

A favorite pub

When I am in the New York area, I try to visit one of my favourite pubs anywhere in the world: Andy's Corner. It is not in Manhattan or any of the other boroughs; it is in a neighborhood called Bogota (pronounced more like "pagoda" but with a "b"), in the Jersey suburbs. It is at 257 Queen Anne Road, Bogota (though the other side of the street is in Teaneck, NJ).

I was there recently, and news of my visit reached reporter Lisa Rose, on the sizable daily newspaper the Star-Ledger, of Newark. Her questions stimulated the following thoughts, which I rounded to ten in each category.

These principles are specific to Andy's, but most of them could be applied as a test of a good American pub wherever it is. Lisa's story, which appeared in the Star-Ledger last Friday, concentrated on the size of the beer selection.

Why do I like Andy's so much? Because it combines the virtues of a good neighborhood bar with those of a "multi-tap".

This is unusual. I can't think of another bar anywhere that does this so deftly.

Andy's virtues as a neighborhood bar:

1. It is a place where people talk to each other. A real "Cheers" as opposed to a confected one.
2. One of the reasons for this: It is family-owned. George Gray, his wife Barbara and their sons Tom and Chris act as hosts. There is usually at least one of the family present. The sense that you are visiting a publican and his family encourages courtesy, sociability and chat. This attitude may not be sustained if the pub is part of some anonymous chain, run by a marketing whiz out of Arizona.
3. A good number of the customers appear to be local.
4. On the other hand, they don't stop the juke-box and stare when someone from, say, Hoboken enters.
5. (As far as I am aware), you don't have to be under 25, over 25, straight or gay. Furthermore: I may be an effete, snotty, Englishman, but I grew up in a working-class family in an Irish and Polish neighborhood of an industrial town. I don't like mono-cultural, squeaky-clean suburbs. At Andy's your collar can be any color you like. So can you. I believe you can be, for example, white, black, Asian, Hungarian, Serbian, German, Hispanic, Irish, English, Jewish or Lithuanian to drink at Andy's. I hope so anyway, as in various proportions, I qualify for the last three.
6. It is in a neighborhood street, not a strip mall. You don't have to drive for 20 miles past used car lots and fast-food franchises, looking between the signs for Blockbuster or Staples to see one for Andy's. I can even imagine that some people might be able to walk there. (But it is no longer on a corner. A proposed hike in rent resulted in its moving a few doors along the street).
7. It is small and cosy.
8. Bar-stools and high tables leave the customers freer to mingle than they are in pubs that are more restaurant-like.

9. It's a bar or a pub, not a restaurant. Nor is it a fake anything. (Not "Irish", "English", "Bavarian" or any other nonsense). Nor does it have any "theme."

10. Although it has bits of advertising material, you are not overwhelmed with intrusive rubbish reminding you to choose this completely tasteless beer rather than its indistinguishable rival.

Andy's virtues as a multitap:

1. Lots of taps (basic requirement).

2. Mainly micro-breweries (for individuality and character).

3. Especially local Jersey breweries, including favorites like Climax (Roselle Park), Flying Fish (Cherry Hill), Heavyweight (Ocean Township) and Ramstein (Butler). Local breweries' beer has the best chance of being fresh. Jersey was slow to embrace micro-brewing, but now has an outstanding selection. Andy's also has some classic imports, usually ones that are big enough to travel and/or sufficiently popular to turn over fast.

4. Publican George and his family are knowledgeable about the beers.

5. This means that their ever-changing selection is well-chosen and varied.

6. It also means they know how to look after the beer. Many pubs don't.

7. And in some cases serve it cask-conditioned (ie unfiltered, unpasteurised, and matured in the cask).

8. And tell you something about each beer, why it was chosen, how it tastes, etc.

9. Do all this without being pretentious or tedious.

10. No wasting time and space with big-name imports that would taste as good as Bud if they weren't stale.

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