

BARFLY

Andrew Taylor



Monkey Magic

410 Crown Street,
Surry Hills

Phone (02) 9358 4444

Rating **7/10**

With the possible exception of the Salvos' Oasis Youth Support Network, Monkey Magic has one of the least-inviting entrances on Crown Street.

Its street-level entry is a dim, candlelit space, seemingly designed to exile unwanted drinking companions – at least on the night I visit.

There's no menu posted at the entrance, either, which might scare off nervous drinkers and diners. Yet upstairs from this social Siberia is warmer and friendlier, with exposed brickwork, a timber open-plan kitchen and communal bar table for liquid diners like yours truly.

Monkey Magic's cocktail list conjures up all the old favourites, including an expertly made Singapore Sling (\$17) that quickly banishes memories of chill wintry winds outside. But the page of Japanese-inspired concoctions is intriguing. Our impossibly tanned waiter recommends the Edo Garden Tea (\$17), a delicate mix of gin, elderflower liqueur, rose syrup, cucumber, lemon juice and jasmine and rose tea that combines well without being cloying. Hibiscus Hana (\$16) – which blends Hennessy VS, liqueur 43, muddled apple, hibiscus juice and lemon – also pulls off the balancing act of complex flavours.

The bar snacks are not designed for empty stomachs but the menu is reasonably priced and – based on our sampling of the salty cuttlefish (\$11), Agedashi tofu (\$8), crispy pork (\$17) and beef teriyaki skewers (\$16) – cooked by someone who knows their teriyaki from their yakitori.

The GFC has emptied many bars of midweek drinkers but happily the Monkey Magic staff use this as a chance to chat with customers rather than sulk in the corner.