

Should I Stay Or Should I Go

By Drew Smith, Front Desk Manager

Over the years, many guests have told us that our pool was the site of several scenes from the Clash's 1982 "Rock the Casbah" music video. We have had more than our share of musicians as guests, so it seemed perfectly plausible. It was only recently that I dug in to check the story out and found myself lost in online obsession, Austin lore, and a Texas-Clash connection going back decades.

It all began with Marty Robbins, whose cowboy ballads entranced and inspired Clash co-founder and vocalist Joe Strummer from across the Atlantic for years. When Amarillo-native Joe Ely toured London in '78, Strummer went backstage to introduce himself and the band. They were huge Ely fans, and while he had never heard of them, they bonded over shared interests in rockabilly, movies, and poetry. They spent the next few days showing Ely around London, even taking him to their studio.

"It was like the West Texas hell raisers meet the London hell raisers," Ely said.

In Ely, the Clash finally had a direct connection to the world they'd only heard on records and seen on television.

"To them," Ely said, "Texas was a mythical place that they only knew about in old Marty Robbins gunfighter ballads and Westerns and stuff."

When Strummer brought up an upcoming American tour, the only places he wanted to play were those he'd heard about in songs—El Paso, Laredo, Wichita Falls. Ely returned home to Lubbock, and soon enough, the Clash called to book several Texas dates with Joe Ely Band as opening act. They played their first Texas show at the Armadillo World Headquarters, the 1970s venue that propelled Austin's music scene to national attention and forever shaped the city's image.



The night was October 4, 1979, and Michael Corcoran's in-depth article, "25 Most Significant Nights in Austin Music History," features it at number twelve. Corcoran quotes the oft-cited description of the performance as "Ely and his band pouring gasoline all over the stage and then the Clash coming out and lighting a match." The all-night jam session that followed, with Ely and the Clash joining local punk band the Skunks on stage at the Continental Club, turned an unforgettable night into one of true, incendiary fame.

When the Clash returned in June of 1982 to film "Rock the Casbah," the Armadillo had been closed a year and a half. Perhaps in homage to the venue that hosted that first Texas performance, the video features a recurring armadillo running through various shots. Maybe it was just a funny thing to include, but a photo from that show did end up on the back of the London Calling album, suggesting the "Dillo's" significance to the band.

To watch the video now is to see glimpses of the Austin that longtime natives speak of wistfully, reverently. As much as I wanted to believe in Austin Motel's place in punk rock history after learning about the Clash's Texas connection, I am sorry to report that the shots of a motel swimming pool were not taken at the Austin Motel. Deflated but undeterred, I continued on in my exploration of this weirdest of Austin relics.

After a deep dive into obscure internet wormholes about the video, my best guess for the pool featured at 2:05 and 2:08 is the Sheraton Hotel near Interstate 35 and 11th Street. According to Songfacts.com, the actor who played the Rabbi, Dennis Razze, said auditions were held at the Sheraton, and pictures of that hotel pool do look like those in the video.

At fifty-four seconds, the two main characters, The Sheik and The Rabbi, drive in to Austin with the Capitol Building in the background. That skyline sure looks different, though, doesn't it?

Other noteworthy shots of 1982 Austin are fun to spot, and often difficult to discern.

0:56 The Winchell's Donuts is now a Subway. A close examination of this location, and a trove of trivia about the video, can be found in Adam Norwood's delightfully obsessive blog.

1:44 The Burger King 27th and Guadalupe didn't change too much—it's now a Whataburger. Texans love Whataburger, if you don't know, so this is one change that old-timers probably aren't mad at.

2:02 The Alamo Hotel at the corner of 6th and Guadalupe appears to now be the Extended Stay America. Fun fact: scenes from the music video for Willie Nelson's "Pancho and Lefty" were filmed at the hotel's bar. It was knocked down in 1984.

2:50 The planes are flying into Bergstrom Air Force Base, which is now Austin Bergstrom International Airport.

3:05 The City Coliseum, which is now the Palmer Events center, was originally an aircraft hangar.

3:28 Footage from inside The Coliseum was, according to Razze, "absolutely crazy, because they just worked us into the audience in front of the stage and shot us and the band in real time during the concert."

The legend of the Clash lounging poolside at our motel may be debunked, but if you want to walk the same path as the armadillo featured in the video, it's tough to find a better starting point. Plus, the former site of the Armadillo is only a ten-minute walk away, and located next door is Threadgill's World Headquarters, a restaurant dedicated to honoring the renowned venue. Memorabilia covers the walls, and the juke box features one hundred albums by artists who played the 'Dillo. In the spirit of two worlds colliding—Texas' Joe Ely and London's definitive punks—you can chow down on chicken fried steak while listening to that "crazy Casbah sound."

Just be sure to wait thirty minutes before jumping back in the pool to avoid any cramping.

Further reading and source material for this blog:

[Joe Ely Remembers The Clash](#)

[Multiple Remembrances From The Chronicle](#)