

Spotlight on Cork Wine & Tapas



by Noah
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Over the course of the ten years I have been working as a bartender, serving food and drinks to the residents and tourists of downtown New Bedford, A LOT has changed. Thankfully, those changes have been far more positive than negative. One of the changes is the amount of new shops, bars & restaurants that have moved into the downtown area, bringing people to New Bedford and keeping them entertained with the creativity and culture that is once again starting to flourish in this great city.

One of the new places that really took the whole dining and service experience up a notch is Cork Wine & Tapas. Located directly next to Rose Alley Ale House, at the end North Front and the corner of Union Street, this bar/restaurant/nightlife spot has pushed to the limits of modern class and style. A high-end feel with moderate pricing has made this establishment special, without emptying your wallet. And if you find yourself wondering, “What the hell are *Tapas*?” Keep reading to find out.

I was fortunate to sit down with the always busy, constantly moving and improving Michael Gavin, Cork’s general manager, to talk about Cork Wine & Tapas, past, present and future.



Cork Wine & Tapas

So Mike, how long has Cork been open?

Cork opened four years ago, in the winter of 2007.

You have been big in the service industry for a long time. What projects were you involved in before Cork?

I was developing two concepts for a local company. I had my own restaurant company for a while, but became well-known as a Director for Capital Grill, where I was responsible for 16 restaurants, including Capital Grill, Hemenways Seafood Grill, and 14 Bugaboo Creeks. I also opened and oversaw 22 openings for RARE Hospitality.

I was on the merger team for RARE and Longhorn Steakhouse as well. Prior to that, I held the same position with Back Bay Restaurant Group, developing such concepts as Famous Atlantic Fish Company and Joe's American Grill. I even managed a hotel and a marina. In 2002, I was even chosen as a host for The Food Network's annual conference in Providence!

That's pretty amazing. You obviously know what you are doing, so what changes has Cork undergone since 'the' Michael Galvin has become the general manager?

Well, being a friend of Rich Cardoza's, we wanted to take what he started and really develop it. The most obvious change was that we've made Cork more user-friendly, as the restaurant is

now available to our fans seven days-a-week. Since my arrival, we have made a strong focus on our food and service, but really, we are still trying to identify our guests.

What did you hope to bring to downtown NB?

I honestly knew very little about New Bedford before coming here, but I brought a spirit of what was happening here in our neighborhood and really wanted to work with our neighbors on developing one common



goal, which is to “make every guest happy and provide them with quality dining experience that is 100 % SATISFACTION. ”

If we all work together towards this common goal, I believe every restaurant and pub business will be successful. We need to help every visitor that comes here have a positive downtown New Bedford experience.

How is Cork different from other bars and restaurants?

We have learned that the best way to set yourself apart from others comes more from what is on the inside...the soul of the restaurant. So we now focus more on improving the inside inefficiencies of all aspects of the business (food, service, atmosphere, etc). We feel if we do that, it will reflect in everything we do. The people that dine and wine here see and appreciate that, and it shows through our entire business.

I think Cork is unique. The building is really the charm; it's one of a kind. I also think the foundation the previous owner established, with the food quality and the enormous selection of wine, is something the area has never seen. It's almost like New York or Miami came to the neighborhood. The emphasis on the Crazy Craft Cocktails at Cork became unique as well. It's really not just a restaurant, it's a vibe and a lifestyle.



Now for the big question...what are tapas?

Tapas are basically appetizers; the word comes from the Spanish word for small plates of food. The purpose of tapas is to be a small snack to eat while one is drinking and does not want to

have an entire meal. I would say this was the area where people were confused about tapas. It is meant to be small plates, shared by people; tapas are meant to be a SOCIAL aspect of dining, not just two people out to dinner. It is meant to be a celebration of food , wine and conversation.

What's your best selling food item?

New Bedford Waterfront Sea Scallops. Large, local scallops, pan-seared and served with jasmine rice, a mushroom macadamia nut cream sauce and soy glaze.

Approximately how many wines does Cork carry?

We have 30 available selections by the glass, and over 300 bottles you can order from around the globe.

Does Cork have any regular specials?

We just initiated the "Wine Down Weekdays," featuring a 3-course meal and a bottle of wine for \$40. Now that is what I call a special! The idea is to break that stereotype that Cork is expensive. We look to welcome new guests.



Celia's, upstairs from Cork, is available for private functions.

What is Celia's?

Celia's is a local legend: Celia, who took New Bedford party life to a new level! It is our room above Cork that is available for private functions.

Any big events coming up this spring?

Tonight is the Cork Open House, from 6-9 P.M. People can come in for some wine tasting and to sample some of the items on our spring menu. Beyond that, nothing major planned. We may try to bring back the summer music series. We also are discussing possibly starting brunch, but I already work 7 days a week, so we'll see.

Is there anything else you would like to add or say before we wrap things up?

I would like to add that ...all of us together have a chance, a real opportunity to make this area a unique dining/drinking/shopping destination. All the downtown venues need to work together: Candleworks, RAAH, Catwalk, Cork, Café Balena, Freestones. If we promote the SPIRIT of downtown, maintain our buildings, train our staff, and treat our competitors as friends and allies, we will succeed in this quest to make New

Bedford a destination. Like Newport or Portland, Maine, or even Plymouth, New Bedford can become a reliable, friendly destination.

Thank you Mike for fitting me into your schedule: Now get back work! Haha.

The neext time you find yourself in downtown or New Bedford, I recommend Cork Wine & Tapas. I know you will not be disappointed. Also, check out their CORK TV shows through their website or Youtube. You'll be able to watch as host Chris Hendricks shows you all sorts of neat drinks, bar tricks, interviews and more.

Now for me, I'm off for a pint...or 3. Cheers.