



Lobby Bar photo: www.driskillhotel.com

STAR_BAR

Austin's historic hotel bar



driskill lobby

by L. J. Gouveia

Austin's fabled Sixth Street bustles with dozens of cheap, trendy clubs that come and go. But the stately Driskill Hotel has anchored the famous street's bar scene since 1886 with a history as colorful as its stained-glass domes.

When Sixth Street was still Pecan, the hotel was built by cattle baron and honorary Confederate Colonel Jesse Driskill, who lost it in a poker game two years later. One of its first formal events was the dedication of the state capitol building. Guests have included presidents, foreign dignitaries, movie stars, and Amelia Earhart. President Lyndon Johnson took Lady Bird here on their first date, and later proposed here as well. He also awaited his election results in his permanently reserved

suite. Most Texas governors held their inaugurations here. In October 1931, Louis Armstrong played one of the first nonsegregated jazz shows west of the Mississippi. In attendance was UT law student Charlie Black, who was inspired to become a noted civil rights champion and worked on *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1934, the Texas Rangers met in the bar to plot their ambush of Bonnie and Clyde. Various movies have filmed here. Untold numbers of business and legislative deals have been cut here, and quite a few marriages proposed or performed.

The Driskill closed in 1969, slated for demolition in 1971. But in true Austin form, a group of citizens rallied to save it. In 1973 it reopened after extensive renovations that included

the octagonal German bar from the movie *Cabaret*. It's still here, oddly at home among the cattle-fur-covered chairs, pistol lamps, leather couches, mounted longhorn head, and copper ceiling tiles.

Besides the historical pedigree and upscale Texas swank, this is a world-class bar. Countless liquors and wines line several shelves around the bar. You can get anything from a Coors Light to a 1967 Glenlivet. Our bartender chatted amiably about the bar's history while mixing a perfect sazerac, then seamlessly swept over to another customer with a beautifully swirling pint of Guinness. The downstairs grill supplies a varied bar menu, from the requisite pub grub to more upscale fare like ancho lobster nachos and truffle oil popcorn. Even the lowly fries come with the hotel's own smoked tomato relish that could make you swear off ketchup. (And the cafe uses mostly sustainable food sources.)

The Driskill Lobby Bar is the perfect stop for a tasteful break from Sixth Street chaos or a superb nightcap before retiring to face the hotel's many purported ghosts, including a senator's baby daughter, three jilted brides, and even Col. Driskill himself. ■