

My Dinner At | The Drop Bar and Bistro

By DEREK DONOVAN - The Kansas City Star



The Drop, in a historic brick building at 409 E. 31st St., has a clubby dining room that features a chandelier made of wine glasses.

I'd been hoping to check out the Drop: Bar and Bistro for a while now. A friend recently told me, "I never expected such fancy food on Martini Corner. It's a lot more than bar food."

So on a recent Saturday night, just as the autumn chill was starting to make al fresco dining a little less tempting, four of us gathered to put that high praise to the test.

Each of us had been in the historic brick building on 31st Street just west of Gillham during other restaurants' tenures there, but none of us had sampled the Drop's menu, which was revamped recently by new chef Kelli Daniels.

We started out with a round of drinks (a Diet Coke for the designated driver) and then made our way to the dining room, a comfortable space separated from the bar by a row of empty window frames.

The room is clubby and dark, not dim, with a whimsically clever chandelier of wine glasses suspended upside down from a tiered metal frame.

"I have boxes of glasses from Costco in the basement," said a friend who's known for his craftiness. "I should make one of those for my dining room."

We took our seats at the black-lacquered table and perused the menu, which was surprisingly lengthy for an establishment that clearly caters to the cocktail crowd.

Chef Daniels said she set out to remake the Drop's menu with an eye toward streamlining the already-established favorites.

"When I first got here, the food was all across the board — you could get a Cuban sandwich and hummus," she said. "My question to myself was, 'Where does my cooking fit into this concept?'"

The Drop's bill of fare is divided into five main sections: starters, "spoon and fork," "with your hands," bruschetta and small plates. The appetizers and bruschetta seemed suited to sharing.

I asked our server about the small plates — are they three- or four-bite affairs like in a traditional tapas bar?

"Not really," she said. "They're more like a regular entrée, but it isn't a really huge serving. But it's still a lot of food."

My friend added, "As you get further out from the city center, in the chain restaurants, everyone expects the plate to get bigger, piled with more starch. You don't need all that anyway."

We started with the house-cured olives, a variety of shapes, sizes and tastes that ranged from pleasantly mild to pungent with a bit of heat. They were fantastic with our drinks.

We also ordered the crab cakes, which Daniels is particularly proud of.

"I will say they're the best in town," she said, "to the point of people requesting them on the lunch menu."

They were served on a pool of avocado puree with a squiggle of what the menu called sriracha aioli. The plump pucks, fortunately, weren't full of bread, egg or especially bell pepper. Instead, they let big chunks of crab do the talking, while the avocado's smoothness lent a velvety richness. The aioli didn't have much garlic/chili kick, but too much would have overwhelmed the sweetness of the crab.

As far as libations go, we sampled a well-balanced Manhattan. I decided to stretch my boundaries with a "Ryan's Sazerac." I've never quite developed the taste for New Orleans' classic blend of dark spirits (usually whiskey or Cognac), bitters and some form of licorice-flavored pastis. But the Drop seems to be onto something with its version, which isn't overwhelmed with anise.

Next our server delivered a wooden cutting board that showcased a strikingly plated assortment of bruschetta. The menu offers 10 topping combinations to choose from, and each piece of bread is neatly cut into four morsels, each big enough for two generous bites. This was easy to share.

We liked the thin slices of prosciutto and roasted garlic piled on a layer of sweet and nutty romesco sauce. The sopressata salami and olive/sweet pepper tapenade was briny, spicy and rich — a bit too much for one guest in our party, but the rest of us loved it.

We were at odds on the piece topped with brie, raw apple slices and a drizzle of balsamic reduction. Everyone concurred that it was beautiful, but half of us found it too sweet for a starter.

Less divisive was the tender beef carpaccio, draped across a creamy porcini mushroom sauce that soaked into the top of the bread. Eye-rolling good and deceptively simple.

We really could have stopped at that point, but one of us chose a dish from the "with your hands" portion of the menu, pairing a grilled cheese panini with a bowl of the evening's creamy tomato and chipotle soup.

It was a terrific, upscale rendition of the classic rainy-day lunch. The crunchy ciabatta crust on the sandwich oozed with just the right amount of brie, mozzarella and pesto, studded with the brightly acidic note of dried tomatoes. The soup had a subdued and smoky heat, savory and intense, not sticky-sweet like the stuff out of the red-and-white can.

The rest of us had ordered small plates, but “small” is relative at the Drop — especially after all those starters.

The bourbon-brined “drunken pork chop” wasn’t particularly boozy, but its accompanying sweet potato salad and peach butter added interest to the moist but plain meat.

My pair of Colorado lamb chops was butchered perfectly and grilled to a model medium-rare. The thin exterior layer of fat was still sizzling as the server put the plate before me, and the roasted root vegetables in the accompanying hash were well-seasoned and crispy around the edges (especially the crazy-good brussels sprouts).

My guest’s coffee-encrusted ribeye was maybe even better, with a slightly charred crust that played off the chocolate-malbec reduction surrounding it on the plate. Served with a creamy combination of asparagus and shallots and paired with a glass of Malbec, it was as satisfying a steak as you’ll find in this meat-centric town.

At the end of the meal, we were all plenty full — both with food and good vibes about the Drop.

What to drink

The Drop’s long wine list focuses on value, with many bottles from around the world falling in the \$25–\$40 range. The appetizers and small plates menu makes the 18 choices available by the glass especially attractive. The M. Chapoutier Belleruche Cotes du Rhone is a perfect match to the lamb chops, and the Altos Las Hormigas Malbec pairs with the chocolate/malbec reduction on the ribeye. The bar turns out a variety of popular sweet “martinis,” such as the Lychee Martini or the Cosmo Apple. Monday evenings bring \$5 cocktails and wines by the glass from 4 to 7 p.m., and full bottles of wine are half price from 4 to 10.

The Drop Bar and Bistro

409 E. 31st St.

816-756-3767

www.thedropbar.com

Hours: 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Friday, 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. Saturday, 4 p.m. to midnight Sunday

Vegetarian choices: Many, including house-cured olives, white-bean hummus, roasted Yukon Gold potatoes, several salads and bruschetta toppings, grilled cheese and vegetable paninis

Noise level: Moderate, but louder as the evening goes on, especially in the bar area

Parking: Free parking in back and on street

Split-plate charge: None

Reservations: Accepted for parties of eight or more: 816-399-0088 or event@thedropbar.com