend and I grabbed drinks—served in polycarbonate cups instead of glass—and surreptitiously perched on one of those benches in the middle. The owners hadn’t arrived yet, so we watched all the people pushing by, and the janitors who seemed to be endlessly mopping spilled drinks. If I had agreed to spend \$500 in these seats, I’d ask to move. The folks in the back room and against the wall, though, were dancing and partying and having a great time with their friends.