

Wanna ogle? Go West, young man

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Publication Date: August 28, 2003 Page: 8 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

The most important thing I can tell you about 219 West, the new Warehouse District bar in Girasole's old spot, is that there are tampons in the women's bathroom: a whole wooden box full, provided just in case. That's a classy and thoughtful-of-women touch you won't find in most bars. The second most important thing I can tell you is that I haven't seen so many men openly gawking at women and leeringly nudging each other since I've been in Austin. Then again, I haven't seen this much silicone since leaving Dallas.

On a recent Saturday night, midriffs were bared, as were brown shoulders. All the drapes, swoops and cling of the clothes served largely to direct your eyes toward skin -- bosoms, most often. There were so many bosoms. And the men noticed. I watched ordinary and sometimes older men abandon any trace of subtlety or grace and simply whack each other on the shoulder and point. Sometimes they muttered things I can't print here. (Occasionally, I've heard, they grab.) That was the same night my friend recognized a woman or two as dancers from local clubs. Beautiful men turned up as well, though in fewer numbers. And I'd swear I saw an important college athlete or two; I'd be able to tell you more if I knew anything about sports.

When you're not busy gawking or, as in my case, gawking at the gawkers, you can drink. 219 is divided into several sections: the beer porch, which is outside and has a fountain; the martini lounge, which is inside, by the bar, and is always crowded; the wine cellar, downstairs and more subtle in tone and style; the scotch room, with big comfy leather chairs and a large cigar collection as well as a view of the downstairs action; and the main area, the Julep Lounge, with an assortment of tables and chairs and sitting areas near the DJ and the stage. (I should mention that management contacted me for "womanly" input as they were building the place; obviously, my "funky cool art/ironic kitsch" theme was not a hit.)

You can order any kind of drink no matter where you sit, of course, not to mention a wide variety of tasty if not inspiring food, from seafood beignets to cute mini-burgers with proscuitto, basil, mozzarella and tomatoes to mini corn dogs. The various types of food are meant to be paired with specific beverages, but no one will stop you if you feel the need to quaff a delicate pinot noir with a corn dog. (They might, of course, mock you later in the staff room.)

Then again, they might not. The service at 219 was excellent. Whether I came in flip-flops or full makeup, the waitstaff was solicitous and quick. Arriving with my friend Susan and the remnants of our dinner one moderately busy night, our waitress offered to put the doggie bag in the fridge and brought it back, unasked, with our check. One friend of mine named 219 the uber-Fourth Street bar. Another called it an "alternate Austin." Not alternative. Alternate. It's not the Austin he or I see very often when we go

out. But if you want to watch it, try going before 11. That seems to be when the line starts on the weekend.

Another new bar opened recently, at Sixth and Red River streets: Bigsby's, from the same guys who own Red-eyed Fly. I stuck my head in the last couple of Saturdays and hung out with Rockstar Brent, who's managing there. It's a huge space (it used to be the music venue Six of Clubs), with six pool tables, enormous movie screens behind the bar on which films or sportscasts are shown, freestanding video games including Golden Tee and Ms. Pac-Man, and a shuffleboard table in the works. It's laid-back, though Brent tells me he expects madness now that school has started. Still, I liked the chill vibe and the sense of open space (a lot of pool tables will do that).

Final note for those of you looking for something new -- or new-ish -- to do: the Tavern on Lamar Boulevard has finally reopened. They may not have a boxful of tampons, nor six pool tables, but as the sign says, they do have air conditioning.

219 West. 219 W. Fourth St., 474-2194. 5 p.m.-2 a.m. Tue.-Fri.; 6 p.m.-2 a.m. Saturday; 7 p.m.-2 a.m. Sunday; closed Monday.
Bigsby's. 505 E. Sixth St.