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Spaces We Love: Rio Scenarium

BY SHIRA LEVINE, TUESDAY OCT. 20, 2009

TRAVEL, RIO DE JANEIRO, ANTIQUES, BARS, BRAZIL

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Something as authentically cool as Rio Scenarium simply doesn't exist in Manhattan anymore. Well, maybe in Queens — but not with the same across-the-board fanfare Rio Scenarium garners in Rio de Janeiro. What was once a massive antique shop bursting at the seams with fabulous finds like vintage tricycles and ancient accordions, grandfather clocks and Venetian mirrors, even a 1928 Ford (with a collection of garden gnomes sporting Brazilian soccer jerseys for good measure), is now a nearly 27,000 square foot, three level bar.

Nightly, live music and dancing draws in both Cariocas (natives of Rio) as well as tourists of all ages who seem to like the place enough that they're willing to wait hours in a line that stretches back five blocks. Before it was a nightclub, the four owners would invite their close friends to hang out after hours — a party would inevitably ensue. Like any late night of socializing mixed with caipirinhas, draft Skols and rousing people, someone would pick up an instrument (that they either brought, or plucked off a wall) and initiate a jam session that lasted till daybreak. It didn't take long for the good word about the festivities to get out. Samba and bossa nova players became Rio Scenarium buddies. They popped by for impromptu performances at the antique shop. In 2001, Scenarium officially became a new destination, from shop to bar, and made its mark in Rio party history.



The venue is set up with the stage on the ground floor and within view of all three floors. A packed night always includes revelers leaning over banisters and grooving to the beat. The second floor has an annex and hosts bands, as well. What makes this place so special is that its allure spans the generations. Each night feels like an excellent wedding reception at which everyone shows up and gets down well into the good night. From 7:30 pm (when the doors first open) to closing in the wee hours, people tear up the dance floor. Around 11pm the second wave of

Scenarium revelers — typically twenty-somethings — move in. When patrons aren't dancing, they are indulging in the bar equivalent of fried Brazilian food. (Think cheese, beef and pork fritters.) The feijoada is some of the tastiest in Rio, if you're brave enough to risk dancing your ass off after eating the black bean and rice soup dish.

And it is still an antique store, lest people forget. See something you want to take home? Those tchotchkes continue to hang on the walls, and are still stacked precariously on books shelves, on top of and inside Victorian and turn-of-the-century furniture. Everything is for sale. Obviously those caipirinhas and caipiroskas make it easier to rationalize the purchase of say, a four-foot tall marble cherub. There won't be room for it at your table, but when you redeem your admittance ticket at the end of the night and pay your sizable bill, the kind people at the Scenarium help you get it into a taxi.

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Sue Rhodes
October 20, 2009 Sounds like a great place and all those accordions on the wall!



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Morris A.
October 21, 2009 What a wonderfully descriptive article. You can easily imagine the dance floor moving and the food areas filled with people eating local treats while admiring the decor, both the human kind and that on the wall. After all it is Rio.



Andrew S.
October 21, 2009 Great Article Shira!