

Fado: Not pretty at closing time

Moira Muldoon

Publication Date: April 10, 2003 Page: 11 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

I'll be honest: Most of the time I hate Fado. I hate that on Friday nights it's body-to-body crowded, with men boasting to each other (and everyone within earshot) while staring down the front of women's shirts. I hate that on a Saturday night I can't go in for 15 minutes without getting hit on. I hate that Fado looks Disneyland Irish, with clever quips from Oscar Wilde or moving verses from Thomas Kinsella printed on paper placemats. I hate that Fado is so corporate it doesn't have a particular sense of place the way my favorite pubs in Dublin did. I hate that the Fado in Columbus, Ohio, looks just like the Fado in Washington, D.C., looks just like the Fado on Fourth Street. And did I mention that I hate that Fado is a major meat market on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights? To my surprise, I've discovered I kinda like the place on weekday afternoons. All bars smell terrible in the middle of the afternoon: old smoke, old beer, the hangover of excess. Fado is no exception. But in the afternoon, the sunlight comes in through the windows and lights up the walled-off booths (aka snugs) in the front, making them appealing places to have lunch. Now that spring's here, eating outside on the patio is also an option.

And the food is good. Actually, it's lovely. Real rashers (yummy Irish bacon), proper sausages, boxty and delectable chips. It's actually better than the food I used to eat in Dublin pubs.

The daytime crowd is a better mix than the nighttime carousers. I heard a lot more Irish and English than braggart accents, though that might have had something to do with the soccer game between England and Turkey being broadcast. (There was something terribly wrong, in a postcolonially ironic way, about sitting with my English friend in an Irish pub in America while the Brits banged up the Turks in a soccer match that you had to pay \$20 to watch. But, as I said, the food was good.)

Fado, which means "Once upon a time" in Irish, is twistily laid out, with lots of wood and glass dividers separating the bar into cozy snugs. On occasion it can make it hard to find friends who beat you to the place -- and sometimes you look a little silly, wandering around and poking into every cranny -- but the divisions create excellent space for hanging out.

There's also a stage. On a good day you can catch a trad session (traditional Irish music); on a bad one, you might find a cover band (traditional Irish schlock) or a country band (not traditional Irish anything). World Cup games, World Cup qualifiers, rugby and some Gaelic football are broadcast. On Sundays, there's a Bloody Mary bar, so that customers can make their own tomato juice cocktails and quit "giving out" (Irish slang for "giving grief") to the bartenders, as manager Declan explained to me. (Declan also explained his theories on the mating rituals in Fado, the importance of the Special Olympics and queried me about my age, job and philosophies in one of the longest phone conversations I've ever had with a bar manager.)

In order to research this column, I've had to drag people into Fado with me, bribe them with drinks and promise that we could leave after only a drink or two. It's too fake, it's too smokey, it's too crowded and lecherous, they complained. And I have to say, for the most part, I don't relish going to Fado myself, at least on weekend nights. But the next time I get a hankering for a rasher on a Tuesday. . .

bargirl@covad.net

Fado: 214 W. Fourth St., 457-0172

Monday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-2 a.m.