

Esquire

Mitzi Jerman's Café – Cleveland, OH

By Joe Oestreich



You're Having: A Boilermaker

The Jerman (pronounced Yer-man) family opened its doors to the east side's workingmen in 1908. Today, looking out the bar's bay windows, it's clear that the neighboring factories on St. Clair Avenue weren't as deftly managed as Jerman's Café. But even if the avenue is now a ghost of its grease-and-guts heyday, the street's favorite bar sure hasn't changed much. A certificate of membership to the Ohio liquor league from 1917 still hangs on a wall that's the dirty yellow of smoke-stained teeth. Beer bottles still sweat into the original one-piece slab of wooden bar top. Mitzi's daughter, Susie, will still sling you a story while measuring an impossibly cheap inch of Jack into a highball, adding Coke straight from the can. And Mitzi's mutt, Roscoe, still yaps at customers as they are buzzed inside.

But Jerman's Café has changed. At the end of the bar, the lawn chair where Mitzi used to watch the Indians on TV sits empty. Mitzi poured drinks, cheered on the Tribe, and lived in the upstairs apartment -- the apartment where she was born -- almost to the end. When she died last October at ninety-two, the *Plain Dealer* ran her obit on the front page.

Mitzi saw a whole bunch of what there is to see in a place where men are free to be their best and worst selves -- from snooping T-men to backroom politics to the rise and fall and rise of punk rock -- but, sadly, she won't see her bar turn 100. You should, however. Bring a friend. Just not too many