

100 PLACES TO SIP AND CHAT

VOLUME 2: LOBBY LOUNGE AT THE FOUR SEASONS - Z'TEJAS

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Last week, we introduced the first 50 in our 100 places to sip 'n' chat. We chose these to distinguish from places primarily for dancing, loud partying or listening to bands. As always, we will update this list online, so send suggestions to bargirl@covad.net and mbarnes@statesman.com.

Salud.

51. LOBBY LOUNGE AT THE FOUR SEASONS

98 San Jacinto Blvd. 685-8150

In some ways, arriving at the lobby bar feels like leaving Austin. Yes, there's a small deer's head up by the bar, but the bar is elegant. Paris is elegant. Austin is funky. The embossed linen coasters, the fresh towels in the bathroom, tightly folded, the staff courteous and swift: This was big city, elegant stuff. And yet . . . the bar is very much Austin. If for no other reason than that the large graceful windows overlook the Town Lake hike-and-bike trail.

52. LONGBRANCH INN

1133 E. 11th St. 472-5477

There are things to love here, namely the gorgeous oak bar, the low modern sofas and chairs, small tables, high bar stools, the almost-downtown location with none of the chaos of actual downtown, the neighborhoodiness, the long narrow (nearly 'gunshot') shape of it so that all things are visible and people-watching extensively possible. Longbranch people-watching is often great — from magenta suits and hats to goatees and long hair and lots of ordinary folks in between.

53. LOVEJOY'S

604 Neches St. 477-1268

Guys with bedhead and bright orange band T-shirts chatted with girls in pegged pants and ponytails. My friends and I sat on an overstuffed couch and poured house microbrewed beers from the pitcher, while everything from Serge Gainsbourg and Luscious Jackson to Tom Waits sang from the jukebox. But lest you think that Lovejoy's is the exclusive province of the tattooed musical-trivia elite, let me add that it's truly an Austin bar — low-key and full of all kinds of people.

54. MALAGA

208 W. Fourth St. 236-8020

Smack dab in the middle of the Warehouse District, Malaga is a wine and tapas bar. Not that they don't have a full bar; they do and you can find liquors from Grey Goose to sundry Scotches. But with 50 wines by the glass (many priced at \$5 and \$6) and 300 wines available by the bottle, wine tends to be the more interesting choice. Tapas involve fabulous words like 'manchego,' and 'tortilla,' and selected tapas can be paired with selected wines for only \$6 during happy hour.

55. MARS

1610 San Antonio St. 472-3901

Red and intimate. A handful of tables, a short shelf along a wall, a full bar and wait-staff service: Mars invites. I've been in a couple of times to chat with girlfriends over a Marstini (Absolut Citron, Grand Mariner and a lemon twist) or Martian (raspberry bellini) or wine or bourbon. The Pacific Rim food smells good and looks delectable as it passes us by, but we like chatting over dim lamplight and red and black décor and consuming tasty beverages.

56. MEAN-EYED CAT

1621 W. Fifth St. 472-6326

Here are things I appreciate about the Mean-Eyed Cat: 1) By my third visit into the MEC, the bartender/owner Chris Marsh remembered what I drank. 2) Johnny Cash. The words 'mean-eyed cat' are actually from a Johnny Cash song and the bar is an homage to the man in black. 3) They serve Frito pie on Monday nights. Here's another thing that might interest you: There's no hard alcohol. Beer dominates and it's priced to move: \$2.50 a Shiner. \$2 Pearl in a can. \$3 Carta Blanca.

57. MOLOTOV

719 W. Sixth St. 499-0600

The new rooftop bar and patio at Molotov may be good, but the best thing about Molotov is still the long window facing West Sixth Street. Fresh air circulates when it's open, and more importantly, the window provides an excellent vantage point from which to encourage/tease/cheer on people attempting to parallel park on Sixth. Big arty panels separate one room from another and they suit the bar's vaguely Russian theme, with Americanized Soviet propaganda posters.

58. MOONSHINE

303 Red River St. 236-9599

You can drink wine; you can drink cocktails; you can drink small-batch bourbon; you can eat shrimp dipped in a corn-dog batter and fried. Moonshine has a little something for everyone. A favorite for its happy-hour specials, Moonshine seats customers on the veranda and the patio, and even has an indoor patio bar at the carriage house, complete with a fireplace. In all these places, you can munch traditional American fare, sip a glass of wine and study the 19th-century building.

59. MOTHER EGAN'S IRISH PUB

715 W. Sixth St. 478-7747

Mother Egan's is a proper Irish pub — pub food, good Guinness, god bless 'em. It's neighborhood-y, the way most pubs in Ireland are, meaning the wood's dark, the snugs are cozy, and people stop in for a casual drink on Saturday (or Tuesday or Monday) afternoons. Mother Egan's offers weekly pub quizzes, Wi-Fi, Sunday brunches, and has been known to host a live (read: 6 a.m.-ish) World Cup match viewing or two.

60. MUGSHOTS

407 E. Seventh St. 236-0008

Owned by some of the same folks as Barfly's, Mugshots is downtown and has very affordable drinks (\$3.50 Jack and Coke, for example). Conversation is easy; wandering through the various rooms with the original stone and structure exposed. There's a photo booth for capturing memories, a pool table, foosball and lots and lots of seating in a variety of rooms — including a new back smoking patio. Some corners are dimly lit, some have good lines of sight.

61. 1900 LOUNGE

1900 Rio Grande St. 495-1800

Sitting at the elegant oak bar, drinking a red mojito made with rum, muddled mint and pomegranate juice, I looked out the windows at the courtyard with its enormous crape myrtles, supposedly the only plants left from the mansion's original owner Ella Wooten's turn-of-the-century garden. Everything about this place is beautiful, elegant, tasteful. I alternately listened to the music and to occasional bits of conversations near me and read my book. I wished I'd worn silk.

62. NUEVO LEÓN

1501 E. Sixth St. 479-0097

I first found out about floaters at this relocated and expanded Mexican restaurant with its lively indoor and outdoor drinks scene, the latter overlooking Plaza Saltillo. Just that splash of premium tequila on the crest of a creamy frozen margarita elevates the drink from an adolescent slushy into an adult delectation. Politicos assemble here, as do folks fresh off from work; the interior bar can get overly festive, but the deck — when shaded — can be paradise with a buzz. — Michael Barnes

63. OILCAN HARRY'S

211 W. Fourth St. 320-8823

It's gay goodness. Oilcan's has been around for years and is a hopping joint. Although it has a quieter room, most of the bar is loud and crazy on weekend nights. The entire space encompasses about 6,900 square feet: outdoor patio with bar, big central bar, dance floor with a mirrored ball. Women are welcome (there's even a women's bathroom, though men have been known to use it too). Nights are themed. And of course, there are DJs, playing music you can dance to.

64. ONE 2 ONE BAR

121 E. Fifth St. 473-0121

It's a neighborhood joint, sure, and yeah, there's cheap drinks, but the real draw is poker. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, there are two seatings: at 7 and 10 (5 and 8 on Saturdays). Get there a half-hour early to sign up for one of eight spots at each of the tables. No, you can't win actual money, but you can win prizes. And if you don't want to play, pretty soon you should be able to go to the rooftop bar (opening in the not-too-distant future) and smoke a hookah.

65. OPAL DIVINE'S

FREEHOUSE

700 W. Sixth St. 477-3308

The rambling wooden pub is ideal for fans of single-malt scotch: Scotch tastings are regularly organized, and the list of whiskeys runs from peaty Highland scotches (yuck) to delectable Speyside scotches (Balvenie — yum). Beer, gin, Guinness, a full bar and a kitchen keep non-scotch folks happy, too. What's even more appealing is the copious amount of deck seating. Shady, sunny, upstairs, downstairs — but no matter where you set down, there are few things more pleasant than sitting outside with a cold beer on a warm night. Or a warming scotch on a cold night. Or beer and scotch on any night. Yeah.

66. PAGGI HOUSE

200 Lee Barton Drive. 499-8835

One of the oldest buildings in Austin has long housed a traditional linen-napkin restaurant. Now, the back room has been cleared out for a light-filled, lively bar, which spills out onto patios, some decorated by recently uncovered limestone cisterns. The

cocktails are among the most scrumptious in town and waiters regularly float by your table (or couch) with tempting delectables. The new owners have added music, art and movie events, as well as a thriving happy hour. — M.B.

67. THE PEACOCK

515 Pedernales St. 276-8979

Designed by Joel Mozersky, who also did Uchi, Oslo and the Real World Austin house, the walls are a deep teal green when the lights are dim, blue when they're brighter.

Peacocks emblazon the low white chairs and the high tall bar stools. Chandeliers tinkle and all the trim is bright white. The interior felt like Faulkner meets Wonka. The cement patio, divided from the street and parking lot by white cinderblock walls with corrugated metal, is reasonably sized and, on some nights, hip.

68. PETE'S DUELING PIANO BAR

421 E. Sixth St. 472-7383

Who knew so many people would go to a piano bar and how many of them would request wedding DJ classics such as 'Sweet Home Alabama' and 'Sweet Caroline'? Two guys, two pianos, a whole lot of crowd participation. At Pete's, patrons request songs, offer the bartender a tip. Occasionally, rival songs are requested, with people throwing more and more money into the kitty for their song to be played. Combine that with some adult beverages and a rowdy night may ensue.

69. POODLE DOG LOUNGE

6507 Burnet Road. 465-9468

Frat boys and alternative types come in, but the Poodle Dog is essentially smoke-voiced and blue collar. It's AC/DC's 'Back in Black' and George Jones' heartbroke wailing, depending on who's at the jukebox. When the George Jones folks get going, they sometimes two-step through the pool tables, paunchy older guys leaning in close to their wives and girlfriends. Beer comes in cans or bottles, but mostly cans. You can bring hard liquor and buy set-ups, but mostly you drink beer.

70. RED FEZ

209-B W. Fifth St. 478-5120

Some folks say the bar is romantic — it's dimly lit, it's got an exotic flair, the drinks are reasonably strong. Other folks really like the music — the Sunday night hip-hop with DJ Kurupt in particular. The Fez hosts an Arabian Night with belly dancers, offers hookahs and free Middle Eastern appetizers, and the interior has an Arabian Nights flavor: mosaic tiles, long drapes, large hexagonal metal screens that complement the tile, a hookah. It tends to pop later, rather than earlier, in the evening.

71. REED'S JAZZ

AND SUPPER CLUB

9901 N. Capital of Texas Highway. 342-7977

This is a jazzy kind of place, with, surprisingly enough, a real supper club. During happy hour, a few appetizers are half-price. The décor is swanky fabulous in a 'Gosh I wish men still wore tuxedos to dinner' kind of way. And the manager was charming and warm. With jazz running nightly, from 6:30 p.m., this spot in the Arboretum/Gateway area is an excellent place to drop in with friends, especially if you've got your swank on.

72. THE RITZ

320 E. Sixth St. 474-2270

The Ritz is a great place — flames on the walls, high ceilings, eight pool tables, two air-

hockey tables, pinball machines, arcade games, foosball. It's like a punk rock/skater/alternatypewriter teenager's fantasy den. The tables and chairs would make a House & Garden editor cry: metal benches covered in stickers and beat-up sofas — things a little spilled beer wouldn't hurt. And surely at least one beer has been spilled in the joint, perhaps at one of the regular air hockey tournaments.

73. SABA

208-D W. Fourth St. 478-7222

I prefer Saba's mojitos to its caipirinhas, but I appreciate knowing both are an option. The vast majority of this blue-water watering hole is occupied by the restaurant. However, the tall tables and stools in the bar area can get packed to the gills during happy hour as plush people nibble on appetizers and drink the fabulous and ordinary. Watch the fish in the giant tank behind the bar, chat with bartenders when it's slow, or sit near the window so that everyone walking down Fourth can see you.

74. SAM'S TOWN POINT

2115 Allred Drive. 282-0083

Low ceilings like an old rec room, green patterned carpet, wooden chairs and stools with those rounded spokes that look like they could have come from a tall ship's steering wheel, long tables, little tables, round tables: A plethora of seating options is yours in the one big room that is the bar. If you order a beer — and it's the kind of place where you should order a beer — you get your own koozie with it. And smokers, please note: This bar is just outside city limits, meaning you can light up.

75. SAN MARCOS RIVER

PUB & GRILL

701 Cheatham St. 353-3747

It's an ordinary bar with bar food (always opt for the fried stuff) and pitchers and liquor. Some nights there's music on a wooden deck just above the river — Toni Price and Slaid Cleaves, among others, have played there. People can sit inside, or outside on the lower or upper deck. My group tends to overrun the outside because the bar is right on the river and the sound of water, any kind of water, is a wonderful thing at night.

76. SCHOLZ GARTEN

1607 San Jacinto Blvd. 474-1958

This is an old-fashioned beer garden. Opened at the end of the Civil War in 1866 by August Scholz, it's an enormous place; outdoors alone, more than 25 picnic tables seat guests — some of whom share tables when the place is crowded, just like in a German beer garden. Polka bands play, famous Texas politicos have hung their hats and eaten lunch here, novels (at least one) have featured the joint, and folks cheer on UT here. It's a storied Austin venue. And there's beer.

77. SHADY GROVE

1624 Barton Springs Road. 474-991

The patio is one of the main draws at Shady Grove. With shady sections, sunny sections and about 35 tables, pasty-faces and sun goddesses alike can be accommodated. Additionally, a completely covered outdoor waiting area is available, and a no-cover-at-all waiting area allows you to drink as you burn. Wagon wheels, wooden fences, strings of light bulbs, umbrellas in the real heat of summer: things to look at while sipping margaritas after a day at Barton Springs.

78. SHERLOCK'S BAKER STREET

PUBLIC HOUSE & GRILL

9012 Research Blvd. 380-9443

This place is bells and whistles and British-themed. A red phone booth stands by the front door. Inside, the first room has lots of polished wood, snugs, booths and big sit-and-chat leather chairs. Exit stage left — to the game room next door has three Golden Tees, darts, pool and foosball. To the right of the main room is the gi-normous dancing room. The dance floor runs up almost to the stage, where bands play every night but Sundays and Tuesdays.

79. SHOAL CREEK SALOON

909 N. Lamar Blvd. 474-0805

Shoal Creek Saloon, the neighborhood sports bar with Louisiana flair, serves po' boys and oysters and fried crawfish to soothe the gullets of the saintly fans. It's worn and comfortable, with wood that's been distressed by years instead of style. Games play in the background — baseball and football and whatever else requires numbers to determine who wins. Outside, plastic chairs mix with wooden benches; ceiling fans whir. In addition to the usual beer, Shoal Creek now serves hard liquor.

80. SIDE BAR

602 E. Seventh St. 322-0697

Located right behind Elysium on Seventh Street, this is an addition to the Red River world and feels like it belongs to the Casino-Lovejoy's-Deville triumvirate. It's got a wry, ironic side: The first Thursday of every month is moustache night when all bartenders, women included, wear sweeping 'staches and patrons are invited to do the same. It's got a hipster tenor: Hong Kong action films have been known to karate chop their way across the pair of TV screens.

81. SIX

117 W. Fourth St. 472-6662

Two words: rooftop patio. Six has joined the handful of bars around town with stairs that lead to a view of the city. Heat lamps, a full bar, a view of the Warehouse District nightlife below round out the patio amenities. The second floor has dark, intimate seating near the turntables (DJs 3 nights a week). And a balcony that overlooks the main floor, with its cocktail tables and plush seating, as well as two enormous TVs (and several less enormous ones). And yes, Lance Armstrong did invest in it.

82. STAR BAR

600 W. 6th St. 477-8550

It might happen. You might be sitting at a table in the urbane Star Bar, when the people at the table beside you ask to borrow a chair. When you ask what it's worth to them, they might reply that they're starving artists and so it's only worth their eternal gratitude, which you accept. You might suddenly find yourself subsumed into their group, their rowdy, flushed group of faux-finishers and wood-distressers-to-the-newly-wealthy; they are drunk and promise you endless entertainment.

83. STARLITE

407 Colorado St. 374-9012

Now that it's moved next to the Alamo Downtown, you may, if you wish, drink a pomegranate cocktail in the main bar. But if there isn't a private party, you might consider checking out the upstairs lounge. It's cozy and intimate, with dining tables and a pair of small rooms where you and five or so of your friends can lounge. Light blue and

funky cool, it's the kind of space that makes you want to find some deco shoes and a dress Hepburn wouldn't be ashamed to wear (Audrey or Katharine).

84. STEPHEN F'S BAR AND TERRACE

701 Congress Ave. 457-8800

I never sit inside; always on the terrace. The appeal is something akin to elegance. The interior of the bar itself is attractive, but in a leather-and-cigar-and-TV kind of way.

Outside, there's a loveliness to sitting on the terrace, the lights of the Capitol illuminating a friend's face, the traffic and people moving through Congress Avenue a flight below. I often find myself undoing my budget by ordering one of the \$12 drinks on the menu because Jack Daniels doesn't look pretty in a martini glass.

85. SULLIVANS STEAKHOUSE

300 Colorado St. 474-1870

The theme is the 1940s: the murals feature men with hats and women in dresses even Rita Hayworth would deem Gilda-worthy. Live jazz every day creates supper club ambience. Sullivans stocks about 5,000 bottles of wine and its wine by the glass list is strong as are its bourbon and cognac lists. I was tempted by cabernet, but eventually went with a Manhattan served up. If we'd been in on a Thursday, we could have had \$5 martinis and half-price on the bar menu.

86. TAMBALEO

302 Bowie St. 472-3213

Everything about Tambaleo — housed in the old Electric Lounge space — is fat and sassy and well-to-do. The couches are overstuffed, the color scheme runs to tasteful umbers and reds, the bar curves fully around. Think DJs, think art on the walls, think wide open space adjoined by cozy small rooms, think collared shirts undone a button or two. And don't forget parking (there's an actual lot just outside the bar). 'Intelligent Austin Lounging,' the Web site calls it. I buy it.

87. THE TAP ROOM

129 E. Hopkins St., Suite 120,
San Marcos. (512) 392-9824

Want a Duvel while in San Marcos? Go to the Tap Room, which has one of the largest beer selections in town. Walk in on a sunny afternoon, and you might have to take a few minutes to let your eyes adjust before you can see the handful of booths, tables and wooden stools up by the bar itself. A couple of televisions are generally tuned to sports, but the real attraction is the beer: 40 or so kinds are available on tap and about 25 in bottles.

88. THE TAVERN

12th Street and Lamar
Boulevard. 320-8377

It's one of the few bars where you can order breakfast. Every day but Monday and Tuesday, at 7 a.m., patrons can help themselves to omelets and tacos with their screwdrivers. After a fire closed it down in 2002, the Tavern sports bar reopened with the same low-key attitude and brand new paint. A full bar, with a full menu, the Tavern looks vaguely German from the outside but is full of all-American goodness on the inside.

Sports dominate the TVs. Open, in one form or another, since 1916.

89. T.C.'S LOUNGE

1413 Webberville Road. 926-2200

An historically African American East Austin bar owned by T.C. Perkins since 1979, it lures musicians and locals with its blues and DJs. T.C. sells only beer and set-ups. Beer is cheap, but lots of folks bring their own booze. One Saturday, lots of folks were dressed to the nines — purple suits and hats, glorious thigh-high boots — and lots of folks weren't. There was dancing and bustle and a \$3 cover. Mondays, they play the blues.

90. TROPHY'S

2008 S. Congress Ave. 447-0969

Trophy's is long and deep toward the back, where the stage is. It's got crummy floors, the pool table, the jukebox, the bad lighting, bathrooms that make me want to hold it till I get home — real dive bar stuff. Sure, there are some fancy beers on tap, like Sierra Nevada, and all kinds of imports in bottles, and yes, there may be some serious hamburgers coming from the kitchen, but it's still a dive. And one loved by hipsters and hardened barflies alike.

91. TRUDY'S TEXAS STAR

409 W. 30th St. 477-2935

Who can resist a Mexican martini? Actually if you want to keep your wits about you, resisting that martini may be in order. (Two are the limit.) Created in 1977, Trudy's stays open till 2 a.m. — at least in the bar area. All-day happy hour happens on Mondays. So close to UT and all that is Central Austin, Trudy's is low-key and full of people, some eating, some drinking, nearly all making merry. Plus, with locations down south and up north, merriness can be had all over town.

92. TRULUCK'S

10225 Research Blvd. 794-8300

Truluck's at the Arboretum has a lovely piano lounge, plush and dark, booths and tables, and an overall hint of jazz — exactly the kind of place you might go to drink a gimlet. As with most bars in upscale restaurants, Truluck's has an extensive wine list, many of which are available by the sampling (2.5 ounces) or glass: six sauvignon blancs alone are available by the sampling/glass. If you're up in North Austin and looking for a cocktail with a tasty nibble, it may hit the spot.

93. 219 WEST

219 W. Fourth St. 474-2194

This numerically named bar has a little something for everyone: corndogs and Cristal, cabernet-poached pear and beer. For some, the extensive menu and booze selection is overwhelming, for others exhilarating. The bar is loosely divided into several sections: the patio, an upstairs lounge, a cozy downstairs room, the bar area and the main floor. The crowd varies from the beautiful to the ballcapped, but the service is always outstanding.

94. THE V LOUNGE

301 E. Fifth St. 472-1860

This is a high-class joint at Eddie V's Edgewater Grille, with live music, good wine and seafood artfully presented on a plate. It's also full of high-class people. It's a good place, candle-lit and warm. Happy hour is from 4:30 to 7 p.m. every day and all night Sunday and Monday. During happy hour, oysters cost about 40 cents apiece, and appetizers are half off. Drinks are a dollar off too, but that really doesn't much matter if you're ordering martinis or cosmos anyway. Pricey and worth it.

95. VIVO

2015 Manor Road. 482-0300

This East Austin hot spot, which has added a monthly gay and lesbian night, has a lovely deck full of brightly colored plants. But for those who don't like sitting outside on spacious decks vined with flowers, Vivo has an inside drinking area. A dozen chairs line the fully-stocked bar, a quartet of tall tables provides room to nosh, and a pair of large brown leather love seats match an ottoman or two and low wooden rustic coffee table. House margaritas cost \$8.95 (a small is only \$4.95).

96. WHISKY BAR

303 W. Fifth St. 481-8599

Given that the bar specializes in single-malt scotches such as Scapa and small-batch bourbons such as Basil Hayden's, it would behoove you to order something spiffy — or, at the very least, a nice sipping Irish whiskey. The big front room, with its many booths, tables, modern art and a small stage for live music; the tiny middle room with its booths facing the bathroom doors and cigarette machine; and the back room with space cleared out to dance to DJ music: each good to drink whiskey.

97. WHOLE FOODS

525 N. Lamar Blvd. 512-476-1206

Drinking and grocery shopping: it's wilder and weirder than going to the movies at 10 a.m. But when a grocery store has actual taps for pulling beer, how can you not want to have a sip or two? At the 'beer alley,' a long, walk-in refrigerated enclosure with 350 to 400 beers, a tap is ready and waiting for a sampling moment; patrons can buy any bottle of beer and drink it while wandering. Wines vary; there's a red and white at \$4.50 and a red and white at \$7.50.

98. WINK WINE BAR

1014 N. Lamar Blvd. 482-8868

The wine list, as you might imagine from the reputation of the restaurant next door, is sterling. You can order nibbles from the restaurant here, but the real lure to this intimate space is the wine. They're labeled welcomingly: 'Rich, ripe & substantial whites' for example or "Big, bold and brazen reds.' The wine list changes as the wine-istas who run the show find new things: At any given point, about 40 to 50 wines are available by the glass; or by the bottle, of course.

99. THEY Y RESTAURANT AND BAR

7720 Texas 71. 394-0220

Oak Hill folks have their very own watering hole: the Y Bar. Located on Texas 71 just past the Y at U.S. 290, the bar and restaurant offers outdoor covered patio seating for pleasant days as well as full seating indoors. Known for its Sunday Champagne brunch (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.), the Y Bar also has a plethora of adult beverages. Casual upscale is how the place bills itself and specialty martinis reside on the menu as well as the regular full-items like whiskey and bourbon and vodka.

100. Z'TEJAS

1110 W. Sixth St. 478-5355

The margaritas will kill ya. But in such a good way. When I first moved to Austin, I ordered a swirl margarita, forgetting that the last time I had one (or four), I called an old friend's parents' home number, instead of his, at a rather late hour. Ten years later, I know how to have just one beverage. But it's hard. Z'Tejas, with its 40-person wooden front patio, 50-person annex bar, fresh Mexican appetizers to nibble, full bar and deadly

margaritas, still calls like a siren.