

one more round

raise your glass to signonsandiego's bartender of the month

AUGUST 2007

Who: Edwin Decker

Where: [710 Beach Club](#)

Specialty: Dirty Stoli Martini

Ed Decker doesn't need to be a bartender. He's got enough odd jobs to put together a modest living with his wife, steps from the sand in O.B. But Ed Decker is a bartender. What started as play time in his neighbor's basement has turned into what he's pretty sure is a 22-year career ("Time's a blur"), a decade-long, provocative column with a bartender's slant ([Sordid Tales](#)) and a book deal ("[Barzilla](#)"). Opinionated and outspoken in print, Decker is polite and camera-shy in person. He also seems like the type of guy who finds delight in the dark alleys of New Orleans and knows his way around a Charles Bukowski poem. Why haven't we interviewed him before? Well, we kinda thought he wanted to keep where he works secret from haters ... and it's scary to interview someone who writes better than you do.

How do you like (working in) P.B. these days?

Well, I live in O.B. and that's where I do most of my drinking. P.B. attracts a young crowd, which is fine when you're bartending or, you know, young. But when I'm drinking, I like hanging around ornery, old rummies.

Tell me what drew you to bartending?

I've always liked drinking and I've always loved bars. I feel right at home in almost any bar. It was just a natural fit. I was very fortunate the way I got into it. Whenever I think about it, I feel like Lou Gehrig — the luckiest man alive.

I had just moved out from New York and was wallowing in a crappy supermarket job. In a pure moment of serendipity, my neighbor's sister, a woman named Marlene and the manager of male dancers, asked me if I would be a waiter for the show they were presenting at the Bacchanal on Thursday and Saturday nights from 4 to 9 p.m. I had absolutely no experience, but that didn't seem to bother her. Next thing I knew, I was waiting tables for a couple hundred screaming, horny women and making money left and right. These women were nuts; I can't even tell you. Then at 9 p.m., the dancers would quit, and a live band would start and I would get behind the bar and help the bartenders pour beer, stock ice, and get rip-roaring drunk. Ahh, the glory days.

I get the sense there must have been a very influential bar in your history, a stomping ground ... was there such a bar?

The Acorn Pub in Monroe, N.Y. It was a little house on the side of the road, between two lakes. It was real cozy, the kind of bar in which you would spend Christmas Eve. It had a pool table, a jukebox, a big jar of pickled eggs, a large-breasted bar mama named Susan, and a flat, table-model Asteroids game that gave a free case of beer each week to the high scorer. I was the Asteroids master of Orange County, N.Y. I dominated that table for over a year and accumulated several stacks of beer cases that towered above my head. Eventually they had to pull the plug on the giveaway.

Favorite Bukowski quote?

"When the world is closing in very fast, a bottle of wine seems a reasonable friend."

What's the best advice you've heard in a bar and who said it?

Bill Winston, the founder of [Winston's Beach Club](#), used to tell us over and over at our meetings that



Play beer pong with Ed at [710 Beach Club](#).



people don't go out to bars because they want to be served by rude, pompous a-holes. They go out to bars to get away from people like that, to forget the rigors of daily life, and if they can't find escape at your bar, they will find it somewhere else. It was great advice and wise of him to keep hammering home because it is so unbelievably easy to get jaded and miserable in the bar biz. Whenever I get to that point, I remember his words. Rest in peace, old friend.

If you could give all your past and future patrons one piece of bar etiquette, what would it be? It's a toss-up between, "Keep your disease-addled fingers out of my fruit tray," and "Sleeping with your bartender is the best way to insure prompt service."

What's the most important skill a bartender must have?

Another skill. You can't be a bartender forever.

Most memorable vomit story?

That would have to be the debacle perpetrated by my good friend [Teddy Wigler](#). A couple of years ago, the owners of Winston's and Blind Melons flew a bunch of us bartenders to Oktoberfest in Munich. Before getting there, we stopped in London for two days. On the night before we were supposed to fly out of London, Teddy drank himself into an ill-advised stupor. The following morning, in the taxi-van to the airport, Teddy was groaning in the back seat doubled over, and turning green in the face. The poor bastard was pleading with us to let the driver to pull over so he could vomit. We wouldn't let him though because we were extremely late for the flight. When we pulled up to Heathrow Airport, everyone piled out of the taxi-van and Teddy staggered out and immediately started splashing waves of vomit all over the place.

It was the nastiest gagside I ever saw. All these people were bustling to and from the front of airport, minding their own business, when suddenly here comes Teddy, the spewicide bomber, splashing their luggage and ankles with his vomit missiles as they scattered in horror. Most of the people in our group scattered as well, but it was difficult because we were laughing so hard. He would take a stagger-step, launch a missile, stagger, launch, stagger, launch until all his innards were spread across the front of Heathrow Airport and there was nothing left inside of him but organs and bones.

How have you seen San Diego change over the years? Where do you see it going?

Everything's getting cleaner. Dingy dive bars are being replaced with nicer, spiffier lounges. The Arizona has closed down, Bullfrogs was replaced with a yuppy Irish bar called Gallagher's, Winston's and Blind Melons have been remodeled, O'Connell's is remodeling, Lucy's has expanded and cleaned up, even Dream Street put in brand-new store-front windows and looks like the kind of bar you could bring your mother to. It just seems like the dirty old dive bar is a dying breed.

Favorite/most profound drunk thought?

Never drink anything a bartender serves you after he calls you "Pal." Like, if he says, "Here you go, pal," when he delivers your drink or "What can I get you, pal?" when you order. It probably means you've pissed him off about something, in which case, there's no telling what he put in that drink.

Would you be so kind as to share your favorite line from "Barzilla"?

My favorite line is actually a poem title. It's called "Do you Accept Jesus Christ as Your Personal Trainer?" On the page beside it is a drawing of Jesus lifting weights.

