

America's Best Bars

garden with rows of picnic tables and a line of portable toilets so you don't have to wait. A fence keeps the wind out, and a eucalyptus tree provides the shade. And every night the tamale lady comes with her cooler, selling the best tamales you will ever have.

But there's something at Zeitgeist that goes beyond the great food and the great beer garden. The bar seems angry. The symbols are angry. The bumper stickers are angry. But Zeitgeist is not an angry place. In fact, it is unmistakably friendly and open, even happy. At Zeitgeist, nobody's a freak, not even the guy in the khakis and polo shirt. (199 Valencia Street; 415-255-7505) -STEPHEN ELLIOTT

even if it happens to be a regrettable choice. (9641 Sunset Boulevard, in the Beverly Hills Hotel; 310-887-2777)

La Gitana CA, ARIZONA



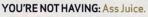
YOU'RE HAVING: A beer and a shot, Sunday afternoon.

La Gitana has bloodstains on the floor, bullet holes in the walls, and the occasional free dental extraction on the pool table from a pliers-wielding biker. Seriously. (17201 West Fifth Street; 520-398-0810)

Double Down Saloon LAS VEGAS







Once, at the Double Down, I saw a beautiful woman drop her jeans and shoot pool in red panties, but that's not what makes this a great bar-or at least it's not the only thing.

What makes the Double Down great is this: While it's in Vegas, it's not of Vegas-except in a few ways that matter. The paradox of Las Vegas is that all your cavorting takes place in the most meticulously calculated, carefully monitored environment known to man. Not at the Double Down. This joint is primordial, and yet a kind of Vegas



Musso & Frank Grill



YOU'RE HAVING: A martini before dinner. (Try the sand dabs.)

The bar, jammed to the edge of the dark and dowdy dining room, is neither big nor elaborate. But it can turn out a martini that Bogart would've judged worthy of the name. That counts for a lot in this world. (6667 Hollywood Boulevard; 323-467-7788)

The Polo Lounge



YOU'RE HAVING: Scotch, one

The tenders of this small bar will do everything they can to make exactly what you ask for,















h, Lord, the Beach Ball. It's easy for a bar to be

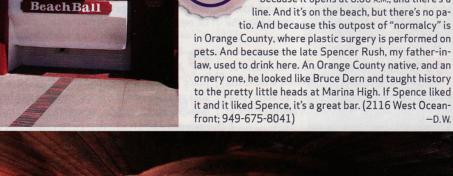
great in New York or New Orleans, where there

are plenty of buildings old enough to have

a good patina on them. In Orange County,

YOU'RE HAVING: A White Russian for breakfast.

not so easy. The Beach Ball makes the list because it opens at 6:00 A.M., and there's a line. And it's on the beach, but there's no patio. And because this outpost of "normalcy" is





The Best

Best men's room: P.J. Clarke's in New York, for its blocky, overwhelmingly masculine ceramic urinals that yo