

WHAT'S THE ALLURE OF DAVE & BUSTER'S? A 'VROOM!' WITH A BREW

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I used to drink and play driving games. By driving games, I don't mean drag racing or cone circling: I mean games, arcade games. "Daytona USA." "San Francisco Rush." Playing them with a gin and tonic next to me made me feel wild and reckless. I was dangerous. (You can stop laughing at me now.) Recently, I was reminded of how well driving games and beer went together (it's like peanut butter and chocolate) when I went to Dave & Buster's.

For the 10 of you who might not know D&B, I should explain that it's a full entertainment kinda joint. Part restaurant, part arcade, part family entertainment, part corporate resource, D&B also has a full bar for drinking to escape any of the above: Thirty-two televisions, 15 beers on tap (Guinness included), and a bartender who'll offer you a martini with your lunch like McDonald's offers fries.

Heading to D&B midweek and midday, you may find a corporate meeting going on in one room; couples eating lunch at red booths whose quilted backing rises like a deco idea of a skyscraper in another; kids taking down pixelated baddies; and absolutely no one at the Skee-Ball lanes, leaving them wide open for 30-somethings who really should be home grading papers. Friday-night happy-hour time, the bar may be full of a wide assortment of folks of all shapes and sizes and suits and tennis shoes stopping in for a snack and a drink after a long day. And the bar and various other rooms are big enough (45,000 square feet) that I haven't seen the joint ever get jammed (though I admit that my forays into D&B are infrequent).

In the back of the enormous place, just outside the arcade, is a smaller bar and across the way, a beer stand, for the acquisition of a beverage during game time. Between them is the little shop where you can exchange tickets for the strange little toys that make you feel better about how much money you've spent on games. Games, by the way, number in the hundreds and range from Ms. Pac-Man to various Star Wars incarnations to water gun shootouts and plain old shooting games. (I hate guns, but love shooting games. Go figure.)

It's easy to make fun of D&B -- it's completely corporate, so much so that sometimes you wonder why the staff doesn't have to wear flair. But it's hard not to have fun while playing Skee-Ball. I first went to the Austin D&B a few years ago, as my friend's "date" to his law firm holiday gathering. We had some food, made some small talk and proceeded to spend a couple hours shooting, wrestling, and drinking and drive gaming (or at least I did that last). It was fun. Really fun.

Addendum: One night, post downtown Alamo Drafthouse, my friends and I stopped into the now five-week-old Ringers Sports Lounge, where Miguel's used to be. As regular readers might know, I'm not nuts about sports bars. First of all, I much prefer to talk to people than watch TV. Second, I'm not much of a sports fan. There's no question that it's

my idea of hell (even the lights on one wall were round and orangey-red and looked to me like warmers for food being held over people's heads) but a sports fan should love this place. It's covered in televisions. A few statistics: There's a 17-foot and a 15-foot HD projector screen TV; there are seven 50-inch HD plasma TVs and nine 43-inch ones; and there's a TV in the mirror of both the men's and women's bathrooms. The cavernous space eschews sports paraphernalia for sleek warehouseness (think expensive high-ceilinged cave); the chef was a fine dining guy and the menu includes fancy food served until 1:30 a.m. on weekends; the bar is full, the beer mostly bottled (Dos Equis, Bud Light, Fireman's Ale, Pyramid Hefeweizen and Fat Tire being the exceptions) and the service was warm and efficient.

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