

BAR-HOPPING ON BURNET: THE GAME'S AFOOT

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The whole Brentwood neighborhood is booming. People are buying houses, selling houses, remodeling houses. Someone even built a house with a turret. (Every time I drive by, I wonder if the residents are tempted to shoot flaming arrows at the people eating at the Little Deli just down the street. Had I a turret, I'd indulge in flaming arrow fantasies.) As the neighborhood -- located between Lamar Boulevard and Burnet Road, Justin Lane and 45th Street -- changes, so do the neighborhood joints. The Stone House Grill on Burnet became the Brentwood Tavern in June, and I'm happy to report that between the hours of 3 and 7, a pint of draft Lone Star will set you back only a buck-fifty -- and it's just a buck on Mondays. If draft Lone Star doesn't float your boat, frozen margaritas set you back only \$3 during happy hour and the other nine beers on draft, wines and wells are cheaper too.

In some ways, the Brentwood Tavern feels like a north central version of Freddie's. Beer flows. Hefty burgers land on the table with a solid thump. (Brentwood serves them on yummy sweet buns.) Outdoor tables promise that one day soon it will again be pleasant to sit outside during daylight hours.

But Brentwood, unlike Freddie's, doesn't have the cool, in-vogue vibe, and so it isn't packed to the gills. There's parking. One path to the front door slips through a nursery, so you walk through plants and flowers. The farmer's market is right behind the bar. On Tuesday through Saturday from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., the limestone-walled Brentwood Tavern hosts live music -- the stage is wooden, huge, and covered. And did I mention that you can get a table?

Head another few blocks north on Burnet -- all the way to U.S. 183 -- and you'll come to Sherlock's Baker Street Public House & Grill. Where Brentwood is low-key and Austin neighborhoody, Sherlock's is bells and whistles and British-themed.

A red phone stands by the front door. Several employees in uniform check your ID and keep count of guests with a hand-held clicker. As you approach the front door, you can see the 11-table small outdoor patio with umbrellas and iron rails. (A separate 14-table smoking patio is now available though it won't be complete until October.)

Inside, the first room has lots of polished wood, snugs, booths and big sit-and-chat leather chairs. Exit stage left -- to the game room next door has not one but three Golden Tees, darts, pool and a foos ball table. Foos ball -- a game second only to skee ball for sheer delight.

To the right of the main room is the gi-normous dancing room. The dance floor runs up almost to the stage, where bands play every night but Sunday and Tuesday. When the bands aren't playing, the music tends toward the mid- to late '80's.

You need a driver's license and a credit card to open a tab; once you've opened it, you can order one of several zillion beers on tap -- I had the Czech beer Pilsner Urquell because I was with Czech friends in town from Prague (and I think they drank Texas beer). Happy hour runs till 9 p.m. and the kitchen -- with offerings from "British sausage roll" to quesadillas and "Covent Garden" salads -- stays open till 2 a.m., a rarity in that neck of the woods, and in most of Austin.

Now, if we could just talk Vulcan into opening a fourth location next to the H-E-B at Burnet and Koenig . . .

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