

While you were away...

A new lineup of restaurants, bars and stores to get into an Austin state of mind // Drink
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Hello, rock stars, rock fans, filmmakers, film fans, insiders, outsiders, Austinites and Australians. So glad you all could make it out this weekend. In order to make your stay with us more pleasant, allow me to introduce you to Austin's newest libational ventures and born-again watering holes. Here, in no particular order, are some of the bars new in the past year and their stories (or mine, depending).

Given the nature of the event you are attending, we will begin with a bar with a musical theme. Big posters of jazz musicians line the hallway leading into Ludwig's, an upscale joint in the Warehouse District that looks like nothing so much as an expensive, open, white-walled California home (as a friend recently pointed out). A baby grand piano poses gracefully in the center of the main living and drinking room, a crowded bar stands to your right and a raised white banquette with a view curves artfully from the wall, L.A. museum style. Outside is a wonderful, small patio area, with raised tables and stools and real wood and soft cushioned furniture (which gets covered in the rain). Heating lamps will keep you warm in the event of a mid-March chill; a less crowded bar will help you keep cool in the event of a mid-March heat wave. Girls wear pumps and asymmetrical cling; men come in all shapes and sizes. Hair product required.

A mere block or two away is Cuba Libre, also known as Candyland because of all the eye candy. Cuba Libre serves delectable mojitos and tapas (the kitchen's open till 10 p.m. weekdays and 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, closed on Sunday); certainly the interior of the bar is deep and warmly colored; of course the service is pleasant and efficient (even during Mardi Gras weekend). But these are not the kinds of things people mention when they talk about Cuba Libre: They speak only of hotties.

MugShots is not the spot for the hot to trot, but drink enough of the really cheap booze and you won't notice. Part punk, part rock 'n' roll, part warm and neighborly, MugShots is notable mostly for its jukebox (very good), its drinks (very cheap) and its building (old Austin-style architecture). Hang out, throw darts, drink, talk to a guy who used to be a rock star and now works for Hoovers. Wear a hooded sweatshirt for maximum credibility.

If you're going to shows at Opal Divine's or Momo's, you might think about walking up to the brand-spanking-new Tambaleo. Veteran SXSW-goers may remember this as the huge old Electric Lounge space, but Tambaleo has forgone the neon slam of the old days and opted for soft colors, hard floors, big couches forming small enclaves and an awkward assortment of standard black tables and chairs, presumably where people can eat, though tapas service doesn't start till summer. The artists, performers, slam poets and rockers who populated the old Lounge probably won't frequent this sleeked-out space, but young hipsters abound. Perhaps the same ones who quickly filled up the new-fangled apartment buildings next door. . .

I've heard Apple Bar described as a New York City kind of place, and it is, in fact, small and cozy and big-city vertical (there's an upstairs and a downstairs) rather than wide-open-Texas horizontal. Big art hangs on the walls. Bartenders concoct on both floors, and on weekend nights servers will carry your drinks the 10 feet from the bar to the couch or stool you occupy. I'm not sure which of the above qualities makes the bar New York-ish, but my two born-and-raised New Yorker friends agreed the bar was sort of New York-y except 1) the people seemed all wrong for a New York bar (maybe because they were Austinites) and 2) the art felt very Austin (I have no idea what Austin art feels like). The result: sort of Austin, sort of New York. I think. It's a fine place. Just perhaps not very exciting.

Finally, as you are walking through the streets of Austin, please take into consideration some of these new establishments. The Bar at Thistle, on the more grown-up end of Sixth Street, is granite clean and slightly antiseptic, but it is possessed of enormous windows well-suited to people watching. An equally austere restaurant is attached to the bar, should you wish to dine. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Ed's Cucaracha, a place so dive-y, it lacks a phone, or at least a directory listing. I went in search of Ed's one night; my friend and I had nothing more than a name, a hunch about its location, and a few dollars in our pockets to spend. We questioned bartenders all over town, but to no avail. We never found it. I have, however, been recently and reliably informed that we were fools, that the bar is located in plain sight at 406 E. Sixth St. All those stops in other bars along the way must have distracted us. Oh yes, and there's a new bar called the Fox and the Hound -- perhaps you have one in your town. I find it to be the epitome of all that is unholy (soulless, overwhelming, TVs, TVs, TVs everywhere), but if you, in your brief sojourn with us, decide you'd prefer to watch sports on multiple large-screen TVs, rather than listen to bands, Godspeed.

(from box)

Apple Bar

120 W. Fifth St., 322-9291, Wednesday 4 p.m.-midnight, Thursday-Saturday 4 p.m.-2 a.m., Sunday 4 p.m.-midnight.

Bar at Thistle

300 W. Sixth St., 275-9777, Monday-Thursday 7 a.m.-10 p.m., Friday 7 a.m.-11 p.m., Saturday 5 p.m.-11 p.m.

Cuba Libre

409-A Colorado St., 472-2822, 4 p.m.-2 a.m. daily.

Fox and Hound

Smokehouse & Tavern

401 Guadalupe St., 494-1200, 11 a.m.-2a.m. daily.

Ludwig's

217 W. Fourth St., 494-1150, Tuesday-Sunday 7 p.m.-2 a.m.

MugShots

407 E. Seventh St., 236-0008, 8 p.m.-2 a.m. daily.

Tambaleo

302 Bowie St., 472-3213, Monday-Friday 4 p.m.-2 a.m., Saturday-Sunday 6 p.m.-2 a.m.