

Upsizing Oz

A downtown club looks beyond the hookah

Cafe Oz founder Amer Zahr has found a partner for his modest hookah bar on Fifth Avenue in landlord Jacques Habra, who used to run the "e-business" firm Web Elite out of the same building. Habra, who sold Web Elite a couple of years ago, says he and Zahr have been friends since college ten years ago, and that when Zahr's cafe "hit a ceiling" saleswise, they got together to brainstorm ways to expand.

There will still be belly dancers at Oz on Friday nights—but other evenings will feature 1980s music (including karaoke), techno, reggae, jazz, and what Habra calls "high-energy acts."

The result is **Oz**, a downsized name for an upsized business. Whereas Cafe Oz was a small, modest gathering place with a vaguely industrial atmosphere and the occasional belly dancer providing entertainment, Oz, as reconceived by Habra, has expanded from 1,800 square feet to the building's entire 5,000-square-foot first floor. It has a new, upscale decor, with cedar trim, lush fabrics, vivid colors, and the look, Habra says, "of a traditional Moroccan living room."

The front of the space is an intimate lounge where patrons can talk, share a hookah, and mellow out. The back is now occupied by what Habra calls "the largest stage of any club venue in Ann Arbor," with club seating designed so that every customer in the place has a good view of the stage and dance floor. There will still be belly dancers—Friday night is International Night, when belly dancers and patrons alike can swivel their hips to world dance music spun by deejays. But Tuesday is Eighties Night, which includes karaoke; Wednesday features electronic techno music; Thursday is Reggae Night with former Bird of Paradise deejay Billy the Kid; Sunday is Jazz Night; and Saturdays will be devoted, Habra hopes, to "high-energy acts."

There are cover charges on Wednesday and Thursday nights but none on Fridays and Saturdays, making Oz one of the most affordable weekend entertainment destinations in town. "We're really trying to push the no-cover model so people feel more invited than obligated," Habra says.

Food service runs from 8 p.m., when the cafe opens, to 4 a.m. Thursday through Saturday. The partners are calling the no-

alcohol-allowed period between 2:30 and 4 a.m. "After Oz." "We're hoping people will stick around, smoke some hookah, eat some food," says Habra.

*Oz, 210 South Fifth Avenue, 222-4770.
Tues. & Wed. 8 p.m.–2 a.m., Thurs.–Sat. 8 p.m.–4 a.m., Sun. 6 p.m.–midnight.
Closed Mon.*



Amer Zahr and landlord-partner Jacques Habra have more than doubled Oz's size.

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