



## All Bar None

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I met my business partner and good friend Nathan Headlam in Melbourne a number of years ago,' says Australian expat Brendan McCarthy as we sip on a local craft beer at his Phnom Penh rooftop hangout, Sundown Social Club. 'At the time we were co-managing a venue called The Penny Black in Brunswick while Nathan was studying and I was pursuing a music career. We made some loose plans to one day put a hospitality venture together, never expecting it to be in a place like Phnom Penh.'

Headlam came to the city in 2014 and after the first year identified several interesting opportunities in the market. Following some initial research he called on McCarthy to help expand on his ideas. 'I came to Phnom Penh in late 2015, which was when we signed the lease on our first venue, Long After Dark.'

Opened in April 2016, Long After Dark saw the pair convert a 1960s Cambodian house into an old-world speakeasy and whisky bar, featuring reclaimed wood details throughout, including the bar top, stools, tables and booths. 'The original elements of the existing property were an advantage from a design perspective,' explains McCarthy. 'The site layout was a great foundation to build on, while the warm tones accentuated the aesthetic we wanted.'

Almost a year later to the day, the pair launched sister bar Sundown Social Club, with a very different design ethos in mind. Whereas Long After Dark — as the name implies — was all about late-night shadows, the new venue was a third-floor rooftop bar overlooking the city's famous Russian Market. 'We deliberately designed it to be an open-air space that engages with the vibrancy and frenetic atmosphere of the action below,' recalls McCarthy. 'It's a tropical urban oasis — Miami Vice meets Cambodia.' When the retractable roof is open in the afternoon, the bar becomes a spacious and light-filled environment perfect for lingering over cocktails.

A year and a half later came Juniper Gin Bar, their second rooftop spot, this time located in the city's Riverside area. Here, north- and south-facing decks offer sweeping views of both the city and the Tonlé Sap river. 'The views of the cityscape offer such a sense of spaciousness that we didn't want to clutter the space with unnecessary design elements,' says McCarthy. 'The roofing framework and decorative elements are set high so they draw the eye to the expansive surrounding views.' Ultimately, the pair were drawn to the elegant nature of gin itself, with a striking gold and white colour palette that contrasts perfectly with the purple and orange sunsets for which the city is known.

Facing Page, top  
In Phnom Penh, a series of design-led bars takes locals and visitors from day to night with ease  
Images by Brendan McCarthy

Facing page, bottom  
Warm tones and reclaimed wood feature throughout Long After Dark, making it easy to linger and experience its extensive whisky and vinyl collection  
Image by Lauren Crothers