

Sit back at Suede

„ The new Old Town club is designed for relaxation.

BY STEPHANIE BARNARD

Wichita Eagle correspondent

Walk inside the new club known as Suede in Old Town and you'll find couches instead of tables and a piano instead of a jukebox.

Club manager Ed Banda says he wants to offer a quieter, more relaxed atmosphere from other downtown bars. He opened Suede Piano Bar & Lounge last month at 141 N. Rock Island, in the former Torre's Pizzeria space.

Banda, a native of France, came to Wichita to play soccer for Wichita State University. As a student, he worked at a local bar and decided he wanted to open one of his own.

Banda said he wants professionals to look at Suede as a place to drop by and have a drink after work.

"It's more like a lounge (where) you relax," he said. "I don't see anything like that in Wichita."

The club's lighting is dim, with fluorescent lights near the bar and lamps near the tables. Bouncers at the door check identification and enforce the business-casual dress code.

The only seating so far is white loveseats, with small black tables on which to set drinks. Banda said he might mix up the seating by adding individual chairs and larger couches.

A wall separates the entrance and the bar from the piano and most of the seating. Donna Tucker, a well-known Wichita jazz singer and pianist who performs Friday nights at Suede, praised its acoustics and atmosphere.

"When you walk into the room, you think you're in New York," she said. "In fact, it's nicer than a lot of the New York clubs."

Tucker is sticking closer to home these days after regularly performing in Japan from 1999 to 2007.

"I have so wanted a place to play at home, and there just hasn't been a place (until Suede)," she said. "It's nice to not have to have a passport to go to work."

Tucker said she had been considering relocating to her native Dallas, but was reluctant to leave family members here. Then, the opportunity to perform at Suede came along.

"(Banda) has been checking throughout the city for someone to do this, and I guess I was in the right place at the right time," she said.

Live jazz will be featured from 8 to 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Banda also is bringing in deejays and meringue music from Colombia.

"Since America is a melting pot, I think it's time for Wichita to have .æ.æ. music from other cultures,"
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he said.

Tucker said Latin dancers have been known to show up to dance to the recorded music.

"We've never seen this in Wichita. (The dancing) is something you see on 'Dancing With the Stars,'æ" she said.

In order to accommodate large groups and control the crowd, Banda recommends that patrons make reservations, especially between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. It's just part of his strategy to make the experience enjoyable for the young professionals he hopes to attract.



Fernando Salazar/The Wichita Eagle

Suede's manager Ed Banda takes time out from his club duties to play around on the piano with jazz singer Donna Tucker.

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