



Smoking lounge Sugar East opens on Upper East Side

Hold on to your butts.

Smoking may be banned in most businesses and public spaces, but the city is home to several holdouts where it's still legal to light up a cigarette or cigar indoors.

The newest of the bunch opened last week on the Upper East Side.

Sugar East is one of only eight bars where you can still smoke legally indoors. An outdoor cigar lounge is also located on the rooftop of the two-year-old Knickerbocker Hotel in Times Square, currently operated by Upper East Side cigar bar Club Macanudo.

Sugar East took over the space previously occupied by the 20-year-old Merchants NY Cigar Bar, which closed late last year.

Merchants Hospitality, which operated the original cigar bar, revamped the space with a Havana nightlife-inspired theme and modern cocktail menu.

“We decided to transform Merchants Cigar Bar into a casual smoking lounge, so you can just have a cigarette during a night out while enjoying a cocktail and some great music,” said Abraham Merchant, president and CEO of Merchants Hospitality.

The city's Smoke Free Air Act, which went into effect in 2003, bans smoking inside restaurants and bars, among other businesses and certain public spaces. But it offers an exemption to establishments that were already in existence, have not moved or expanded, and earn 10 percent or more of their income from tobacco sales. Since the ownership and size of the Sugar East space has not changed, the exemption remains.