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JOUR 411

Professor Schmidt

Tiger's Tap Room (Hotel Congress)

A slightly tattered man in camo pants and combat boots talks candidly with a stranger about governmental conspiracies while the pair sip on a can of Pabst Blue Ribbon. The bartender smirks at a few of the conspirist's comments as he wipes down the sturdy oak bar top.

The tap room smells distinctly of musk and an old cigar box, the wood varnish holding onto times of when patrons could smoke inside the bar—an aroma that has never quite left the walls of the nearly 100-year-old venue.

Inside the historic Hotel Congress sits Tiger's Tap Room, affectionately named after the bartender who has become something of an icon during his 54-year reign. Today, however, Tiger has the day off. In his place stands a burly bartender with an infectious smile and handlebar mustache.

Over the bar hangs a large red and blue neon sign reading "Tiger's Tap Room," which reflects off the mirrors on the opposing side, flushing the small area with a slight purplish hue. Above the neon sign is a clock that runs 20 minutes fast, likely a trick to make sure bartenders get out on time.

Surrounding the neon sign are several framed charcoal and pencil portraits of cowboys on bucking broncos. Artist Pete Martinez reportedly drew inside the same tap room more times than in his art studio—often paying for his bar tabs with

his artwork. Collectors and museums alike ask if the drawings are for sale, but upon Martinez's wish, the drawings stay hanging inside the Tap Room.

The area isn't large or expansive, and seems more like a long hallway than an actual room, but is intimate no less. The current mood is steady, with no rush of people fighting for the bartender's attention, but small commotions happening as people pass in and out.

A Wurlitzer 2900 stereo, the only thing in the Tap Room older than Tiger, plays a steady stream of 1940s and 1950s classics. The bartender struts over to the corner and places a quarter in the machine. Vaughn Monroe's "Riders in the Sky" plays steadily through the stereo.

The bar stools that frame the bar top are of the same wood—dark, sturdy and very worn-in. They wait, lined-up in anticipation for 5 o'clock happy hour.

A man with broad shoulders and callused hands walks in and collapses onto one of the bar stools, his voice baring the words of a long and tiring day.

"What can I get for you, sir," the bartender asks, his thick mustache bouncing up and down as he talks.

"Anything with alcohol," he answers.

A younger man joins the chorus of screeching bar stools and asks the bartender for water. He taps his foot anxiously, with one finger resting on his temple and his eyes locked on his phone. His all-black attire tells me he's likely an employee of Club Congress attempting to hide away from the pending four-show madness.

Outside of the tap room, the sounds of rolling stage equipment and an ushering of commands can be overheard. Through the Tap Room and onto the left lies a single stage that once held the likes of Kurt Cobain and Nirvana.

In 2010, *Esquire* Magazine named Club Congress one of the best bars in America.

Though the accolades are great, the Tap Room still remains unpretentious in both its décor and mood. The black-and-white checkered floors are faded to a degree, and the brass panels surrounding the outer edges of the room have about the same amount of luster as a 20-year-old penny.

Still, Tiger's Tap Room remains a local favorite, by-and-large. The charm of the old Tap Room is just as strong as the whiskey here itself, and as storied as the memories made and told in the painted walls and paneled booths.