

OING MILDLY SOCO FOR ZAX AND BECKS

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Publication Date: July 13, 2006 Page: 10 Section: XLEnt Edition: Final

It's almost a cyclical thing: Sometimes I find myself hanging out at bars on Burnet Road; other times I seem to spend lots of time on West Sixth Street or in the Warehouse District. Lately, I've been wandering around South Congress Avenue — seeing shows at the Continental Club, eating dashi bowls at Zen, heroically resisting Amy's (must . . . swim . . . more). And as long as I've been down there, I've also been checking out a few places to have drinks — less Doc's Motorworks and the Hotel San José than places in which I haven't, until recently, spent much time. Like Zax.

So Zax Pints & Plates isn't really on South Congress, but it's not far, and I wanted to investigate the Wednesday night pint nights — an event popular enough that one Wednesday, by 6:30 p.m. or so, they'd completely sold out of the beer on special and given away all the free beer glasses that went with it. It started at 6. On a recent nonpint night, I tried a Belgian beer, Delirium Tremens (the glass has pink elephants on it). According to the beer mat, it's the “best beer in the world.” It's also 9 percent alcohol, has that big Belgian taste (like Chimay and Duvel) and was surprisingly fruity. People not given to drinking beer named after withdrawal/excessive alcohol trembling can also try Chimay, Fireman's 4, Live Oak, Guinness, Saint Arnold, or any one of the nearly 20 beers on tap (including some seasonal and rotating taps). If wine and booze and other beverages are your pleasure, ask about fancy martinis or hibiscus mint tea. Me, I stuck with beer while a friend and I discovered that uncovering one card at a time, scratching very slowly and in no particular order, does not increase your chances of winning \$35,000 on a poker lottery scratch-off. It is, however, incredibly entertaining. And almost as delightful as discovering that the interior of Zax is filled with light and is nearly as surprisingly, cleanly yellow on the inside as on the out.

It's been a few weeks since I've sat on the patio at Zax (the food ain't bad, I might add, and I hear good things about the Sunday brunch), but I've stuck my head into the patio at Becks on Congress several times of late. A friend of mine lives at the State House; I can just see Becks from the apartment complex — or at least I can see the white lights wrapped around two of its enormous trees. Live music runs nearly daily (the whole joint is closed on Mondays) and really, the place feels more restaurant than bar. (I liked the gumbo, and the half-pound Angus beef hamburger came with a fancy, parsley-decorated plate.) But the patio is filled with wooden tables, some with umbrellas, the waitstaff is friendly, and no one seems to mind if you just want a beer instead of a full meal. It won't be a fixture on my “favorite bars to hang out in” list, but it was nice to stop in and see up close what I had been viewing from afar.

Speaking of up close, the amazing and delightful Susan B. Anthony Somers-Willett (otherwise known as Whiskey Susan) was in town and reading poetry at the Wednesday night slam at Ego's (she belly-danced for us post-poetry because she is that cool). I love her poetry, I love watching her perform, and I especially loved that no one was smoking at Ego's, though it was utterly disconcerting. I hadn't been back to the quirky dive since

the no-smoking ordinance, and it's wild and weird — no mist, no haze, just trace scents of the foggy daze.

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Zax Pints & Plates. 312 Barton Springs Road. 481-0100. Becks on Congress. 1321 S. Congress Ave. 383-9400.