

Alamo Drafthouse finds a way

Theater rentals bring back a sense of normalcy to movie-viewing

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staff reporter

The lights begin to fade. My mom is to my right, my sister to my left, and my dad at the end of us.

We sit in anticipation, waiting for the movie to begin.

Then, the *Jurassic Park* theme starts blaring. I jump from my seat and look over at my mom.

Where's the remote? I need to turn it down! I think to myself.

But I can't turn it down. For the first time in nine months, I can't adjust the volume of the movie playing in front of me.

Because we aren't sitting on our couch watching a movie.

We're sitting inside an Alamo Drafthouse movie theater.

A private Alamo Drafthouse movie theater. And it's just like normal.

Almost. "It's just like normal, almost" could be the slogan for The Alamo Drafthouse's new private theater rental viewing experience.

It takes you out of your own home and brings every part of a classic movie theater experience aside from your fellow audience members. While this does mean no one is there to raise an order card on you, it also means that arguably the largest part of attending a movie—the group setting—is lost.

Despite the slightly eerie emptiness of the theater, I had few complaints about the experience as it proved to be almost like a slice of regular life in the middle of a completely irregular time.

When we walked into the theater, we were greeted by a friendly employee who—despite having a mask covering half his face—seemed to be smiling.

After a wave and a hello, my dad told him we were here to see *Jurassic Park* at 12:45.

"Which one are you seeing?" He asked us. There was a brief silence.

"It's OK, you can just say the best one," he

said, laughing at his own joke.

A conversation with another human being who I am not directly related to caught me off guard and was possibly why I completely missed the subtle humor of the Drafthouse employee and his mocking the franchise for making sequels to a movie with an otherwise perfect ending.

Or perhaps, it is simply because I have lost all ability to read social cues due to my limited interactions during quarantine.

The real reason, we may never know.

He followed our slightly awkward encounter with a temperature check, then asked if we had purchased our tickets online and sent us on to seat ourselves.

Once we were seated, a masked server came into the theater to ask if we would like our drinks brought out before our food—both of which had been previously ordered online.

I sipped on a Topo Chico as the Alamo's pre-show skits and short films played on the screen. Everything was seemingly the same as the usual experience, except that there were no trailers for upcoming films. The pre-show ended, and we went right to the movie.

For the following two hours and eight minutes, my eyes never left the movie screen. I munched on far too many mozzarella sticks and took the term "bottomless popcorn" a little too literally.

When the credits began to roll and the lights faded back up, I felt the same post-movie exhaustion I've felt time and time before despite having done nothing for the past two hours.

As we made our way out of the Drafthouse, I recognized the dazed confusion of emerging from the dark theater and into the bright sun; a feeling I hadn't experienced in almost 10 months.

Despite my tired brain and cloudy eyes, one thing was clear: I was happy.

For two glorious hours, I was able to escape into a world of dinosaurs and cinematic mastery that, even if only for a moment, took away from the unending stress of the current pandemic.

The bottom line: For a family of four that has had limited exposure to others since March—having done little to no in-person shopping and having avoided restaurant dining—the expense of roughly four movie trips in one felt well worth it.

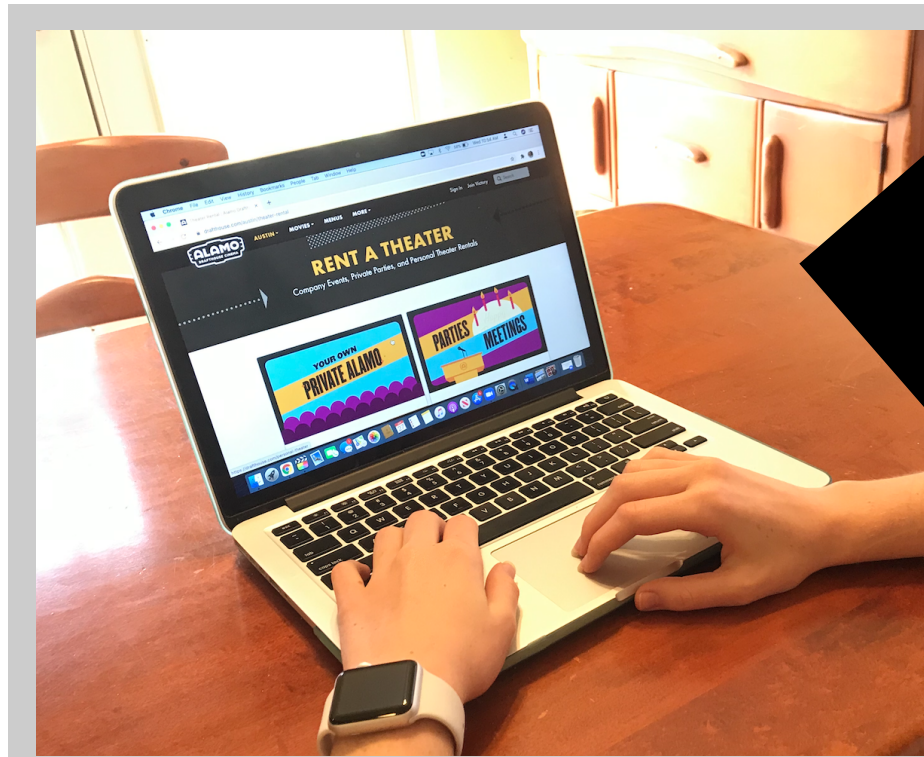
I would advise others, however, to read the fine print carefully, because the full process for renting the theater was not explained in detail on the website. My family

misinterpreted the final pricing due to the theater rental fee and food and drink minimum being the same cost. And neither fee accounted for the cost of the movie tickets themselves, which seemed like it could have been included as part of the rental package.

In spite of the cost, we were glad to support a local business and an industry that has been almost completely shut down by the pandemic.

And while the expense might not be realistic for everyday use, but better reserved for a special occasion, the sense of normalcy brought with it a reminder of the luxury of pre-pandemic life — and that was priceless.

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The show must go on

The Alamo Drafthouse now offers a private theater rental alternative for pandemic-safe movie viewing. Rentals are available on their website (left) where customers can reserve a spot at one of the Austin locations offering this option and select a movie to see from a limited list including fan favorites, top picks and family friendly options curated by the Drafthouse. Photo by Alice Scott.

Welcoming movie-goers to the theater, the Alamo Drafthouse's iconic sign (right) hangs above the entrance of the Mueller location. At the beginning of the pandemic, all of the Drafthouse theaters closed, but certain locations now offer private rentals as well as regular showings. Specific viewing options for each theater can be found on the Alamo's website. Cutout by Alice Scott.

For more information, visit drafthouse.com.