



Behind Bars: The Straight-Up Tales of a Big-City Bartender

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After reading *Behind Bars*, a no-holds-barred tell-all in the spirit of *Kitchen Confidential*, you'll never look at your favorite bartender the same way again.

Ty Wenzel offers a raw and clever account of slinging drinks in New York City on the Bowery before and during its renaissance. Wenzel, now thirty-six, has just thrown in the towel after a decade at the swank Marion's Continental Restaurant and Lounge--a gig that was supposed to be a temporary escape after corporate burnout, but instead, like with most bartenders, took over her life.

Honest, clever, and often scathingly funny, this memoir at once offers outrageous tales, the dirty little secrets of the trade, and inspired commentary on bar culture and the human condition. Wenzel's candid stories of life behind the bar covers everything: sex, money, celebrities, the tricks mixers play on you to get you to stay on that stool, how to jumpstart your own bartender fantasy, that all-important tip . . . and how "pink drinks" like the Cosmopolitan are ruining civilization.

Behind Bars is also a riveting narrative of Wenzel's life outside the bar, which is complicated by her Islamic background, her drive to save enough money and get out of "the life," and the ultimate realization that the grueling lifestyle that is driving her crazy is also something she has grown to love.

Behind Bars: The Straight-Up Tales of a Big-City Bartender Details

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Author : Ty Wenzel

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Amy Pratt says

Funny perspective of a bartender.

Kumu~aloha says

i have a love/hate relationship with this book. there is no denying ty wenzel was a big-city bartender . . . her descriptions of which kind of customers drink what, knowledge of bar staff politics, and growing aversion to her own profession are all compellingly accurate. as a former bartender, i can relate to virtually every observation and gripe she makes. however, at times she comes across fairly self-righteous (perhaps expected of us beerslingers?) and she writes as if she has some insight that no other bartender might have, which seems a little naive.

my other problem is with the writing itself-- she really needed an editor. the chapters are not arranged cohesively, and she often meanders from one subject to the next without logical progression. i understand the bar business can be this way, but i really don't think the intention was for her prose to mimic the life it reflects upon. i give it more than one star simply because it hit home with me; if you are a bartender who doesn't care much about good writing and wants to say "oh my god, that's SO true" outloud every other page, this is your book. but if you are looking for a *deeper* understanding of bartender's world coupled with sequential writing, this is not your read.

Lesley Henderson says

I read this book on a trip to New Orleans, which I found somewhat appropriate, since Ty Wenzel's memoir is of her life as a bartender. Of course, her book takes place at Marion's in New York, a bit of a distance from New Orleans, but the city streets smell about the same, really (at least in the French Quarter).

I love memoirs and found this one to also be a very pleasing read. A few caveats... The surly-bartender "tips" made me feel like a jackass for all the sins I've committed as a patron, as did her long list of "lame drinks" (all of which I tend to order). And I now have anxiety about my previous bar-tipping behaviors, as I am unsure if my gratuity was appropriate. If Ms. Wenzel teaches the reader anything, it is to tip your 'tender well. To her credit, I left the New Orleans bars beyond broke.

Okay, aside from the reassurance that I am a lame drinker, hearing what it takes to be a bartender as well as all of the personal anecdotes and profound toll the job took on the author was a pretty worthy read. The lady can write an interesting memoir!

Grace says

A friend gave me this and I started this book for the second time and could not get through it. I had to force

myself to keep reading then finally gave up. She is constantly dropping the names of bars and different people (am I supposed to know who they are?) like they're common knowledge. A quarter of the way through, I had to ask myself what this book was even about...her bartending memoirs? That's a creative description.

Leonardo Etcheto says

Interesting book about being a bartender, and ending in a sweet gig that gives you money, time and friends. The downside is it is backbreaking and foot breaking work and you have the privilege of dealing with a ton of drunks. It was an enjoyable read for me, light and interesting, with a good touch of human drama. Enjoyed the view of the inner workings of the serving drinks business. There is always more to things than meets the eye. Though it is amazing how quickly things come down to the money. It is what lets you get time off since you make so much in a good night.

I agree wholeheartedly with her theory on how you graduated from sweet (mask the alcohol) drinks to simpler and stronger stuff as you develop your taste. A fine cocktail is like anything else, it takes time and practice to appreciate. Most people do not care - they drink to get drunk not because they enjoy the drink. To each his own.

Ty started as a strict upbringing Muslim, went on to party girl/fashion world writer, then became a bartender and finally quit bartending after becoming a mom. A classic immigrant story of finding yourself in America. I found it amusing but not surprising that after a strict Muslim upbringing she ends with an amorphous religion - organized church = bad, but personal God = good. In America, we get to make our own rules.

Lauren Hewitt says

One of my all time favorite books! You will be able to relate if you have every worked in the service industry as a female. Bartender, cocktail waitress, etc. So true to life and will make you laugh; and for me it reminds me of all my late nights behind the bar :) oh the stories to tell....

Anne says

I loved this book! I would compare it to Kitchen Confidential by Anthony Bourdain for the Bar world. It's sort of like being a fly on the wall of a bar and hearing and witnessing all those horror stories that you only normally hear about. Its just another reminder to be kind to your bartenders and waitstaff.

Sheila says

I saw this at the library and thought, hmm, that looks interesting. Well, that is all it really was - interesting - barely. But I read the whole thing. I do not feel "enlightened" for having done so either.

Sara says

This is my life to a T!! Even the tiniest details of the brand of lipstick I wear, MAC. I have been a female mixer for the last 11 years and the way she describes the job is my life!! Perfect!! Thank you! Awesome read!!

Kim says

I found this one tricky to rate. As someone who has gone out to many, many (manymany) bars, has bartended and now owns a bar, I tried to read this book with the perspective of consumer, bartender and bar owner in mind.

My overall perception: meh. Sure, I could relate to many of her experiences as a bartender, but in general I think the author really needs to get over herself. Although I could empathize with her annoyance by certain types of customers, I think she seems like she had a serious attitude during her bartending career. She complains a lot about deficient tippers, but if I encountered a bartender like her, I might not be a spectacular tipper either. I definitely try to screen out people like her when hiring in my bar. Everyone in the bar industry has probably, at one time or another, experienced about 80 to 90 percent of the situations she describes in this book, and I guarantee that a vast majority would handle many of these situations with more diplomacy and grace than they way she does in this book.

Nonetheless, it was a very quick read, and I did like the inclusion of drink recipes, a bartender's glossary, etc. Like I said, I definitely could relate to a lot of these situations, and I think other bartenders could as well.

Pamela says

Oh how I can relate

Audra says

Meh. This book was a bit of drag to get through. I wanted to hear more specific stories about her experiences bartending. Not enough of those in this book to make this an overall enjoyable read for me. Pet peeves that she put throughout the book were nice but they were just stuck in and had nothing to do with the text in which they were embedded. Was really turned off when she went on a diatribe about smoking in bars and the government has no right to ban... blah, blah, blah. I thought this book was about bartending. Get off your soapbox. After typing this I'm realizing that I should probably only give this book a one star rating, but I'm sticking with two because there were some amusing parts. Some pretty gross parts too.

ukht says

undemanding.

