

Raise your glasses — for copper
From the brewery to the bar, copper plays a historic role

It matters little if your favorite thirst-quencher is a glass of wine, a bottle of [beer](#) or an alcohol-free “Shirley Temple,” many would agree that the best place to enjoy a cool, refreshing drink is in the convivial atmosphere of a welcoming bar.

What helps to give any bar its ambience is attractive surroundings, but sometimes a change is needed to turn a good bar into a unique bar.

That kind of transformation is evident in the newly reopened Hyatt Regency lounge in Washington D.C. After \$7 million worth of renovation, patrons find it hard to get through their suds without remarking on the extraordinary copper coin art displayed around them or the stunning new copper bar top that was recently added.

When asked to describe the copper renovations, Tammy Hagin, Hyatt’s director of public relations, summed it up in two words: “It’s everywhere!”

The [unique characteristics of copper](#) can strongly influence a project, which is what Magdalena Laska, a designer with Looney & Associates, in Dallas, Texas, had in mind while planning the renovation.

“The use of copper at the bar top allowed us to achieve a curved form with minimal joints and seams,” Laska said. “Copper is a ‘living’ surface that will patina over time, adding more character to the bar as it ages.”

Taking advantage of copper’s malleability and its subtle and gradual color change, gives the bar the perfect feel for the mingling Capitol Hill political figures that routinely make their way to the lounge.

As for the copper coin art dangling from the ceilings, Laska says there’s no better way to pay homage to the U.S. Treasury, which is also located nearby in the nation’s capital.

Another influential—some would say legendary—watering hole that recently took advantage of copper’s natural beauty is The Oak Bar located in the iconic Plaza Hotel in midtown Manhattan. This historic bar first opened its doors in 1907, was closed during Prohibition and reopened in 1934 as a full-service restaurant.

When it closed in 2005 for major renovations, the new owners’ paramount interest was to keep the ambience of the original Oak Bar alive. The custom design work was done by Annabelle Selldorf, who earned a stellar reputation for her work with the Neue Galerie and the Urban Glass House, also in Manhattan. When The Oak Bar reopened this November, its elegance and sophistication were intact, and a key element of the renovations included copper covering the former oak bar top. The designer also chose copper for a showcase decanting table in the adjacent Oak Room dining area.

Tourists to New York would be wise to put on their to-do lists a visit to taste such house specialty drinks as The Oak Room Manhattan. And while there, as they imagine sitting next to Truman Capote or Greta Garbo or any of the other luminaries who once frequented the place, they should take time to notice how the copper complements the lush wood-paneled walls and ornate barrel-vaulted ceilings.

Aside from world-renowned bars and lounges, copper is also often found where many lagers, ales and microbrews are produced.

Copper was once the standard for vessels used in breweries. With its superior heat conduction and inherent [antimicrobial ability](#) to prevent the growth of germs, copper trumped all other types of containers when it came to storing and boiling booze. Today, stainless steel is frequently used, but copper can still be found in premium brewing operations.

“As you could imagine, cleaning agents that most breweries use today could be rough on copper,” explained Andrew Ety, assistant brewmaster for the Brooklyn Brewery. “As a tradition, though, (breweries) will still go out of their way to have copper vessels to put out for show.”

Due to this rich history and tradition, all vessels used in brewing today, stainless steel or otherwise, are still referred to as “coppers.”

Ety went on to say that some breweries will import traditional copper vessels from Germany just to put them on display. Most industrial-sized copper vessels used today are lined with steel, much like [copper kitchenware](#).

So, from the holding vessels where beer was originally brewed, to the bar top you now rest your glass or mug on, copper has played an important role. It’s something to keep in mind during your next toast at happy hour.