

Pier 37's new leadership brings the modern bistro experience to the downtown historic area in impressive fashion



The Pier 37 family and interior.

I've been visiting 37 Union Street in all its incarnations for decades. When I first started going there, it was known simply as "37 Union Street." No, really. That was the name of the bar. Since then, it has been known by a number of names, including most recently, "Fins" before it earned its current

name.



Brick and stone interior, water feature, dark hardwood and a variety of light features characterize Pier 37's welcoming interior.

Pier 37 today is under new ownership and management – it is certainly nothing like its seedy beginnings or a disreputable hangout. It is light years apart from that. Today it is a classy, yet not stuffy, modern bistro. I wouldn't deign to use the term gastro-pub – since this is not a pub. A pub typically refers to a place where there are either a large variety of beers on tap or a place that focuses on micro-beers. Almost always, the fare is typically hamburgers or pizza, albeit gourmet or “upscale.”

A modern-bistro is a legitimate eatery with restaurant quality food that features cocktails and wine, with beer taking a backseat – not a hidden one, mind you. It swaps out the stuffy atmosphere you may find at an upscale restaurant, for a more casual one. You get upscale food, in a casual environment for affordable prices.

Located downtown; new ownership, new chef, new menu

Pier 37, now owned and operated by Jeremy Dias and Eddy Yedlin, manages to do this in exemplary fashion. The menu was devised by Yedlin, an experienced chef who has a bachelor's degree from The Connecticut Culinary Institute and master's degree from Johnson and Wales University. After graduating, he went on to hone his craft at the prestigious Vanderbilt Grace Hotel and Relais & Chateaux properties throughout New England. He has a genuine passion for cooking up mouth-watering dishes and has chiseled the modest menu to one page full of favorites...and a few surprises.

Mike and I sauntered into Pier 37 at lunch time. On approach, you could see the energy – an “Open!” flag waved to us, and the blackboard with the day's specials beckoned for a closer look. The door was open which allowed a gentle breeze and ample air circulation. We were greeted immediately and warmly, by manager Cindy Sylvia and sat near the window – our preference.



A variety of daily specials compliment the modest menu.

If you have been to Pier 37, you are aware of the water feature, stunning wood bar, granite decorated counter-tops, aquarium and hardwood floors. The atmosphere is a warm, welcoming one and the seating is arranged so that you have a choice in distinctly different environments. You can sit at high tables near the window and do some people watching. You can sit along the wall and the counter-tops in the middle of

the “flow” of people. You can sit among the group of tables in the main dining area, closer to the aquarium and the small dance floor. Or you can, of course, mosey on up to the bar. Finally, if weather permits there is outdoor seating starting in July.

Starters to start

Poring over the “starters” section of the menu, we saw, as expected, the old stand-bys for this area: Caesar salad, New England Clam Chowder, kale soup, quesadillas, stuffed quahogs, wings, fried calamari, etc. However, there were plenty of original creations: **Spinach Balls** w/ balsamic vinegar, fried avocado rolled in panko and drizzled with chipotle mayo, a **Cheese Plate** (three cheeses of the day, pickled vegetables, jam, honey, and grilled bread), the **Pier 37 Salad** (mixed greens, goat cheese, grilled asparagus, pickled beets and tossed in balsamic dressing – you can add chicken, salmon or shrimp) and some delicious sounding flatbreads – **artichoke & arugula** w/ garlic herb spread, and mozzarella and a **wild mushroom** w/ cheddar cheese and truffle oil.

All were priced between \$4-\$13 with most starters around the \$5-\$8 range.



One of three flatbreads offered at Pier 37: the Lobster B.L.T. Flatbread

The two that caught our eye were the **Lobster B.L.T. Flatbread** and the **Crab & Spinach Dip**. The flatbread was loaded with

chunks of lobster, real bacon, tomatoes, garlic oil, provolone cheese and topped with lettuce. Just amazing. Chef Yedlin was generous with the amount of lobster he placed on this flatbread putting it over the top.

The crab & artichoke dish actually bested this. Real crab meat, not imitation crab meat – yes, you read that right. The bane of every seafood lover was not present. Again, Yedlin was generous, a theme here, with the crab meat. The dip was jam packed with it. The spinach had a bright, earthy flavor indicating that it was fresh spinach. The chips that formed a moat around the dipping bowl, came out piping hot – showing that these are made to order.

The Main Dishes

The main section is comprised of a variety of entrees, including burgers and sandwiches which came with a choice of french fries or sweet potato fries. They range from the \$8 pulled pork sandwich (cabbage slaw, dill pickles, cheddar cheese) to the \$17 lobster roll. The standards were there: chicken Caesar wrap, steak & cheese on a pretzel bun, chicken panini, bacon cheeseburger, fish & chips, grilled sirloin tips and seafood scampi – scallops, shrimp, mussels, scrod, fettuccine pasta.

The rest of the menu contained items that Yedlin jazzed up or created altogether. The Blue Burger was a burger topped with blue cheese but also had prosciutto and a balsamic reduction. There was a delectable sounding baked lobster mac & cheese, moules-frites – mussels in a red tomato broth served over french fries, and a house specialty, the smoked fried chicken – with garlic mashed potatoes, grilled asparagus, and covered in a bistro sauce.



Pier 37's lobster roll features a mountain of lobster meat on a butter-toasted bun. Happy, happy time.

I opted for the **Chicken Panini** and Mike ordered the **Lobster Roll**. The panini was filled with juicy, spot-on charred chicken breast with vibrant pesto, sweet caramelized onions, tomato, and mozzarella on a perfectly grilled ciabatta bread. It came with a heaping pile of homemade french fries that had a light coating – piping hot, crispy on the outside and creamy on the inside. Generous portions again. This was a fantastic sandwich and certainly one I would come back to time and again.

Mike's lobster roll was massive. Jam packed with large chunks of lobster spilling over the butter-toasted bun, without any filler – that “other” stuff people fill a lobster roll with to make you think you are making out. This was lobster madness. The roll was a hot dog bun that was, again, perfectly toasted and a nice contrast to the lobster meat. Great attention to the little details. It came with a huge helping of the aforementioned fries, cole slaw on a lettuce leaf, pickle, and a wedge of lemon. One of the best lobster rolls I've tasted in ages.

Entertainment and Summary

Great atmosphere and fare is one part of any equation for a decent eatery. How about some entertainment? What the owners, and manager Cindy Sylvia have done is replicate a similar

format to what the New Wave Cafe used to have: live music, DJ, karaoke, jukebox. There is something for everyone. Going beyond that and having something only one other place in the city has: LGBT themed entertainment. There is a “Drag Brunch” that takes place on the last Sunday of each month (11:00am-4:00pm) and often the karaoke nights have a different theme.



Chicken Panini: filled with juicy, spot-on charred chicken breast with vibrant pesto, sweet caramelized onions, tomato, and mozzarella on a perfectly grilled ciabatta bread.

It's best to be prudent and monitor the Facebook page to see what is in store. The page is frequently updated and any events are showcased there. The page is also a great way to see some more of the inside and glorious images of the mouth-watering fare.

Pier 37 compliments the downtown area – which has greasy spoons, diners, cafes, pubs, and proper restaurants – with the sole addition of the modern bistro. The food is some of the best that you will find locally, in one of the friendliest environments and affordable enough to eat at with some regularity. With the addition of the huge variety of entertainment, you have a place that you will want to visit

with regularity. While the bistro is LGBT friendly, it is not, by any means, exclusively an LGBT establishment. In fact, you would do yourself a serious disservice if you did not stop in at Pier 37 – regardless of your sexual preference. If you are looking for a fun place, with lots of entertainment, that is affordable and offers fantastic food, then you just found it. At the end of the day, that's all that matters.

Pier 37 accepts Visa, American Express, Mastercard and Discover. Walk-Ins Welcome, Good For Groups and Waiter Service. The city has removed parking for the first block on the bottom of Union Street, but there is ample parking in the small parking lot on the corner of Union and South Water Street.

Pier 37

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Hours of Operation:

6am-2pm everyday (Fridays till 8 PM).

Facebook: facebook.com/barpier37

Website: Pier37Restaurant.com/

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