Max's recent renovation hasn't changed its neighborhood charm

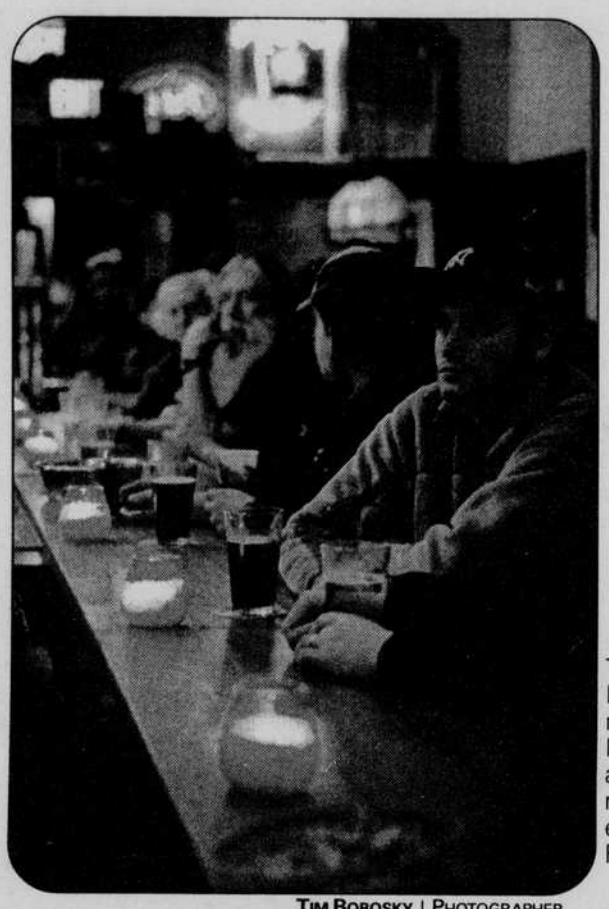
Subtle changes include chessboard tables, new bar

BY RYAN MURPHEY
PULSE REPORTER

For some people, a night out isn't complete unless it involves theme nights, dancing, drink specials, karaoke or some other excuse to dress up and drink up. Everyone else just wants to get away from those people, sit down, and have a gimmick-free drink with some good friends. These people go to the neighborhood bar. It's comfortable but lively; people don't have to dress up, and if there's a jukebox, it's always incredible.

No one in Eugene does the neighborhood bar quite like Max's Tavern, which has recently reopened after five months of renovation. The tavern had to shut down near the beginning of last summer after seepage from a corroded drainage system created a 6.5-foot deep bog of sludge under the floor. The load-bearing wall between Max's and Little's Market had to be stabilized, the drainage system replaced and nearly everything touching the floor had to be torn out.

For Ward Fairbairn, the owner of Max's since 1993, the renovation took "too damn long," and I'm sure that many of the regular patrons agree. After all, there isn't really anything like it in town. The bar's comfortable charm and classic decor has always been more traditional than other bars in the Eugene area, with it's elaborate bar cabinetry and high-backed wooden benches. The decor is still being renovated and the bar wall is mismatched plywood, but Fairbairn said that Max's will be looking like it's old self again in time for Saint Patrick's Day.



Tycer Turner, a Eugene native, returned to Max's Tavern after the reopening to enjoy a drink Friday night.

Tim Bobosky | Photographer

Though the look of the place is fairly consistent with the old Max's, a few subtle changes have been made. The bar has been rebuilt and expanded, two of the booths have been restructured to accommodate larger groups and a second window table has been installed. Also, Fairbairn has constructed several tables with inlayed marble chessboards, and hopes to eventually host chess and cribbage tournaments in the bar. Patrons will be able to check out pieces with photo identification at the bar.

Max's is the oldest bar in Eugene, dating back to 1933, that is still in its original location. It was originally named Robinson's after the original owner, Max Robinson, but was referred to as Max's by most regular patrons. The name was officially changed after Robinson passed away. The bar has since been owned by five different people, the most recent being Fairbairn and his wife Kimberley Fairbairn.

"We had come up from San Diego to buy a house, and Ward stopped in to have a beer," said Mrs. Fairbairn. "The owner at the time told us that we shouldn't buy a house, we should buy the bar."

The bar features 11 taps, with three domestics, Guinness and seven microbrews. Fairbairn is working on a menu for the bar so that they can start serving liquor by spring.

Those sophisticated enough to appreciate the charms of a neighborhood pub can't afford to miss Max's Tavern.

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■ **Movie review**

Sax's 'White Noise' redeemable as a thriller, cliché as a ghost movie

BY RYAN NYBURG
PULSE EDITOR

"White Noise," the latest in the recent string of Hollywood ghost movie/star vehicles, is a cliché-filled ghost story with too many dull stylistic flourishes and a plot you really shouldn't think too hard about. None of this detracts from its intrinsic value as a thriller, though it does keep it from being anything more than simple fodder for the cinematically dead month of January.

The film begins by explaining its central gimmick, EVP, or Electronic Voice Phenomenon, which describes the ability of the dead to communicate with the living through electronic devices such as phones, televisions and radios. The film treats the phenomenon as a real occurrence, though whether it is or not hardly makes any difference. It's not a new idea in ghost movies in any case, dating back to at least "Poltergeist," when the family tried to communicate with their daughter through the blank channels of their television.

The plot concerns an architect (Michael Keaton) whose wife dies suddenly. Shortly afterward he begins receiving strange phone calls and hearing odd things on the radio. He is told by an investigator dealing with such matters that his wife is trying to communicate with him through electronic devices. He meets others who have experienced such forms of communication and soon begins making recordings of blank static in order to record the messages. Beyond this point the plot stops making a whole lot of sense.

In the right hands this plot could have been turned into something truly worthwhile, but everything is so mishandled that the material never rises above TV-movie quality. Director Geoffrey Sax adds arty camera angles and other overused claptrap for no other purpose than to let people know he is directing something, never seeming to think that a lack of style might have been more effective. When the camera starts doing 360s around the actors, it only serves to remind people they are watching a movie, the last thing you want to do if you're trying to scare them.

The plot itself is also criminally mishandled, not only in its various loopholes but in the management of the characters as well. When Keaton's wife dies we never see his reaction to the news. We are never given a chance to make that emotional connection to the character. The death of the wife is handled in such a perfunctory manner that it seems to serve no purpose other than to give Keaton an excuse for becoming obsessed with EVP. The character of Keaton's son is even more cynically handled. Apparently the screenwriter thought it would be important for Keaton to have a son to make him more likable, but in order to skip over the emotional trauma the death of a mother would cause, they make the character a child from a previous marriage. This also serves

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