

PEACOCK STRUTS WITH WONKA-ESQUE AMBIENCE

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I met Oscar the Grouch.

A few weeks ago, I attended a wedding in Kentucky, an elegant, gorgeous wedding. In front of me, in a line, was an older man with soft white hair and a green velvet traditional Austrian jacket. He turned and I saw his short beard, his clear eyes. The man sparkled. Cracked. Twinkled. Willy Wonka didn't look this full of magic, even when Gene Wilder played him. This was a man who knew the sky inside his body (to paraphrase poet Ilya Kaminsky).

And so, when he rose to make a toast at the rehearsal dinner, I was thrilled. I knew something wonderful would happen. He reached into his bag, and brought out Oscar. He, Carroll Spinney with wonderful eyes, had puppeted Oscar (and Big Bird) since Day One. This was the real Oscar the Grouch, and he toasted the bridal couple. I almost peed in my pants I was so excited.

I've told that story to almost everyone, including my friend Matt, while we were at the Peacock, the spanking new bar on Pedernales Street in East Austin. Designed by Joel Mozersky, who also did Uchi, Oslo, and the "Real World: Austin" house, the walls are a deep teal green -- when the lights are dim, blue when they're brighter. Peacocks emblazon the low white chairs and the high tall bar stools. Chandeliers tinkle and all the trim is bright white. The interior felt like Faulkner meets Wonka, perhaps on a cruise ship. (I wonder: Does that mean it's like a gambling boat?)

We made our way pretty quickly to the outdoor patio area. In contrast to my Oscar the Grouch story, Matt told me about a friend's recent troubles -- a story which necessitated him having a cigarette or two to tell. The cement patio, divided from the street and parking lot by white cinderblock walls with corrugated metal, is reasonably sized -- it can hold about 40 people, and the Saturday night we were there, it was largely filled with 20somethings in various states of hipness.

Matt and I shut the bar down that night, he drinking \$2.50 Lone Stars (they serve 13 beers plus a few seasonal items, such as cider), me quaffing \$5.50 Jack and diet Cokes, though we could have tried house specialties such as the Peachick (sparkling wine and grapefruit) or the Tailfeather (unfiltered saki, green tea, Charbay green tea vodka) or even a gin fizz.

Some of the other departing people looked as if they were striking out for the new-ish lofts across the street. As we headed out the door, I noticed that the DJ who'd been spinning was in fact an old high school classmate of my brother -- that explained why the music had been so good. Ariel Quintans, whose DJ handle is not publishable in this newspaper, always had great taste in music. (The Peacock presents DJ's about four nights a week, plus karaoke and pub quiz nights.)

The Peacock opens at 5:30 p.m.; I went once in the early evening (which is when the bar is very quiet, as it turns out, though the owners are planning to create a happy hour scene). I was with my friend Maria, who had introduced me to Kaminsky, literally and literarily, in Seattle last year. After he read, we'd all gone to a bar that felt like an Alice-in-Wonderland ship -- curled iron banisters and tall booths curved like waves. Perhaps it was the memory of that night that made me think the Peacock's interior felt like an imagined funky cruise ship. Perhaps it was simply the sky inside me.

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Peacock Bar. 515 Pedernales St. 276-8979.