

A True Original

The Original Pinkie Masters
BEST DIVE BAR

Written by CAROLINE EUBANKS

THE WHITE SIGN WITH THE ICONIC PABST BLUE RIBBON LOGO is like a beacon above the building, drawing in thirsty locals and travelers like a tractor beam. On my last visit to the now 70-year-old watering hole, it was the crisp air conditioning and a \$3 beer to quench my thirst that pulled me in. My friends and I gathered in a booth beneath the yellowed disco ball, lit from the dim glow of colored Christmas lights and chatted about our weekend plans.

And I'm not alone. It's 4 p.m. on a Friday and the bar, set in the middle of the darkened room, is completely full of out-of-towners, Savannah College of Art and Design students and the regular group of older men that hold court there, discussing politics and events of the day.

While the bar opened in 1951 as The Rainbow Grill, by 1953 it was known as Pinkie Masters — the nickname given to its larger-than-life owner Luis Chris Masterpolis, the son of Greek immigrants. Tucked between Lafayette and Madison Squares, it quickly gained a loyal following from all ranges of Savannahians.

Despite the passage of time, it feels like little has changed in terms of decor, with breweriana and photos of regulars crowding the walls, along with artwork from Georgia artist R.Land and old Jimmy Carter campaign signs. Masterpolis, who later changed his name to Masters when he started boxing, forged a friendship with then-gubernatorial candidate Carter, supporting him in his political endeavors. After Masterpolis' death from cancer in 1977, Carter visited the bar on St. Patrick's Day and gave an endearing speech about his friend.

St. Patrick's Day is one of the more lively days to visit Pinkie's, when the bar opens at 7 a.m. for parade attendees to sip on beer and whiskey, and the crowd dons their finest green duds. But at any time of year you might spot celebrities in town filming various projects, including Liam Hemsworth, Kristen Stewart and Chloë Sevigny, enjoying the jukebox tunes and conversations like the locals.

But there was a time when it seemed that Pinkie's future was uncertain. After Masterpolis' death, the bar passed hands a number of times and by 2015 had fallen into disrepair. The then-owner stripped the bar of much of its famed memorabilia, planning to open elsewhere.

Two regulars purchased the ailing space after a great deal of work, bringing it back to its former glory. The "Original" was added to the name despite the fact that the other Pinkies never opened. More regulars came together and brought in pieces salvaged from the bar over the years, including items that had belonged to Pinkie and the beer signs stolen from the watering hole.

After 70 years, Pinkie's has been repeatedly voted as the city's top dive bar and will hopefully continue to be a port in the storm for all in search of ice-cold beer and boozy slushies.

Just remember to bring cash. 🍷

