

A TOUCH OF BIKER-BAR HOSPITALITY

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"Did you get lost? Are you trying to get out of traffic?" a patron asked me as I stepped into Beverly's. In other words, what, exactly, was I (with my spiffy glasses and new jeans) doing in a biker bar in far South Austin? The question was friendly, the puzzlement obvious.

You know that scene in "Mystic Pizza" where the townies come into the locals' bar, all spiffy and so clearly out of place? Or that same scene in a dozen other movies? That was me. Not to mention my lovely and wild-maned friend and poet Briante and computer guys David and Rick, who'd come with us. We were clearly not bikers. Not even close. Couldn't look like we belonged there if Julie Taymor had made us up; our faces are unlined, our hands are soft. Beverly's isn't a Steve-Forbes-has-a-fancy-motorcycle kind of bar (though I suspect Ann Richards would do fine there). Beverly's is a biker bar -- guys with beards and hair and big silver crosses and leather vests.

However, outsiders though we were, we were made welcome. The bartender brought drinks by regularly. Regulars talked to us. I heard about when the old chimney burned down and a bunch of guys donated their time to rebuild it (the new one is beautiful). Another regular sat down at our table, introduced himself and began talking to Rick about fishing (and going on benders).

Cher was blasting when I walked in, Neil Young was available and there was some good old Southern rock. The big round table we sat at, located conveniently in front of the rebuilt fireplace, was, we were told, the place to hear the jukebox. And, from our point of view, also an excellent place to watch people playing pool, to read the graffiti scrawled all over the ceiling (including right above the ceiling fan), to look at the posters of girls with beer, to see the sequined pumps by the fireside hearth and the holiday decoration in the firescreen, to witness the wall covered with photos of bikers and a framed copy of "The Biker's Eulogy," to admire the big bikes parked out front, their owners standing just outside the door, talking.

Not that it's otherwise hard to see things in Beverly's. It's not a big place: just a room really, with a dilapidated ceiling, a bar with stools, neon beer signs and sundry stuff (writing, photos) over all the walls. It was a good place, even if we were out of place. Briante said that being at Beverly's was like being in someone's living room; we were clearly in someone else's space. It felt more like a clubhouse that was open to the public but didn't really expect the public to show up. People have been telling me about Beverly's for years, and I was excited to go see an old roadside bar that hadn't been shined up, a place you wouldn't find on Fourth Street or frat-friendly Sixth. When the jukebox fell silent, the man who'd greeted me as I came in announced that since we clearly had money (a strange position for a graduate student to be in), we should put the quarters in. When Rick reached for his wallet, the man was taken aback. He'd just been giving us a hard time.

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Beverly's. 8504 S. Congress Ave., 282-9142. Hours: 10 a.m.-2 a.m., Monday-Saturday;
noon-2 a.m., Sunday.