

LOTS OF HOWLING AT AUSTIN'S COYOTE UGLY, BUT NOT MUCH BITE

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Publication Date: July 1, 2004 Page: 9 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

It's Disney dirty, my friend Owen said. Yes, that's Coyote Ugly.

In a GQ article, former coyote Elizabeth Gilbert writes about a night in the original East Village bar: At 1 a.m., she whips regular Redneck Lou in "such an ironic way that you, the customer, die laughing." At 2, she has a fake sword fight (brooms and trash can lids) on the bar with another regular, who's wearing a Zorro mask she made by ripping his shirt. At 3, "Spit-Take Phil" has filled a rubber glove with beer, pierced holes in each finger, placed "the bloated glove into his belt, so it hangs like an udder" and she milks him. By six, she's sweeping bottles off the bar trying to get people to go home.

What I've read about the edginess of the original Coyote Ugly, what I've heard about the Hank Williams, Jack Daniels kitsch/rough/dive-ness of the original Coyote Ugly, what founder tough-talking supreme saleswoman Lil seems to be about: That ain't what I saw. What I saw was Disney dirty.

It's Disney clean and friendly: The bouncers came over to our table and chatted with us about how great the bikers had been the weekend before, about how familylike the staff is, and how careful they are to make sure customers never touch the bartenders, or the women who get up and join the bartenders. Our drinks were handed to us efficiently and politely.

The bar is on Sixth -- not far from the spiffy new Hilton Hotel -- and most of the customers looked much shinier than those you'd find, say, at Ginny's in the early afternoon (though there'd be a little crossover).

It is also dirty: Bartenders (all women) shake and rattle and roll on the bar, and they invite female patrons to do the same (no, ahem, "roosters" on the block, they say). Women gyrate into and with each other. Bras from female patrons hang behind the bar. The bartenders wear jeans so low and midriffs so long you wonder how much shaving they had to do before coming to work. I saw a variation of the body shot that consisted of bartender No. 1 lying down on the bar and bartender No. 2 taking a slice of lime with her mouth from bartender No. 1's hands, conveniently located just over her crotch. The patron drinks a shot carefully raised from bartender No. 1's belly and gets lime juice dribbled into his mouth from the mouth of bartender No. 2, who's just squeezed that fabulous wedge.

Beyond the questions of feminism and empowerment (and this column isn't long enough to properly debate those questions, though I will say the shot routine left me sad and kind of disgusted), Coyote Ugly disappointed me because it wasn't unexpected.

Part of the glory of the original seemed to be its no-holds-barred determination to get and keep customers. I've never been to the original, and am not even sure I'd like it. But it

seemed to have a flair, a fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants quickness that sounds appealing. Bartenders did what needed to be done -- launched swordfights, made Zorro masks and shook their things.

What I saw in Austin was all about shaking their things: The bartenders danced, female patrons got up and predictably grinded their bodies in ways that would make a small-town girl blush. The customers both nights I went seemed to enjoy the spectacle; on a Sunday night we saw various pairings of women and women, and women and women and men, as well as men and women, some of whom were groping each other in places most people don't grope in public. (OK, that was unexpected.) But nobody made brooms into swords or trashcan lids into shields. Or even gloves into udders. Instead my experience at the bar was well-ordered, carefully orchestrated "sexy" fun. Yawn.

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Coyote Ugly Saloon. 501 E. Sixth St., Suite A. 236-8459.