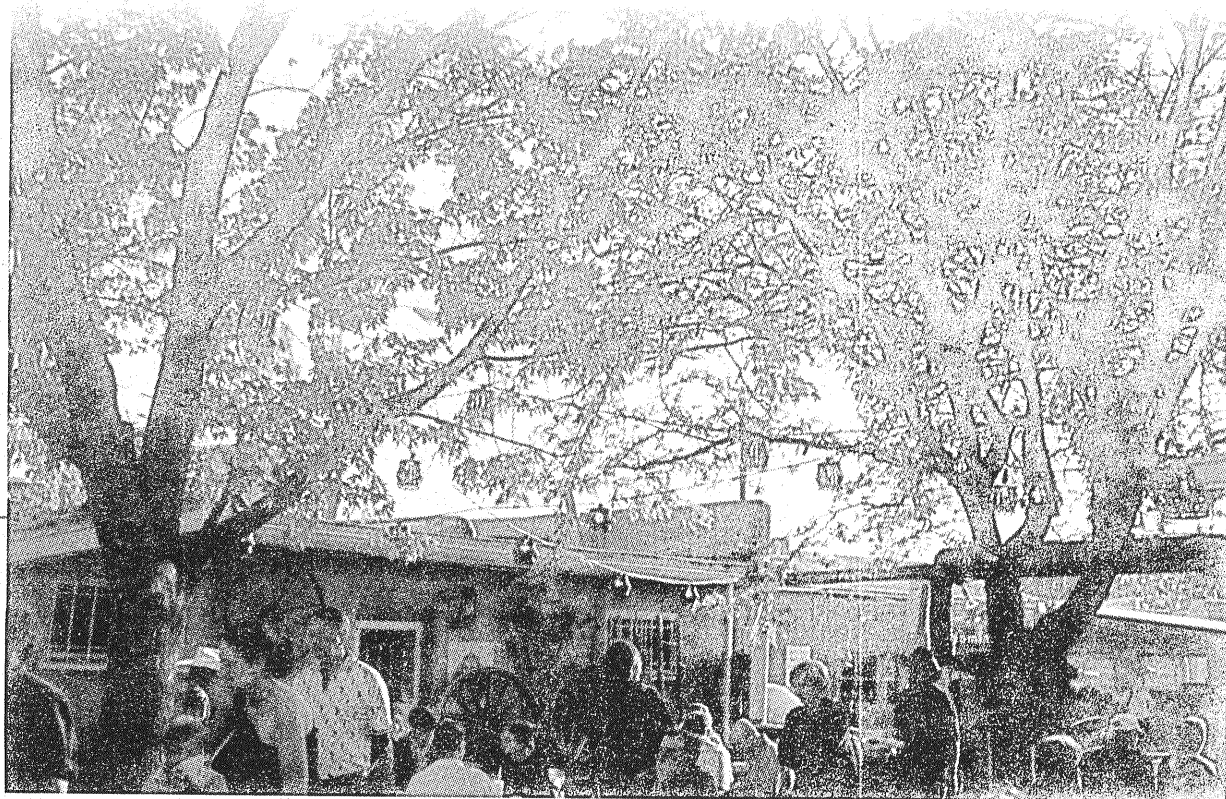
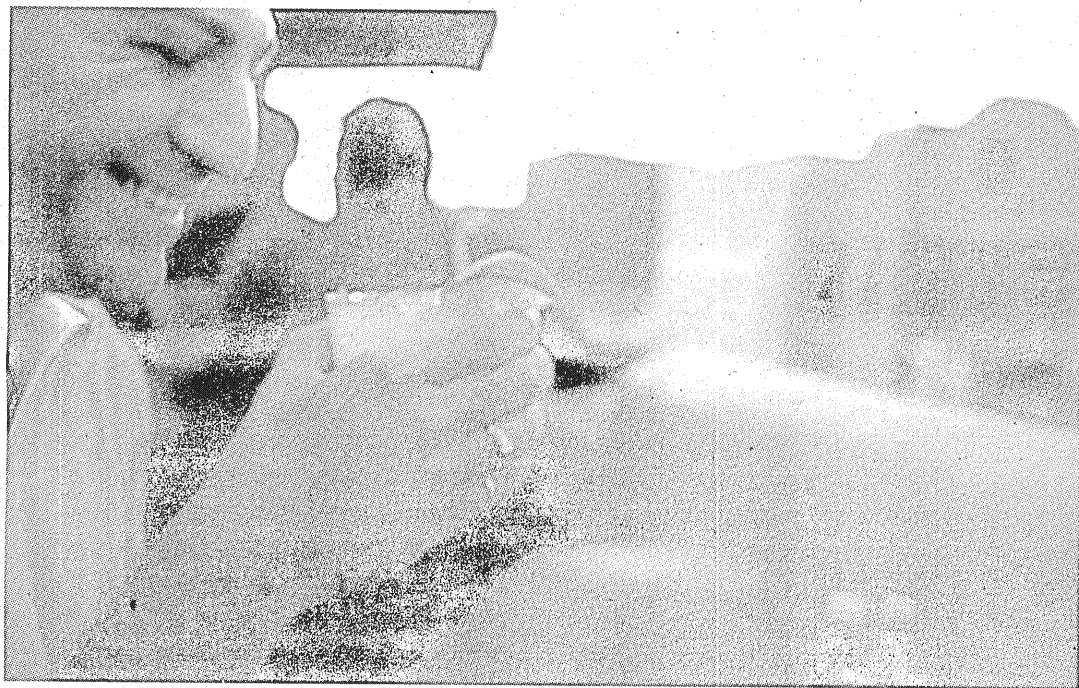


at the cantina



TOP: THE
ALWAYS PACKED
COURTYARD
AT THE COWGIRL
HALL OF FAME;
RIGHT:
ENJOYING
FAMOUS
MARGARITAS OF
THE COYOTE
CANTINA

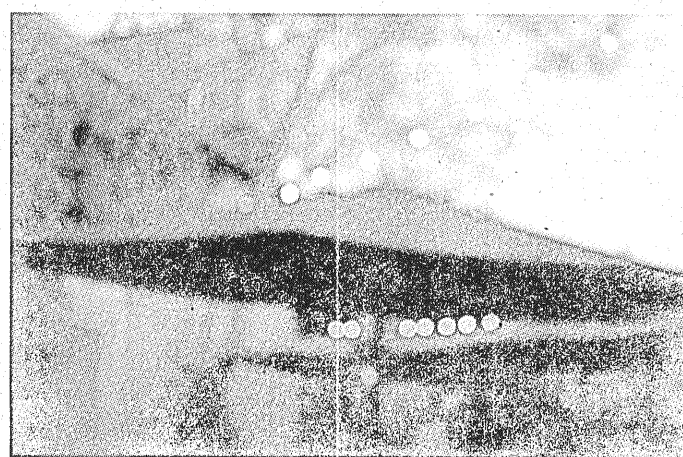


Don't go out to go in. Go out to go out. Cantinas are the place to be this summer. Restaurant patios are already abuzz with people meeting people, lively—sometimes live—music, and little gas lanterns or fairy lights sparkling the evening, lending an air of festivity and a feeling of summer freedom. Cantinas are sometimes less expensive and often less formal than the same establishment's indoor dining space. They are wonderful places for friends to meet and carry-on for hours, enjoying the fresh air, the views, the plentiful drinks. Bump into people you haven't seen since last summer's patio parties and abandon yourself to the whims of chance as a Santa Fe Cantina evening unfolds. We visited three very different Santa Fe restaurant patios searching for ambiance, atmosphere, and that certain *je ne c'est quoi* that makes a great cantina stand out. Whether you enjoy the hip artist set, schmooze with a young professional crowd, or desire a romantic evening for two, you'll kick up your heels at our picks: Rio Chama Steakhouse patio, Coyote Café Cantina, and The Cowgirl Hall of Fame patio.

Take a date: it's swank. Rio Chama steakhouse patio envelops you with adobe walls, wrought iron gates, and a graceful, tasteful, wood and canvas demi-roof. Sit at charming tables and observe sophisticated waiters who drift about, seamlessly perfecting things, then disappear into the adobework after

preparing your salad right before your eyes. Heavens, it's charming. While chirping on charming, allow me to champion the chile. Chile as in Texas chile, not as in green or red. Spicy just to the point where you can still taste flavors, it's well endowed with chunks of sirloin. Hanging baskets of flowers adorn the pleasantly open space, which features a handsome, stone fireplace for chilly spring and summer evenings. Jazz music wafts gently through the air. You have umpteen choices for wine, and for delicious sirloin of all sorts. You are surrounded by other diners who speak serenely of their children, or latest novel, or can't-fail business propositions, and discuss future plans for sailing in the Gulf. Meanwhile, you and your date look longingly into each other's eyes and sigh over the naughty ecstasy of one fat juicy steak each, and the prospect of later collapsing into one another's arms like two sleepy lions....ah yes, this place definitely puts you in the mood.

Outside at the Coyote Café Cantina, get a sweet and spicy Jamaican Jerk chicken with Mango and greens for just eight dollars. All this and a salad as perfectly dressed as a farmer in overalls. Meanwhile, sit at a rail overlooking Water Street and some picturesque rooftops. Watch swallows dart high overhead and eat tiny airborne insects. Casual and classy, an all-ages joint where



AT LEFT & ABOVE:
CELEBRATING ON
COYOTE'S FABULOUS
CANTINA; ABOVE: THE
HIDDEN INNER COURT-
YARD OF THE RIO
CHAMA STEAKHOUSE
AND SERVINGS OF THEIR
MICRO-BREWED BEER.

laughter and conversation reign over speakers playing drum 'n bass, salsa, jazz and other atmospheric, far-away, music. Fancy drinks fill menu pages like they must have a bartender Einstein in some dark secret room concentrating and inventing constantly. I drank, and witnessed, the "Water Street Sunset" simultaneously, which is an opportunity few bars offer in this otherwise best of all possible worlds. Delicious! A happy combination of fast and slow food atmospheres combine linen tablecloths with white paper over the top. Here you find shoulders bared and bellies covered in fine enough fabrics for the crowd of Young Adults Toting Cell Phones Hiply and Instinctively Everywhere (YATCHIES)—who gather in groups: James Joycean heavily-drinking book clubs? Salvador Dali-meets—Indian-time—melting clock associations? Drought-gardeners and grass-lovers of America gone-mad support groups? Good soup. Guacamole so chunky it's luscious as a tender baby's toes. My date admits he hasn't been out since last year, but is better able than I to determine the sex of our waiter. Some men at the next table discuss pictures of themselves. One on my left explains, "I was climbing out the window in my boxers!" You like fancy drinks, honey? You like some good food, baby? You like to be above it all—like a cat, like a rock star, like an artist ahead of his time? You come to Coyote, they feed you good.

Now it's time to let your belly out en order, sir. Sassy young patrons at The Cowgirl show so much hipbone I think it's bikini season in jeans. Any thing matches tonight: plaid with stripes, wide tie with suspenders. "Hey babe! Did your mother dress you?" is a compliment at this arty, casual and very

crowded, festive space. Pronounced clavicles hearken spring on ladies with necks bared, whose stealthy eyes pick out off-duty waiters from other restaurants: loosening neckties, letting out shirttails, propping cigarettes to dangle from slack lips' corners. Their vigilance no longer focused on seeking errant bussers, but on the lookout for hot buns and cold beers. Strains of bluegrass seep through body-jammed doors and windows, rendering diners helplessly enthralled. Specialties include sweet potato fries, which leave you with eyes wide and popping, amazed and delighted. Pink drinks, margaritas, daiquiris and lots of beer here. A Canadian is standing there amazed, saying "Santa Fe! If only I could pack you wonderful laid-back people home to boring old Calgary!" The guitar picker makes that half-ecstasy/half-toothache face that guitar pickers everywhere make when in love with their own sounds, and little girls' hearts just flip and do the splits. Tips for the band pile up and pour out the tip jar along with wilting tulips, love notes, pints of blood and offers of first born sons. All the youth in your soul slowly bubbles up and over the sides of the pot as your body remembers the joys of awkward limbs, loosened beer jaws, and weird hair. The Ice Cream Baked Potato is an artfood sculpture, a dessert, a meal, a conversation piece. "What's in this?" we ask, and our waiter dives in with a fork and takes a bite! "That there's banana!" At the Cowgirl, you can be yourself, only cooler.

*Rio Chama Steakhouse 414 Old Santa Fe Trail in Santa Fe. (505) 955-0765.
Coyote Cantina 132 West Water Street in Santa Fe. (505) 983-1615. The
Cowgirl Hall of Fame 319 South Guadalupe in Santa Fe. (505) 982-2565.*