



CRAB CORN DOGS



GLOBE TROTTER



BLACKENED STEELHEAD

The Main Attraction

TAVERN ON MAIN ELEVATES DINING IN DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD *By Will Kennedy*

After nearly two years of takeout and delivery courtesy of the pandemic, I was feeling burned out on bar food when I stepped into Tavern on Main in downtown Springfield, only to have one of the best burgers in Lane County.

Tavern on Main Bar + Kitchen is located, appropriately enough, on Springfield's Main Street, among other restaurants and shopping opportunities in an increasingly charming district of downtown. Opened in April 2021, it's the latest project from Todd Wallenbeck and Andrew Deffenbacher, following B2 Bar and Grill in the Crescent Village area of north Eugene.

Serving new American cuisine, the space has a tasteful mix of art deco and modern interiors, themed around F. Scott Fitzgerald's Roaring '20s classic *The Great Gatsby*; the tavern is inspired by Death & Company, an on-the-pulse cocktail bar with outlets in Los Angeles, New York and Denver.

Of his latest project, Wallenbeck says, "We want to transport you — make you feel like you're in a larger city."

As far as the burger, what makes it notable are the contradictions.

Restaurant priced, it's served with a good-portioned fresh salad or fries — experienced eaters might notice something familiar: The thin-cut fries are cooked in beef tallow just like McDonald's used to be. Otherwise, the burger is made from an 8-ounce dry-aged patty, flat-topped and seared, with gouda, offering all that makes a fast food burger such a naughty treat: a kicky yellow mustard, an open-fermentation pickle and a savory-sweet grilled onion frisée, on a pillow-y bun made by The Bread Stop bakery in Eugene.

There's also an emulsified American cheesiness, met with what's listed on the menu as a secret sauce, similar to a New Orleans comeback sauce, typically mayonnaise, ketchup, chili sauce and lemon juice. Add to that, Worcestershire sauce, dry mustard, onion powder, hot sauce, garlic powder and paprika.

"Not so secret," Wallenbeck admits, but delicious, and

with everything sustainably sourced you feel somewhat less guilty for enjoying it.

Is it possible to transition from the raved-about burger to a Caesar salad without sounding condescending? Let's give it a shot, because Tavern on Main's plentiful Caesar is no bit player.

With little gem lettuce, pecorino cheese, croutons, fried anchovies and shaved cured egg yolk, it's satisfying and something like a drink of cool refreshing water. There are lots of other great non-meat eater options on the menu



CHEF JOSH GACKE

as well, such as the citrus salad, a mix of chicory, citrus segments, savory ricotta salata, mint, hazelnuts and champagne vinaigrette.

Elsewhere, Tavern on Main excels in updated classics, befitting the atmosphere, like oysters Rockefeller — baked oysters in herb butter with parmesan and bread crumbs. Head chef Josh Gacke's take on another fine dining mainstay, lobster Thermidor, was a recent New Year's Eve special, made relevant with hints of lemon and experiments with fermentation. Also selling well, according to Wallenbeck, are the crab corn dogs — a concept borrowed from his time serving lobster corn

dogs at The Blacksmith Restaurant in Bend.

No, it's not crab meat forced into the elongated shape of a hot dog, but a battered and spherical Dungeness crab cake on a stick, served with old bay and harissa aioli — cut with citrus, the harissa is peppery and hot, but worth the risk.

Among all the offerings on the menu, Wallenbeck says, "steak is king," particularly the frites, or eight ounces of grilled hanger steak with pomme frites, beef demi-glace and wild mushroom compound butter.

Serving a brunch menu on Sunday (lunch service is scheduled to return in February, COVID allowing) there's buttermilk and poppy seed pancakes with lemon curd and powdered sugar, and biscuits and gravy, with homemade biscuits and boar sausage gravy — add eggs for an additional \$2.

Cocktail heavy any day of the week, the drink options extend to brunch, according to front-of-house manager Nicole Kauffman, who collaborated on the mixed drink menu, like the Spicy Bloody with a chorizo infused house bloody mary mix.

There's also the popular cereal shots, which are exactly what they sound like: sweet, cereal-infused milk, just like you remember from when you were a kid, mixed with the booze of your choice.

"It brings people back to their childhood," Kauffman says. "You feel like an adult riding a tricycle."

Despite the attendant challenge of running a restaurant in a pandemic, business has been great so far for Tavern on Main, signaling Lane County's readiness for more dining options in a new-look downtown Springfield.

"We have really awesome local support from the Springfield community," Kauffman, with a lure for the Eugene community as well. "The area is becoming more pedestrian friendly, people want to come here and we offer a pretty approachable menu," she says. ■

Tavern on Main is at 338 Main Street, Springfield. It's open Tuesday through Thursday 3:30 to 10 pm, Friday 3:30 to 11 pm and Saturday 4 to 11 pm; the restaurant serves brunch 10 am to 3 pm Saturday and Sunday. For more information go to TavernOnMainSpfd.com.