

## PATIO PATOIS

With fall-like temperatures on the horizon, Austinites can again drink up the atmosphere in restaurants' outdoors spaces.

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October was ever my favorite month.

But it wasn't till I moved back to Texas that I realized why: It's the month things here cool down. Or, more accurately: It's the month when the heat breaks. The first breezes come. There's that day when you're riding your bike and the tips of your ears go red and the canals hurt just a little bit because the air is cool as it sings by. That day you get to pull out your tall leather boots and turtlenecks, turn off the air conditioner, open every window in the house and sleep with the smell of leaves. When you can go out to a patio bar, have a drink, and when you stand up, you don't stick to the seat.

Ah yes, October.

I've compiled a list of restaurants with great patios. They vary -- different parts of town, different levels of elegance and casualness, different attitudes. Each appeals to a different mood, but hopefully, together they'll present you with excellent options on the first heat-broken October day you'd like to have a nibble and a drink while wearing a long-sleeved shirt.

Fino

2905 San Gabriel St., Austin, 472-6483

Sometimes a girl just needs a little paper-thin serrano ham with manchego and a glass of white wine. Needs it. And when she wants it on a patio, Fino is the place to go. Despite the fact that I keep trying to stop by on a Sunday (it's closed), I have actually made it to the new restaurant occupying the old Granite Cafe space run by the folks from Asti. The outdoor patio is rare among Austin patios because of its modernist grace. Clean lines, understated elegance, shades that filter the sun when it's too hot, and a thoughtful and knowledgeable staff: Fino is a place I intend to spend a few fall afternoons, perhaps grading papers, perhaps simply tasting Bordeaux.

Iron Cactus

606 Trinity St., 472-9240

Got a little Looky-Lou in you? If so, you might enjoy climbing up to the rooftop patio at the downtown Iron Cactus and watching the Sixth Street nightlife below. Whatever else it might be, Sixth Street is never dull: from Leslie to tourists to University of Texas students, the people-watching is great. And at the Iron Cactus, you can drink beer at the lofty height of about 25 feet (two and a half stories up) and gaze upon the world below. Water misters help dispel the heat, food is of the Mexican grill variety and tequila options abound -- 76 to be precise. The entire restaurant seats more than 600, but the upstairs patio has room for only about 225 people; get there a little early on weekend evenings to get choice crowd-watching seats.

Freddie's Place

1703 S. First St., 445-9197

Could it be more happening? The South First Street venue with fabulous burgers and 20 kinds of cold beer and washer-pitching has been rock-'em sock-em busy every time I've been by. (Being a geek, I've been known to show up a little early so that I get parking and

then pass the time with a Dos Equis or two.) The outdoor patio is shaded by oak trees, the tables are of the picnic variety, and everything has that low-key South Austin feel -- the colored lights strung from trees, the friends of friends' improv troupe hanging out at the other end of the table, the basket of fries so full I couldn't finish it even after an hour and a half of swim practice (the improv guys helped me out).

#### Iguana Grill

2900 N. RM 620, 266-8439

Though a friend was not particularly interested in drinking from a special Iguana cup and though I was disappointed that the special Iguana cup wasn't shaped like an iguana but a regular plastic glow-in-the-dark cup with the Iguana Grill logo, we were both delighted by the Golden Iguana margaritas that came in our respective drinking receptacles.

Homemade with a hint of orange juice for flavor and golden color, the delectable margaritas paired nicely with our calming, unbroken view of Lake Travis and its boats. Iguana Grill, two miles south of the Mansfield Dam, offers 50 to 60 umbrella-covered tables on its patio, and each lets you see the water. The menu runs to acclaimed "Lake-Mex" cuisine, and the salsa's a favorite with many (me included, my friend not so much), but the bigger lure is that feel-far-far-from-Austin-and-your-regular-life deep breath of a lake view.

#### 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 (several house cocktails are \$4 and appetizers are half-price), 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 on any of the traditional American fare offered (think macaroni and cheese done well), sip a glass of wine and study the refurbished 19th century building.

#### The Cafe at the

#### Four Seasons

98 San Jacinto Blvd., 478-4500

Araspberry mojito with real muddled raspberries and fresh mint, you say? Indeed, that and other elegances are available at the five-star Cafe at the Four Season's 42-seat terrace, overlooking Town Lake. Scotches, margaritas, martinis, beer in tall, cool glasses -- or just about anything else from the full bar -- can be paired with exceptional cuisine or drunk alone under an umbrella. Smokers can walk to the wooden Adirondack chairs facing the water and lounge at the edge of the green, green lawn while smoking. Show up on a Saturday evening, and you might even get to see a wedding performed just a stone's throw down the way. Go during a music festival, and your friend may catch a glimpse of the wild-maned Lyle Lovett, though sadly, heartbreakingly really, you may not.

#### Vin Bistro

1601 W. 38th St., 377-5252

This little patio tucked away on Kerbey Lane offers some of the best wine deals in town: \$5 or 50 percent off for any glass of wine (depending on the glass) all day Wednesdays; a variety of bargains on wines after 8 p.m. Saturday nights. The wine selection is good, and in my handful of visits, the service was exceptional: arriving a couple minutes past the

end of the lunch hours, I was allowed by the waitress to order drinks, despite the fact that technically, they were closed. The new white canopy shields the patio from the heat; views of the various Kerbey Lane shops, all housed in actual houses, create an intimate, neighborly vista. Plus, if you're hungry, you'll find some good victuals: executive chef Sean Fulford was recently named one of Austin's best new chefs by XL food critic Dale Rice.

#### Hula Hut

3826 Lake Austin Blvd., 476-4852

Aday in the sun, a view of the lake, a margarita under the grass-thatched roof of a palapa. Chuy's Hula Hut has been a West Austin hangout since 1993, and on sunny days, you'll likely find it full of people who like looking at Lake Austin and contemplating the menu of Mexican-Polynesian food while drinking a beer. Surfboards serve as decoration, unlit tiki torches enhance the decor, and about 300 people can gather between the deck bar and the bar actually on a pier; it's as close to the water as a girl can get and still keep her martini dry. Though admittedly, sitting on the shaded deck on a tempestuously hot Sunday, we were tempted to jump in the lake. Which makes me wonder how many times that has actually happened . . .

#### Shady Grove

1624 Barton Springs Road, 474-9991

The KGSR concerts have wound down, but Shady Grove, with its picnic tables, '40s-era-state-park decor, and 35-table outdoor patio and six-table cocktail area (drinks and apps only) still appeal. The longstanding Austin favorite --owned by the same folks as Hula Hut -- serves burgers and chicken fried steak kinds of fare, along with some Tex-Mex items. Nearly every night the weather's nice, films are on the menu as well -- a screen is put up and folks can sit on the patio and watch movies. If they'd rather pass on the movie, there's still plenty to look at: wagon wheels, the silver bullet trailer, pecan trees that shade sun-wary patrons. Everything about Shady Grove is low-key and relaxed, especially if you sip on a Shady Thing while waiting to be seated.

#### 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 from San Francisco just over five years ago, the only person I knew in the whole city took me for drinks at Z'Tejas. 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 and had a lovely "conversation" with his dad. Ten years later, now that I'm a grown-up, I know how to have just one beverage. But it's hard. Z'Tejas, with its four-dozen-person wooden front patio, fresh Mexican appetizers to nibble, full bar and deadly margaritas, still calls like a siren. I, like Odysseus, will lash myself to a mast. One margarita only. No swirl. And no phone calls.

The following fields overflowed: SOURCE = SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Caption: With its clean lines and understated elegance, the outdoor seating area at Fino (which is in the space that used to house Granite Cafe) is a fine place to sit and sip a glass of wine. // Freddie's Place offers more than just some crayons to keep kids occupied. One day last month, Julie Lee proved interesting for some little ones. Lauren Adamo, third

from right, holds kitchen tools that Lee handed out for the kids to use as instruments. Her son Nico, 2, is the one in the plaid shirt. To Adamo's right is Becky Bills and her daughter Sydney, 3. // Raul de Leon and Jeannette Castilleja hang out at Freddie's Place, where you can hear music or watch people pitch washers. // Raspberries tint this mojito. // It's hard not to grin when you have a view like the one Donna Petersen has as she sits on the patio at Hula Hut. The deck is actually a pier that sits on Lake Austin.