



Earnestine & Hazel's has live jazz every Sunday.

DIVE_BAR

The infamous Memphis brothel turned bar

earnestine & hazel's

by Joe Walz

ON the corner of Main Street and GE Patterson in downtown Memphis sits a building with a story to tell. Earnestine & Hazel's was originally opened as a dry goods store, but a different kind of business was taking place upstairs. Up until twenty-odd years ago, Earnestine & Hazel's was a well-known brothel. At the top of the stairs, a dimly lit hallway reveals several rooms, each filled with vintage sofas, kitchen tables that have seen better days, and the occasional refrigerator that hasn't worked since the sixties.

Sitting in a room by itself, though, is a small bar with a bartender who has been there for, well, only he knows how long he has been there. Nate is just there, seemingly waiting for you. If you feel like talking, he definitely has a story

or two to tell about the bar or life. If you don't, he seems fine with that, too.

Downstairs, the legendary jukebox fills the place with Memphis soul, funk, and country. Tables and chairs seem to be randomly put across the floor. The bar just has a limited selection of beers to offer, no cocktails or fancy stuff. But behind that bar is where they make the famous Soul Burger. The name itself sparks interest and Memphis natives and tourists alike hunt it down regularly. It's served hot off the grill with cheese, onions, and mustard, in a basket with a bag of chips. Hot, juicy, and seasoned to perfection. A bargain at \$5. The purported secret is that they clean the grill with pickle juice.

Just remember if you go, the place doesn't even really pick up 'til around

midnight. That's when the brew really starts pouring, the people start talking, and the music gets some people onto the dance floor. There is a pool table if you feel like a game.

Black Snake Moan and *Elizabeth-town* have filmed scenes here, and Ray Charles was a fairly frequent customer.

Oh, and rumor has it there may even be a few ghosts in the place. In fact, a website dedicated to ghost hunting in Memphis says the jukebox itself is haunted, sometimes playing several songs in a row pertaining to your conversation. They also claim to have several photos and even video of some spookiness caught on overnight excursions to the bar. Check it out if you dare at www.memphisghost.com. ■

Photo by Maureen "Mars" Blomgren