

CATFISH CHARLIE'S BREWS BEER NOW?!

BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

I don't know if you've noticed, but here in the Tri-States we're about as far as we can get from a sea. As such, seafood is not really something we're known for. While there's a New England clam chowder and a Manhattan clam chowder, a Dubuque clam chowder is probably not in the cards. And that's a shame. It's 2018 and great advances have been made in refrigeration technology over the years. I expect to get some backlash for saying this, but fresh frozen seafood is nearly as good (if not just as good) as fresh seafood. There's no reason we can't have a Dubuque clam chowder with bacon and roasted corn with maybe a beer cheese base. Maybe on the side we can have some kind of hush puppy situation with deep fried balls of turkey and dressing. Anyway. The point is, just because we're technically landlocked, doesn't mean we seafood lovers are totally screwed. Catfish Charlie's has been proving that to us for years.

When you come to Catfish Charlie's, you're first struck by the...I'm sorry. Before I get into all that, there's something I've got to get off my chest:

WHY DIDN'T ANYBODY TELL ME THAT CATFISH CHARLIE'S STARTED BREWING THEIR OWN BEER?!

Catfish Charlie's has been brewing their own beer under their Catfish Creek label since 2016. That's two whole years where one of you degenerates could have told me that there was a local beer option at Dubuque's #1 seafood restaurant. And you didn't! I thought you and I were cool. Here I just handed you the makings of a game-changing Dubuque clam chowder recipe and you can't even say, "Hey, Danny. Have you been to Catfish Charlie's lately? They're brewing their own beer now." I know, I know. It's not your job to tell me where to find good food and drink. It's my job to tell you. But somebody should have said something, you buttfaces! I'm sorry. That wasn't called for. You're not a buttfacet. It's not your fault, obviously. I'm just disappointed in myself. How did this slip under my radar?

So how is the beer? Definitely worth your time.

I didn't fall in love with every beer in the flights we ordered, but that's the case with ANY brewery. None of them were complete disappointments (which is almost NEVER the case with breweries) and some of them are brilliant. Their beer menu comes with the information every beer snob looks for—ABV (alcohol by volume) and IBU (international bittering units). Let me tell you about some of my faves.

For the hop heads, there's the Ice Harbor IPA. It boasts a blend of pale ale and crystal malts with five different kinds of hops—Amarillo, horizon, centennial, simcoe, and cascade. It comes in at a respectable 70 IBU. For comparison, Dogfish Head's 90-Minute IPA comes in at 90 IBU. It has the lovely floral aroma that a good IPA has. I know people who don't like the bitterness of an IPA but will request frequent sniffs of mine. I may have weird friends.

For malt mavens, there's their doppelbock. It's a big beer with 9.5 ABV with just 24 IBU. It's very easy drinking so be careful with it. With that much alcohol, it'll mess you up if you're not careful. And I never am.

Our favorite is the Bourbon Port Scotch Ale. There's a lot to unpackage in that name, so stick with me. A scotch ale is very malt-forward, sweeter than most beers, with a color that ranges from a rich, deep amber to a dark brown. Old Chub by Oskar Blues is a good scotch ale you can find in stores around here. This beer is fermented in Cedar Ridge Port Bourbon barrels. That means that these barrels have been used three times—once to age port, which is a fortified wine; once to age Cedar Ridge bourbon, which imparts some of that port goodness into the bourbon; and once by Catfish Creek to impart ALL that goodness into this beer. Using a bourbon barrel infuses the vanillins



TWIN LOBSTER TAILS

into a beer. Any time you drink a beer and it has a kind of vanilla flavor to it, it's probably been in a bourbon barrel. It doesn't come from vanilla. It comes from vanillin compounds created when oak is charred. And when you add the elements of the port? Holy crap, friends. I love this beer dearly. I just imagine one of those barrels working wonders with port, bourbon, and finally beer. Those barrels accomplish more than most people do in an entire lifetime. Those barrels can probably speak like four different languages.

Now that I've got that off my chest...

When you come to Catfish Charlie's you're first struck by the setting. We've had some pleasant weather for eating outside lately, and the views of the river from Catfish Charlie's, as well as the rustic shade umbrellas make for a pleasant dining experience. Get in on that before it gets too hot, yo. And when it gets too hot, take it inside. The interior is decorated like you'd expect a seafood joint to be decorated, except for the funny and inspirational-but-not-glurgy quotes on the wall, complete with the entire "Here's to the crazy ones" quote from that old Apple commercial. I could take or leave that kind of thing, but it gives one something to look at other than your phone.

Food, though.

I got two good-sized lobster tails with two sides for just \$26.99. You hear me? I don't think I need to say more than that. I could end this now. That's an awesome price for two lobster tails. And that's a fixed price. None of this "market price" BS. When ordering lobster, or any seafood, you worry about it being overcooked. It's incredibly easy to do. The beer has drawn me to Catfish Charlie's several times over the past few weeks and so far, I haven't been subjected to leathery, dry seafood. I've tried the lobster, the pongo, the crawfish, the scallops, the shrimp and on and on and it has all been perfectly done.

Speaking of the crawfish, don't sleep on the crawfish. Crawfish is a vastly underrated and sustainable shellfish. Catfish Charlie's crawfish is served in a breading that is very tempura-like, served with a tangy/zippy comeback sauce. My wife wasn't so into it, despite crawfish being her favorite crawfish, but I loved it. I'd prefer to have a big ol' pile of whole, boiled crawfish so I can pinch some tails and suck some heads, but I suspect I'm in the minority.

Catfish Charlie's also boasts a wonderful Cajun menu. You can roux the day (see what I did there?) with jambalaya, gumbo, or even étouffée. If you're not into the spicy, you'll want to look elsewhere on the menu,



ALLIGATOR NUGGETS



FISH 'N CHIPS



FLIGHT OF BEER

but I trust you're smart enough to not order Cajun food if that's the case.

Also impressive is the number of sides you can choose from. I'd have been happy with just some fries and coleslaw but Catfish Charlie's comes correct with hand-cut fries, coleslaw, hush puppies, red beans & rice, beer cheese mac n cheese, clam chowder and other soups, a side salad, pasta salad, homemade potato chips, sauteed vegetables, harvest blend rice, and three cheese smashed potatoes.

Our biggest beef with the appetizers and entrées is that the crab isn't real crab. To me it's a harsh reminder that we are not on the coast. Not to say it wasn't delicious in the shrimp and crab jambalaya, but...y'know...real crab is real crab. Of course, real crab is real expensive.

Desserts? Let me tell you. My wife loves bread pudding. And with all her favorite foods, she's very particular about it. For example, she loves fresh tomatoes, but she'll only eat really good fresh tomatoes. Same with bread pudding. She loves bread pudding but it has to be good bread pudding. And she has a whole set of rules I don't fully understand for what is considered good bread pudding. Well somebody get her some glow sticks, a pacifier, and a few tablets of ecstasy because

she is raving about the chocolate chip bread pudding at Catfish Charlie's. (Just kidding. Please don't send my wife ecstasy. That would be weird.)

If you're not into beer, they have a pretty decent cocktail menu. I was in a mood for something with blue curacao in it ("curacao" is pronounced KYOO-ruh-soh. I know you've always wondered that) so I ordered the Mississippi Black Water. It's kind of like the grape drink you had when you were kids but 'cept it'll mess you up a bit. Well...it'll mess some people up. My tolerance for alcohol has been hard-earned. My wife's cocktail was even better, but I'll let her tell you about it.

Things my wife wanted to make sure I mentioned:

- Bathroom well lit, fresh smell, clean, three good sized stalls, good water pressure on sinks
- I saw geese, a jumping fish, and a whole duck family
- Music was quiet enough to barely notice
- Staff pleasant and attentive, happy to answer questions
- Parking in lot
- Mississippi Mudtini martini tasted like the Lil Debbie snack cake brownies I ate at lunch in middle school, in the best way ■



CATFISH CHARLIE'S

1630 E 16TH ST, DUBUQUE, IA

563-582-8600

CATFISHCHARLIESDUBUQUE.COM

Hours: Mon-Thurs: 11 AM-9 PM;

Fri-Sat: 11 AM-10 PM; Sun: 9 AM-9 PM

Prices: \$9.99-\$27.99

DANNY FAIRCHILD

DANNY DOESN'T TAKE CRAP FROM NOBODY, BUT HE'LL TAKE FOOD FROM ALMOST ANYBODY. IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT DANNY, OR FEED HIM NOM-NOMS, EMAIL HIM AT DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM.

