

Jazz on the Zug un- derground scene

Jazz, cocktails, comedy and cabaret. At “Hidén Harlekin”, you can immerse yourself in another world with a Japanese twist and switch off the analogue way thanks to Kevin Tarō Bicker.

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Kevin Tarō Bicker, born in 1991 in Kyoto, is the business owner and creative director of the Hidén Harlekin club, which he opened at Bahnhofstrasse 30 in Zug in December 2022. As the son of a Japanese mother and a Swiss father, Bicker has been travelling between Europe and Asia since he was a child. He makes the most of the influences of both cultures. As a hospitality-school graduate, he knows a thing or two about food and marketing, but he is also passionate about art and design. Calligraphy is another of his passions.

hidenharlekin.com



Hidén Harlekin
[zug-tourismus.ch/
en/hiden-harlekin](http://zug-tourismus.ch/en/hiden-harlekin)



← Great live jazz on the small stage.



↑ Music that gets under your skin.

When you set up a jazz club in a small town, it can't be for the money. Was it passion that led you to launch the "Hidén Harlekin" at the end of 2022?

Yes, but you also have to get the finances right. After all, I have responsibilities – I have wages to pay and, as a business owner, I don't want to lose money. So it needs to work as a business. And it does! Our guests tell us the same thing time and again: Zug has been waiting for a club like this.

The club's motto is "Jazz Kissa". What does that mean? Kissed awake by jazz or something like that?

"Kissa" means tea shop in Japanese, so jazz kissas are places where you drink tea and listen to jazz. Decades ago, in cities like Kobe, Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Yokohama, music lovers were meeting up to listen to records because not everyone could afford LPs and record players. These meeting places were all part of a broader context of enthusiasm for Western culture and music. The Second World War disrupted the success of the jazz kissas, because jazz was now considered "the music of the enemy". However, the jazz kissa community kept the records safely hidden during the war. The scene was later revived in the 1950s thanks to the US soldiers stationed in Japan, and it is still thriving today.

Hidén Harlekin offers more than just tea and the sound of the needle on vinyl. The club is also known for its live concerts and cocktails.

That's right. There is live jazz on Wednesdays and Fridays. We created the programme in collaboration with local musicians, as well as with the jazz academies in Lucerne and Zurich. Whenever there's no band, there's vinyl. You'll hear Miles Da-

vis, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday and more. We see ourselves as a "listening bar" rather than a place where music just plays in the background. Here, you carefully pull a record out of its sleeve, put it on the turntable, listen to the music, take an interest in the genre and broaden your musical horizons. Music is celebrated here.

A passion for analogue music often goes hand in hand with the desire to slow down or with nostalgia for a bygone era. Would you say you're nostalgic?

You could say that, yes. I am passionate about the 1920s to 50s era. I love swing, bebop and the lifestyle that was all about living an unconventional artistic life and being a creative free spirit. Nowadays, we all allow ourselves to be stressed out too much by our digital lives and by making ourselves constantly available. Our club is different. You walk down a few steps and are immediately transported to another world, an atmosphere without the hustle and bustle, where you can just sit back and enjoy. Also, we do more than just jazz. We have stand-up comedy here every two weeks. We

AT THE BAR

also have a format called “Kitsuné”. It’s live jazz combined with a live DJ. The atmosphere on stage and on the dance floor is electric. Burlesque – a sensual and erotic stage show – is another art form to which we have recently started to treat our audiences. Then there’s our collaboration with the Triplestep club, where they teach and dance Lindy Hop.

The club’s décor is exquisite. It feels as intimate as a living room. Is that your personal touch?

Yes. As soon as I got the chance to take over the club, I renovated it from the ground up and put my stamp on it. The design, the layout of the bar and the floor plan, with its multiple levels, are all based on my sketches and drafts. Many great tradespeople and specialists helped me make it a reality. A stage designer and an acoustician were also involved. All of these people, together with the owner of the building, believed in my vision right from the start and gave me fantastic support to help me make it happen.

What does the word “Hidén” actually mean? Does it have anything to do with the English word “hidden”, like a hiding place?

“Hidén” means mystery or gateway to another world in Japanese. We live up to that name not only with the entertainment we put on but also with the interior décor. We have antique wall lamps and hand-rolled wallpaper, velour fabric and awnings. These are things you can’t just pick up at the supermarket. I have collected them over the years and specifically positioned them here. We also put our heart and soul into creating the comfy brown leather sofas we are currently sitting on. We created prototypes in advance and spent hours sitting on them to test them. They are specially shaped to make it easy to strike up a conversation with other people.

What’s the story behind the big JBL speakers on the shelf here? They look very rare.

These two speakers are from 1977. They are actually studio monitors. They were used to record vinyl records. The speakers came here to Zug from Denmark via Geneva. One speaker weighs 80 kilograms. This meant that we had to design the recesses and back walls of the shelves where the speakers sit to be particularly stable.

Your club is discreetly located between a glasses shop and a cosmetics shop. What kind of people stumble upon it?

People aged 35 to 65. People in this age group still want to go out, but they struggle to find the right place to go. We aren’t selective about our clientele. We welcome every guest with open arms! After all, Zug is an international city – whether the



↑ Creative cocktails from the ambitious barkeeper.

people born and bred here like it or not! Many people from many walks of life live and work here, sometimes for a long time, sometimes only temporarily. I love it when I manage to bring together locals, expats, tourists and business people at my club. Making a wide variety of acquaintances broadens your horizons and changes your view of the world. I myself have no fear of meeting new and different people, because I have lived and worked in many different countries: I have stood behind bars in Japan, Australia, France, Thailand and the USA. For me, standing behind bars all over the world was a great “school of life”!

Japan and Switzerland – Kyoto and Zug. Are there any parallels?

Definitely. Politeness, punctuality, considerateness, the need for harmony – these are all character traits and values that Switzerland and Japan share. However, mindfulness and respect for older people are even more pronounced in Japan. I too enjoy learning from the life experience of older people. My grandfather and my great-uncle are important role models for me. They taught me the art of ink painting – a tradition that I still cultivate today and that I continue to practise on my trips to Japan.