

## NOTES ON BECOMING A LOBBY-IST

Moira Muldoon

Publication Date: September 25, 2003 Page: 17 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

The Lobby Lounge at the Four Seasons serves some of the lovelier drinks I've come across. An \$11.25 cosmopolitan, made with champagne, a seasonal \$8 raspberry mojito, made with fresh raspberries. (What a sucker I am for raspberries.) Appetizers, the loveliest bar food I've come across, are also classy and expensive -- six shrimp will run \$14, but they're huge, plump, completely shelled and artfully presented.

In some ways, arriving at the bar feels like leaving Austin. Yes, there's a small stag's head up by the bar, but the bar is elegant. Say what you will about Austin, and heaven knows I love this place, but it is not an elegant city. Paris is elegant. Austin is funky. The embossed linen coasters, the fresh towels in the bathroom, tightly folded, the waitresses in gold, the tuxedoed manager with his Swiss accent, greeting guests, shaking hands, deferential and swift: This was big city, elegant stuff. And yet . . .

. . . the bar is very much Austin. From the large graceful windows the view is of bikers and runners enjoying the greenbelt. Inside, one Monday night, a number of politicians vented angrily (it was the day of the Texas D's return to the Legislature) every time someone came over to pay their respects. They were so loud I heard parts of their conversation several tables away. They took pictures with the waitress. In another corner, a dozen people conducted a meeting, each with her own laptop, the blue of their screens providing more light than the candles on the tables.

Another woman sat up at the bar, her laptop open and on; she chatted with the bartender, worked. And over it all, the politicians, the meeting, I heard a laugh, a flirty, friendly greeting voiced by an athletic, carefully dressed young woman who must, I decided, be in marketing or PR. These are people, I decided, in town for business.

It was a strange place to be a woman sitting alone, watching. I remember my mother, who traveled for business, telling me she never felt comfortable going down to a hotel bar alone. That, of course, was 20 years ago, but even so, I reflected, I never go down to hotel bars alone, though I'm not sure why. (Thanks to this column gig, I've certainly visited plenty of bars by myself.) But sitting in the Lobby Lounge, I wanted to stay. I wanted to watch the older politician calm the young one, to watch the business meeting's flirty friendliness play out. I wanted another of those delectable royal cosmopolitans, though I knew it would push my tired body into a buzz and that I still had deadlines to meet. I didn't stay.

A previous visit with a friend during a weekday happy hour was lovely and uneventful. We ate yummy food, including candied walnuts and olives served to everyone who sits at a table; I drank the aforementioned raspberry mojito. The bar was bustling and the service was good. The floral arrangement in the hotel entryway was exquisite, striking and truly artistic. Suits dominated the space, the grays and browns soft against the off-

white walls. In the past, I'd idly wondered where a person who believed in Saville Row would get a drink in dressed-down Austin, and now I knew.

No. Actually, I hadn't noticed the profound lack of perfectly tailored men in Austin, because Austin isn't a town where you look for them. But they were there, at the Four Seasons, wearing pinstripes as power, the way I wear glasses as art.  
bargirl@covad.net