

Why go to Sixth? for this burger.

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Publication Date: July 31, 2003 Page: 8 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

Punk rock. Really, that's all you need to know about Casino El Camino -- that it's got a Joey Ramone soul. Well, that and the fact that it makes a fabulous, fat burger.

When cook and author Anthony Bourdain was in town for a reading not too long ago, people insisted he stop in Casino. It made sense: Tony, being a punk rock kinda guy with an appreciation for quality food, should have swung by the place. (He did. You could hear people all over Casino going, "Hey, isn't that the guy from that show? You know, the one who eats all the gross stuff?" Yes. It is. He is. And in some cultures, bear bile is a delicacy.)

Casino is one of the few bars on Sixth Street worth going to Sixth Street for. The large patio is friendly, the pool tables are fine places to humiliate yourself, and if you're considering getting a tattoo or unusual piercing, the people-watching can be downright inspirational. (Post-Casino, it always takes me several days to convince/remind myself that I don't need a tattoo, that I don't really want one, no matter how hot they look on punkabilly chicks. I also have to remind myself that I'm not a hot punkabilly chick. Next life.)

But the biggest draw, and I mean that literally, is the gi-normous burgers Casino serves. They are huge, delectable monsters covered in goodies like avocado, blue cheese, barbecue sauce, tomatoes, bacon. Grilled, they're still an inch or so thick, which is part of the reason they take about 20 minutes to cook. This is not fast food -- if you try to get a burger on a crowded Saturday night, your wait could be as long as an hour. (If, that is, you get a burger at all; the cook has been known to simply refuse new orders when the kitchen's swamped.) But the wait is worth it: three-quarters of a pound of yummy Angus beef. You may not have to eat again for days. Those disinclined to eat burgers may happily wreck their health with baskets of chili cheese fries, footlong hot dogs, wings or some chicken-y stuff. (Wussies.)

The jukebox has been known to lure people in even when they're not feeling meat-tastic. The Buzzcocks, Elvis, the Ramones: everything that's so hard to find elsewhere on Sixth. (Not impossible, mind you, but hard.) Weeknights, say around happy hour time, the sound on the jukebox is turned off and the sound on the two television sets is turned on. The bar itself is cavernously dark (last week I stared for a good five minutes at a strange guy, thinking he was my brother, before my eyes could adjust), so the cheery colors of the Simpsons, a Casino favorite, take on an almost Gothic feel. You might also see an arthouse, offbeat film -- "Barton Fink," for example, or anything with Willem Dafoe in drag. As I've said dozens of times before, I'm not a big fan of the bar TV experience, but I recognize that Casino's taste in televised offerings is as good as it gets.

I've been in Dallas for most of the summer, trying to help teenagers become better writers. As much fun as it was to mold young minds, I missed Austin. There are things I appreciate about Dallas: the restaurants, the museums, my mother and stepfather feeding

me, the very cool people I've been friends with for 15 or 20 years. But Austin's definitely my home. And funky places like Casino are one reason why.

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(from box)

Casino El Camino. 517 E. Sixth St., 469-9330 Hours: 4 p.m.-2 a.m. Monday-Sunday

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