

ON TAP IN SAN MARCOS, A PLACE FOR BEER

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Want a Duvel while in San Marcos? Go to the Tap Room, which has one of the largest beer selections in town, including a very large bottle of the aforementioned Belgian brew. Sadly, it wasn't till my last weeks of graduate school that I finally made it to the Tap Room. A classmate and I walked the block or two from the Texas State University campus, headed to the bar's main entrance 'round back (although the Tap Room has a sign on the main square in San Marcos, the back's the best way in).

Open since 1993 (and under its current ownership since 1998), the Tap Room is dark and cozy. Wooden tables abound, and the whole bar consists of a single room. Mirrors emblazoned with beer logos -- think Guinness and Samuel Adams -- line the walls. It was the Duvel sign that prompted me to ask for one, although sometimes the bar keeps signs for beer it no longer carries, adding character. Speaking of character, an enormous moose head occupies the place of honor on the bar's south wall.

Walk in on a sunny afternoon (the bar opens at 3 p.m.), and you might have to take a few minutes to let your eyes adjust before you can see the handful of booths, tables and wooden stools up by the bar itself. A couple of televisions (two of which are enormous 8-foot projection screens) are generally tuned to sports, but the real attraction for many is the beer: 42 kinds are available on tap and about 20 in bottles.

Dear to any college student's heart are happy hour specials, and the Tap Room has some good ones: discounted beers every night, half-price appetizers on Mondays, 30-cent wings on Wednesdays, and flat-out free beer with a burger and side on Thursdays. The burger, for the record, was hefty and good.

Both college kids and locals stop by -- deals on beer and food can be hard to resist at any age. And if a major sporting event (say a big baseball game) is on, well, the joint can get downright packed. The owner says some folks drive in from Austin on the weekends specifically to watch games there and hang out.

When I was in college and studying abroad, I took several philosophy classes. There were no quizzes and tests, little work turned in during the year -- just a serious and seriously comprehensive final exam. Rumor had it that one of my professors used to grade his stack of exams with a bottle of spirits by his side -- whiskey, I think. By the time he finished the exams, the story went, he also finished the bottle. Our serious, philosophical, debated question? Whether we wanted our exams to be in the beginning, middle or end of the stack. (Early middle, I always thought, when he'd be warm and fuzzy.)

Now I'm a lecturer at a university. Loaded down with a stack of more than 80 freshman composition essays one afternoon, walking past the Tap Room, I briefly wondered what that enormous bottle of Duvel ("Devil," the Belgians say) would have done for my old professor: Would the essays at the top or bottom or the early middle receive the kindest

grades? Would beer affect him differently than whiskey? What about champagne and red wine? Or mead, by golly? I climbed into the heat of my car, pondering all the way home.
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