

AT SAM'S, THE DRINKING IS EASY, NOT FANCY
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Publication Date: September 29, 2005 Page: 13 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

You know if you see local musician Jeff Johnston warming up his saw (he plays it with a bow), you're in for a good night. And that was the first thing I viewed when I wandered into Sam's Town Point, a great old smoky bar about 20 feet southwest of the Austin city limits.

Located on Allred Drive, Sam's can be a little bit hard to find -- I'd been told only that it was behind the Ace Hardware at Manchaca Road and Slaughter Lane. So I drove through the Ace parking lot, and found a little road at the end, jumped a curb (wincing for my car), and got onto the road, which took me to Sam's. Had I called ahead and gotten directions, I would have discovered that there's an actual turn you can make from Slaughter Lane onto Riddle Road and then to Allred Drive, and that there are signs on that path pointing to Sam's. But hey, that makes it less of an adventure, right? (Besides, I didn't know the bar's proper name -- Sam's High Town, High Point, Sam's Point Town -- and that makes it impossible to look up.)

The bar itself is an easy comfortable place -- low ceilings like an old rec room, green patterned carpet, wooden chairs and stools with those rounded spokes that look like they could have come from a tall ship's steering wheel (they actually came from a Holiday Inn). Long tables, little tables, round tables: a plethora of seating options is yours in the one big room that is the bar. A pair of pool tables, one small, one larger, looks level. Three dart boards get lots of play on Thursday nights, when the dart-throwers come in, and the jukebox and video game machines provide entertainment while drinking beer. Beer signs are plentiful, and ashtrays cover the tables for those who still want to smoke in bars. (Not me, I promise, Mom.)

If you order a beer -- and it's the kind of place where you should order a beer -- you get your own koozie with it. A couple of guys near me were drinking Natural Light in cans, which cost only a dollar-fifty; I opted for the pricier Dos XX, lime, no salt. Former owner Peggy Grossman, who passed the bar to her son Walter (Wally Jr.) in April, tells me that they'll bring in any kind of beer customers ask for -- they've just ordered some Pearl Light at a patron's request, for example. If you want spirits, bring your own; they sell setups. Last call, for the record, comes early: The bar opens at 1 p.m. but closes at midnight every day except Saturday, when it's open till 1 a.m. And though it used to be a private club, these days it's open to all.

The Wednesday night I stopped by, only a dozen or so patrons had dropped in. Some played pool, some chatted. At least half of them sat up by the stage, listening to the band. I'd heard about the bar from a musician friend, who'd heard about it from another musician -- go to Sam's, he'd been told, because that's where real people play and hang out. The night we were there, we think we identified Scrappy Jud Newcomb and Landis Armstrong playing. For a little while, several of them just jammed. It was fabulous. Loose, relaxed and really good. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, bands play.

Mea culpa: In my last column, I said that Mondays were the days for \$1 Lone Stars at Brentwood Tavern. It's actually Sundays.

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Sam's Town Point. 2115 Allred Drive, 282-0083.