

Happy hours : The Houston Pavilion edition

Syd Kearney at 8:59 am on August 19, 2010



III Forks.: Courtesy photo

All happy hours are not created equal. At most bars, you can get a cheap draft or a few bucks shaved off a well martini. Maybe if the bartender knows you, he'll rustle up some of those little cheese crackers.

But as I found on a tour of the happy hours at downtown's Houston Pavilions are much happier. For the most part, they made me simply giddy.

The Pavilion is packed with a mix of locally grown and chain restaurants and bars. (A homegrown, short-lived wine bar, Cork, recently closed.) Overall, the Pavilions has much to offer the post-office worker looking for afternoon snack and adult beverage.

I found much to make me happy at the relatively new III Forks Steakhouse. The upscale steakhouse is more at ease in the bar. The curvy bar with the black and gold accents is elegantly sexy. The leather bar chairs are so comfortable that I found my self reluctant to leave. The bar menu features a couple of well-priced snacks, including the very sharable, guilt-inducing II Fork Chips. The mountain of homemade potato chips are smothered in fried onions and blue cheese. Ask for a little ketchup (it'll cut some of the richness) and take a friend. Add a couple of \$5 glasses of wine and get happy.

It's all about the food at McCormick & Schmick's. The sports-themed bar can get packed with pre-game fans who have discovered the value-priced and regularly changing happy hour menu. A favorite

is the \$2.95 half-pound cheeseburger and fries, but I'm partial to the seafood offerings such as the \$4.95 Crunchy Chili Shrimp or the \$1.95 fish tacos. Drink specials change with throughout the week. Thursday is "martini night" with selections for \$5.95, but every night you can get a \$3.95 draft or \$5.95 Happy Hour wine.

I was floored with what \$6.25 got me during happy hour at Lucky Strike Lanes. A crab cake slider with fries was half price, making it \$2.25, and a glass of the house wine was \$4. There's several miniburgers offered on the lounge menu, including Beef with Blue Cheese and Barbecue Chicken. Other offerings included pancetta-wrapped scallops, soft pretzels and beef skewers. Beverage specials include a Classic Cosmo or a Lemontini for \$5 and \$3 Bud Light Draft.

The retro lounge with its deep browns, stone, rust and gold accents is a visual treat. The low-slung seating is a plush nod to traditional bowling alley benches.

As for the best of the rest, Guadalajara del Centro has nifty upper lounge, super friendly staff and \$5 discount on its margaritas. Polk Street Pub is the most unpretentious of the Pavilion happy hours. It's all about big-screen sports and draft beers with your buddies. And if that makes you happy, by all means, go.

Details

Ill Forks Steakhouse: From 4 p.m.-7 p.m., enjoy a \$5 Ill Forks Martini or glass of wine (the sommelier's pick).

Lucky Strike Lanes: From 3 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays, try a Classic Cosmo or a Lemontini for \$5. The house wine is \$4 or get a \$3 Bud Light Draft. The Lounge Menu also is half off at happy hour.

McCormick & Schmick's: From 4 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays, a happy hour menu features a dozen items under \$4.95. Drink specials change with throughout the week. \$3.95 draft or \$5.95 Happy Hour wine. Some fine print: specials good only in bar area and there's a \$3.50 minimum beverage purchase.

House of Blues: From 4 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays in the restaurant bar, appetizers are half price. As for the liquor, it's \$2 for domestic bottles, \$3 for imports and \$4 for the house wine and house cocktails.

Polk Street Pub: Happy hour is celebrated 4 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays and all day Wednesdays. The deals include \$3 wells, house wines and domestic bottles and \$3.50 drafts.

Yao Restaurant & Bar: Happy hour is 3 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays. Specials change daily.

Andalucia Tapas and Taverna: In the bar, 3 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays. Get \$3 wine, \$5 sangria as well as discounts on a small appetizer menu.

Mia Bella: From 3 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays, the tiny bar offers \$3 wine, \$3 wells and often you'll find a discount on drinks like bellinis and a short list of discounted tapas.

Guadalajara del Centro: From 4 p.m.-7 p.m. weekdays, \$5 off specialty margaritas; beer specials and small happy hour food menu.