

Less Electric, More Luxe Lounge

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My friend Susan, a most delightful person, has a delightful habit of calling things as she sees them. Which may explain why a scant few seconds after entering Tambaleo she began chanting her Tambaleo-inspired mantra: "Weeeee-ner. Weeeee-ner."

Susan was displeased by the clientele. Susan missed the Electric Lounge. She'd been nervous walking to the front door bar, clutching my hand and hoping that Tambaleo, which recently opened in the old Electric Lounge space, wasn't going to be completely awful. She was one of a bunch of ex-Loungers in my company visiting Tambaleo for the first time that night. All of them were nervous about how their old slam poetry/indie rock show/arts community home had turned out. The answer, apparently, was "wiener." The Electric Lounge, which sat by the railroad tracks a few blocks south of GSD&M, closed before I moved to Austin. And it's hard to imagine how the space that houses the very slick and very sleek Tambaleo was ever a haven for the talented and starving. Everything about Tambaleo is fat and sassy and well-to-do. The couches are overstuffed, the color scheme runs to tasteful umbers and burnt ash, the bar curves fully around. Tambaleo is closer to Fourth Street than to Desolation Row.

As a result, the crowd feels more b-school than art school. The handful of times I've been in, I've seen some very expensively and trendily dressed people, people dancing on tables in their well-cut clothes, people wearing glo-stick necklaces, young people, young-ish people, people on the rebound from a big (UT?) formal, guys in serious scope mode, girls in serious scope mode -- it's a bar that caters to the young and hip. Not to mention those who appreciate easy parking (there's an actual lot just outside the bar).

And to keep the young and hip well-fed, Tambaleo is planning some high-end tapas. The kitchen won't actually be open till summer, but management is designing a "Caribbean/South American" menu with foods such as ceviche and diablo shrimp. The pending eating options seem to have determined the choice of decor; although a third of the bar area is filled with the aforementioned delightful overstuffed sofas, about half of the open space is devoted to uninviting tables and chairs, the idea being that later on people will have places to eat. Not that you can't eat while sitting on a sofa. (Chad Mize, the general partner, tells me they hope to add more couches/comfortable seating later.) In a city filled with great bars, I'm not sure what Tambaleo's major draw will be. B-side has ghosts and fun seating, the Lounge has cigar smoke (and smokers), Ludwig's has that fabulous outdoor patio. Tambaleo's got parking. It will have food. It's next door to those new loft apartments that are full of downtown people who will no doubt enjoy having a good local bar. Art galleries abound in that neck of the woods too -- Tambaleo could be the place to stop in for a bite and some booze post art-shopping.

What it won't be is a struggling arts community hangout. The building, which once hosted raucous shows and then computer geeks (it housed a dot-com for a while), has been cleaned up and dressed up (an excellent thing as far as the bathrooms are concerned,

all my friends agreed). Susan, who has an Electric Lounge sign and booth in her living room, talked about the difference a few people can make simply by giving struggling performers a venue. Then she ordered a dirty martini, got cozy on one of the big sofas, and we all proceeded to have an excellent night.

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