
UPSTAIRS OR DOWN, THE VIEW IS LIVELY LATE IN THE EVENING AT
FOUNDATION THE FIFTH-STREET BAR FOUNDATION

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"You must be working," an old friend said when I ran into him at Foundation, the West Fifth Street bar that replaced Hot Jumbo Bagel six months ago. "This," he said, gesturing at the glamorous crowd, "is not your style."

Nope, it's not. Foundation is definitely an "I heard Owen Wilson was here last week" kind of place. But I'm a responsible bargirl and must therefore visit even those places beyond my ken.

"We're early," a slightly abashed woman ahead of me said to her friends as we walked in. And then: "I just want to find a seat and get drunk." It was about 9 p.m. and she and her posse and my friend Anina and I were about the only people in the place. Us, and the staff still cleaning walls and windows, even though the bar had been open for an hour. Nothing like the smell of cleanser to start a night.

Anina and I ensconced ourselves in big red leather chairs to the left of the door, the better to watch who came in to "be seen." It was slow going at first -- that sort of behavior is a late-night thing. Foundation didn't get busy until 11:30, so for the first hour we had clear views of the bar space.

It's enormous: notched, square cement columns about two feet in diameter mark off two living room-esque areas, one with big leather chairs and coffee tables, the other with mod little orange chairs, coffee tables and rugs. The bar itself is round with small lights dropped from a Jetsons-style ring above it. Tiers of artfully spaced bottles of booze spiral upward and a curved wall behind the bar is tiled in brown and what I like to think of as '50s bathroom blue. (The bathroom, for the record, is also done in the same brown and blue, with shiny chrome thrown in.)

All of this can be seen from the upstairs balcony, where you can lean over the railing and gaze at vistas of bodies. The balcony also has its own bar and seating areas, for those who wish to be in a smaller, more intimate space.

But even from downstairs, people-watching proved excellent. Plenty of the young, bold, and beautiful -- many of them with glamorously made-up eyes -- sashayed in. And plenty of watchers commented as they did. Two guys and a girl sitting across from us, however, looked like they would have been at home in a coffee shop, and a number of folks looked like they'd tried awfully hard to dress bold and young and beautiful and not quite made it -- a look that always wins my heart.

Foundation is not an early-week bar, nor a happy-hour bar: It doesn't open till 8 and if my one Tuesday visit is any indication, no matter how late you stop in on Tuesday, nothing's

doing. Which is probably just as well -- I bet even Owen Wilson isn't much for being glamorous on a Tuesday night.

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Foundation. 307 W. Fifth St.; 472-4256; Tuesday-Sunday 8 p.m.-2 a.m.