

El Chapultepec

1962 Market Street

Phone: 303-295-9126 8AM CASH

Hipster Scale



Dive Bar Rating



Sinatra, Bennett, Fitzgerald, Miles Davis. McCartney, Jagger, Bono, Harry Connick Jr. They've all played here, so it goes. Even Denver's favorite beatnik, Jack Kerouac, allegedly slept it off in his car outside but came in to clean up in the bathrooms. Mention El Chapultepec around these parts and the names of famous musicians rumored to have graced the tiny corner stage rain down like ten-ton cinder-blocks. Take two tiny steps through the front door and into the narrow, 49-person-capacity front room, however, and your gut reaction is liable to be disbelief with a splash of amazement.

For fifty-plus years and counting, the 'Pec's red-and-white checkered tile floor, plaster walls and flimsy wooden stage have undulated with both locally and nationally celebrated jazz. Seven nights a week. With no cover. These days, the weekly lineup leans more toward blues than jazz, but the latter will always play a central role in this institution's reputation. Outside, the paint is flaking and the iconic neon BAR/CAFÉ/CANTINA sign is rusting and burned out (in places) as often as it's lit. But inside, brand new carpet on the stage and fake-brick paneling along the three back walls indicate a promising future. (The last time the stage area—where a plastic fishbowl labeled “requests” atop a piano and a full drum kit are near-permanent fixtures—was “remodeled” in any way was almost 20 years ago, when dirty carpet was both laid and hung.)

El Chapultepec's 34-person-capacity back room—the café—serves up a moderate-sized Mexican menu highlighted by spicy green chili and a ground beef burrito (or Mexican hamburger—whatever you prefer). An S-shaped Formica bar separates the mostly exposed kitchen from a few booths, an awkwardly placed pool table and two tube television showing nothing in particular (unless the home team is playing).

Every day from open until 9 p.m. (when the band starts), happy hour prices reign supreme; the smattering of daytime bar flies, regulars and transients drink \$1.50 Coors drafts or wells for a few quarters more. Once the instruments are tuned and the high hat splash-

ing, a series of signs in all directions enforce the basics: “One Drink Minimum Per Set” (though sometimes it’s two); “No Dancing” (not strictly enforced, though there typically isn’t room to do more than bounce and sway); and “Water For Paying Customers Only. We Sell Bottled Water \$2.00.”

When the Rockies are home, El Chapultepec is post-game ground zero (a minor leaguer could chuck a ball from the ‘Pec’s front door through the admission turnstiles behind home plate), so plan to arrive early if you hope for a drink, let alone a view of the stage. On most other nights, 8 or 8:30 p.m. are safe bets for a seat in a booth or at the bar. But why wait? Show up for grub before sundown, slurp down some of downtown’s cheapest suds and soak in a one-of-a-kind experience.

