

Dining review: The Drop at Martini Corner

Oh! Do Drop In.

By LAUREN CHAPIN

The Kansas City Star



The ingredients on the bruschetta were simple: fontina cheese, onions and almonds. Garlic and tomato. Wild mushrooms and bacon. But after chef Josh Eans worked his kitchen magic and piled the foods on crispy rectangles of toasted bread, the flavors of that bruschetta sang.

The fontina cheese melted from the heat of the sweet caramelized onions, and the chopped, toasted almonds snapped and crunched. The whole cloves of slow-roasted garlic were mellow and sweet, while the oven-roasted tomatoes had a soulful earthiness. Sautéed wild mushrooms were coarsely chopped beneath their crust of crispy bacon.

Eans may be young, but the cherub-faced chef has an intuitive knack for pairing ingredients and cooking techniques. Balance sweet with salty, soft with crunchy. Roast this. Fry up that. Add a sprig of dill or mint. A drop or two of truffle oil. And wow! Something pedestrian becomes something remarkable.

The Drop is the brainchild of Eddie Crane and Ernesto Peralta, former bartenders at the Capital Grille. And indeed, this sleek Martini Corner site serves up some amazing martinis and an impressive wine and beer selection. Their martinis, including a supple red wine martini made with California Pinot Noir and a milky lychee one, match Eans' food.

But whether we are talking the food or cocktails or location, I'm a fan.

Eans changes his menu about twice a season while keeping some favorites, including the arugula citrus salad. Perky citrus was dressed with perfectly balanced citrus basil vinaigrette and studded with wisps of shaved fennel, grapefruit chunks and toasted pine nuts. His field greens salad was just as cohesive: greens, dried cherries, green apple slices, toasted pistachios and soft goat cheese crumbles were tossed with just enough vinaigrette.

His soup du jour was a wild mushroom soup, made with meaty oyster and shiitake mushrooms in a clear, slightly salty broth. Fresh enoki mushrooms and crumbled crunchy Italian bacon were sprinkled atop it. And again, Eans gave the dish pizzazz with layers of flavors and textures.

For something to share and nibble on, order the bruschetta platter and select four toppings from 14 options. Each thick slice of Farm to Market ciabatta bread was cut into four two-bite rectangles. Toppings ranged from vegetarian goat cheese, fig and pistachio to a carnivore's dream of roast beef and gorgonzola. Every one was dynamite.

The heartiest meals were the paninis, also served on Farm to Market bread. I sampled the Smoked Turkey with crispy Italian bacon, romaine, oven-dried tomatoes, roasted garlic mayo and rosemary-black pepper mustard. I shared the Italian, layered with meats, smoked mozzarella, sweet-spicy peppadew peppers and roasted garlic mayo.

These are true paninis, the breads pressed until the outsides are crusty and chewy, the insides warm and oozy. Like the salads and bruschetta, they were big enough to share.

Eans' wife, Abbey-Jo, is the pastry chef (the couple met in culinary school). Usually too full to indulge in dessert, I did try her blueberry almond trifle. Cubes of almond pound cake were layered with stewed blueberries and clementine marmalade. It was light and intensely flavored.

Like Eans, she has the gift. Her food has a playfulness, too: Think Nutella and banana panini or mini cookies served with a glass of milk.

Open since mid-October, the Drop continues to evolve and expand and adapt to the neighborhood of laid-back bars and eateries.

There are 55 beers and 65 bottles of wines stocked. They host salsa dancing on Tuesdays, serving cheap Modelos and margaritas all night, and offer \$5 martinis on Wednesdays.

Even nicer: New windows have been installed — the kind that slide open when the days are pretty and life is grand and, man, let's meet at the Drop.

the drop

409 E. 31st St.

816-756-DROP

Food:

Service:

Atmosphere:

Hours: 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday through Friday. 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. Saturday and 5 p.m. to midnight Sunday

Entrée range: \$8 to \$12 for bruschetta platter

Vegetarian choices: grilled cheese panini, roma tomato panini, several bruschettas

Smoking policy: Smoking in bar

Credit cards: Yes

Noise level: Terrific jukebox with high-def television

Children: Maybe teenagers

Seating capacity: 70

Parking: Own lot

Takeout: Call ahead 15 to 25 minutes

Handicap accessible: Yes

Web site: thedropbar.com