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Pub Crawl — Mon Ami Lounge



- Address:** 4901 Broadway (in the complex just north of H-E-B Central Market)
- Hours:** 5 p.m.-1 a.m. Friday-Saturday; 5 p.m.-midnight Tuesday-Thursday
- Phone:** (210) 822-3253
- Web:** www.monsthai.com

Snapshot: Mon Ami, meaning “my friend” in French, is the perfect name for this warm embrace of a drinking hangout. This new and stylish lounge, born just weeks ago in the back of firmly established Alamo Heights restaurant Mon Thai Bistro and Sushi Bar, features a more social bar area at the entrance and a quiet, intimate space in the room next door. The latter is romantic and low-lit with comfortable black-and-red leather chairs and couches perfect for conversing with loved ones, friends or that sexy new date. Best seating for such a tête-à-tête are two chairs that bookend a view to the exotic and peaceful fountain outside. While the lounge may feel warm and cozy, the ambiance is cool and international, from its large variety of wines, liqueurs and refreshing tropical martinis to its truly scrumptious hors d'oeuvres to its contemporary trip hop and R&B sound. As Mon and Gerry Shirley, the friendly married couple who owns/runs Mon Ami, put it, the place is ideal for “chilling out.”

Behind the bar: Bartender Olaf Harmel can whip up just about any drink or cocktail your heart desires. Also available are Asian beers and an impressive selection of wines. However, you shouldn't leave without trying at least one specialty martini, whether your tastes go to fruity, dry, dessert, sake or traditional. My better half and I sampled two each — the Plum Saketini, which incorporates plum wine with premium sake, vodka and other liqueurs; the Dragon-Eye; the Parisian and the dirtiest of dirty martinis. All went down smoothly, but my favorites were the cool Dragon-Eye, a mixture of vodka, pomegranate liquor and longan fruit juice, with delicious longan (and cherry) garnish; and the Parisian, a richer concoction of French liqueurs and vanilla.

Who goes there: Patrons are usually in their late 20s and older. Dress is elegant or casual, whatever your mood may be. Just about anything decent is acceptable, Harmel said, adding, with a laugh, that the only exception may be a male Speedo.

Munchies: This is one bar that inspires you to skip dinner and devote that appetite to the delicious small plates offered from early evening through late night. Many varieties of sushi are available as well as salads, spring rolls, calamari, wings and dumplings. The dish that still has me licking my lips was the Ribeye Appetizer, a rectangular plate filled with tender slices of beef complemented by a tasty sauce. My guy and I shared one; next time, though, I want this heavenly delight all to myself.

Fun and games: Good conversation without the distraction of TVs.


Soundtrack: Unobtrusive music that you won't find on the radio: European pop and blues; trip hop; soul and R&B; selections from alternative artists such as Angie Stone and Amy Winehouse.

The skinny: Mon Ami's inviting and calming atmosphere makes a night out alone or with friends easy and worry-free. The drinks and food, while not expensive, should satisfy the pickiest of connoisseurs, and its European décor makes you feel classy but comfortable. Its cozy and dimly lit ambiance is a bit reminiscent of Club Cohiba downtown, but minus the smoke. It's a wonderful after-dinner companion to its restaurant, Mon, or a stand-alone drinking alternative to louder or more pretentious lounges nearby.

Jeanne Jakle

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