

Old Curtis Street Bar

2100 Curtis Street
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Probably my favorite thing about the Old Curtis Street is the clock behind the bar. Sounds weird, I know, especially considering the clock isn't anything special in and of itself—it's not vintage, valuable, made from crack cocaine...nothing. It's just a clock. Except that the numbers are reversed, so that clockwise of 12 is 11 instead of 1 (and so on all the way around). I love this because I've been shitfaced here countless times without noticing. It took a sober visit on a tranquil Tuesday evening for me to see it for what it truly is: a really clever trick. I laughed out loud at the idea of other Denver drunks losing all sense of time and place while glancing at it—and blaming those nine \$1 draws and three shots of Crown for their disorientation. Well played, sirs.

Pete Razatos—a gruff old Greek guy who, on my sober visit, played the vintage Double Up poker machine silently in a well-pressed button-up and vest as his bartendress washed glasses—opened this warm, wood-paneled neighborhood joint in 1976. Five years ago, his son, Kosta, gave up a job trading futures on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange to move back and run the place when pops threatened to sell it. What's the same is that the kitchen still kicks out tasty, affordable Mexican grub; the jukebox is still loaded with Queen, the Beatles, Bowie, the Latin Oldies Trilogy, Elvis, Sly and the Family Stone and Zeppelin; the maroon vinyl booths and padded chairs don't look a day over 30; and the cash register, blender and annunciator panel (fire and theft protection), well, they're the same. Since opening day, it seems. The whole place is pretty dated, actually—down to the black-and-white photos of old Denver lining the walls. Which is great. Really great.

What's new is that local rock bands, comedians, artists and other entertainers are using the small stage (obstructed, unfortunately, by a bulky pillar and suspended speaker) no less than three nights a week; the space has been widely accepted as a great place for large groups (wedding after-parties, happy-hour meet-ups, birthday parties) to meet; and the Razatos installed a much-needed (and spacious) side patio. Which is also great.

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