



June 19, 2010

Spring Street Bar & Grill | Louisville Restaurant Review

Pub grub springs forth on Spring Street

By Marty Rosen

Special to The Courier-Journal

Of making many pubs, there seems to be no end. Our fair city is home to Irish pubs, brewpubs, theme pubs of various types and just lately a new crop of so-called gastropubs. Meanwhile, it's getting harder and harder to find a place that cheerfully claims that old-fashioned American moniker: Bar and Grill.

And rare indeed is the place that really lives up to the last part of that phrase by offering a well-developed, appetizing menu -- and then delivering the goods with consistency, generosity, a friendly touch and a reasonable respect for the shallow pocketbook.

"Come Early, Stay Late" is the mantra at the Spring Street Bar & Grill. And it's a mantra worth memorizing. Sunday through Thursday, the kitchen is open until 1 a.m.; Friday and Saturday the grill sizzles up until 2 in the morning.

And when that grill sizzles, good things happen. Hefty burgers weigh in at nearly a half pound and can be topped off with all the usual condiments. But they can also be covered with a slab of Swiss cheese, a splash of Thousand Island dressing and a dash of coleslaw, and served on grilled rye (the "Rowdy Reuben Burger, \$7.45).

Burger lovers of delicate sensibilities might prefer their beef on an English muffin with a sprinkle of crumbled blue cheese and a smear of fancy European-style mustard (\$7.45). There is a turkey burger (\$6.75) for those who avoid red meat. And there's a glorious patty melt, awash in a sea of grilled onions and melted Swiss for those who revel in meaty indulgences (\$7.95).

Folks who want a light nosh with their bottle of Stroh's or their mug of Falls City (or Dogfish 60 Minute IPA) can dip celery sticks into a creamy, pink, oh-so-mild, house-made beer cheese (\$5.50), or grab a platter of Buffalo wings (10 for \$8.75; 45 cents each on Monday nights). Those wings are pretty darned good. They arrive at the table with their crunch still intact underneath the stinging sauce in which they're bathed.

For that matter, the front-of-the-house operation at Spring Street makes sure that everything gets to the table straightaway, including the crisp, fresh vegetable plate (broccoli, carrots and cucumbers (\$5.95) and the iceberg wedge (\$4.95) served up with cherry tomatoes and a portion of the restaurant's mysterious "pepper dressing," a house-made play on ranch dressing, dolled up with a hint of mustard and some peppery spices).

If service does get a bit slow, there are plenty of ways to amuse yourself while you wait. Owner David Clephas has created a whimsical setting, complete with a clutter of photos, an installation of bicycles hanging from the ceiling, the grille of a grand, old, pink luxury car that juts out proudly above the passage to the back dining room, and an ample supply of video games and pool tables.

For my wife, Mary, the key item on the Spring Street menu -- I don't think she ever orders anything else -- is the grilled tuna steak sandwich: a slab of tuna, lightly dusted with a bit of Cajun-style spice, then grilled and served on an oversize bun. The kitchen's default setting is to cook that tuna all the way through -- more than I'd prefer, certainly; but they do it with a light enough touch that the flesh stays moist and pleasant.

The menu tops out at just under \$10 (for the steak sandwich and a double-patty burger that weighs about a pound). But everything else is well under that. A generous pulled-pork sandwich (sometimes leaning to the dry side) comes with coleslaw and spicy-sweet baked beans for a grand total of \$6.95. Well-constructed club sandwiches and a cool number made from Benedictine, bacon and alfalfa sprouts make great warm-weather sandwiches (\$6.75).

Given those prices, and given that many of the dishes come with a choice of salad, baked potato or other side dish, I calculate that a couple of folks could dine pretty happily at Spring Street Bar & Grill for under \$15. In this era, that's even harder to find than an old-fashioned bar and grill.

E-mail freelance restaurant critic Marty Rosen at cjdining@gmail.com.

Additional Facts

SPRING STREET BAR & GRILL



Address: 300 S. Spring St.

Telephone: (502) 584-6630

Web: www.springstreetbar.com

Cuisine: American bar grub.

Alcohol: Full bar, specialty cocktails, a generous list of bottled and draft beers.

Vegetarian: Salads, sides, a couple of sandwiches and pizza.

Price range: Inexpensive. Exclusive of alcohol, two people could dine for \$15-\$20.

Reservations: Call ahead for large parties.

Credit cards: AE, D, MC, V.

Children's menu: Ask your server.

Smoking: No.

Access: A ramp from the rear parking lot offers unimpeded access for people using wheelchairs.

Hours: Food service -- Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-1 a.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11a.m.-2 a.m.; Sunday, 1 p.m.-1 a.m.
