
A DIFFERENT WAY TO ROLL AT JOE'S BAR

A GIRL WALKS INTO A BAR...

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I'd heard good things about Joe's before I ever stepped in, but I have to admit I was a little skeptical — Joe's is within spitting distance of Mother Egan's, Opal's, Molotov, Star Bar, Union Park and Little Woodrow's. I wasn't sure if this bar could bring something new enough to Sixth Street West to make it worthwhile.

And then I heard about bocce.

Long ago and far away, I would walk through Golden Gate Park on Sunday mornings to watch old men — usually Italian old men — dressed in white, playing bocce. I've never tried rolling one of the 4.5-inch, 3-pound balls toward the pallino — the even smaller 1.75-inch ball. (The object is to roll your ball as close to the pallino as possible.) I've played shuffleboard, and best I can tell, this is a bigger, broader, older, less slick-surfaced version of that. And it looks cool.

So I look forward to taking lessons on Thursday nights, which Joe's plans to offer eventually. In the meantime, stop by on Thursdays and you'll also encounter Joe's bocce wine special, with discounts on Bocce zinfandel and Bocce pinot grigio.

Joe's, for the record, offers a number of wine choices — including a \$15 split of Moët and Chandon White Star, not your standard “bar and grill” selection. But I probably won't splurge — Joe's isn't a splurge-y kind of place. It's dark and comfortable and exactly the kind of place where you find yourself saying, “A beer would taste great right now.”

I was perfectly happy with my bottled Negra Modelo, but my boyfriend was disgruntled because only four beers were on tap and none was local. (When I mentioned this to owner Joe Elmiger, he said he was interested in finding out more about local beers.) What grunted that boy of mine was the mini-burger. Yum. On Monday nights, instead of getting four mini-burgers, you get six for the same price (\$8), so he and I shared the juicy, smoked-gouda-covered, tomatoed and lettuceed burgers that were almost as good as the ones I love at Wink.

Joe's food has been receiving lots of raves — the chef has worked at Mirabelle and Louie's 106, and Joe's was started by Joe Elmiger of Louie's 106. The food is reasonably priced, homestyle goodness, cooked with expert touches. The all-you-can eat lunch buffet will set you back only \$8.95 and the kitchen stays open from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and from 4 to midnight.

Joe's, like all good Austin bars, opens onto a deck, and it's one that feels surprisingly airy given that it's smack up against the concrete wall of a multistory building on one side.

Inside, pool and darts and shuffleboard are free in the long deep main area. You can play Golden Tee or watch TVs, including the giant projection one on the deck.

The place does feel different from its neighbors. It's got a good beer-y, hanging-out-in-Texas vibe, which many of its neighbors do, but the food is more interesting than at some of the other nearby joints.

And there's bocce.

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