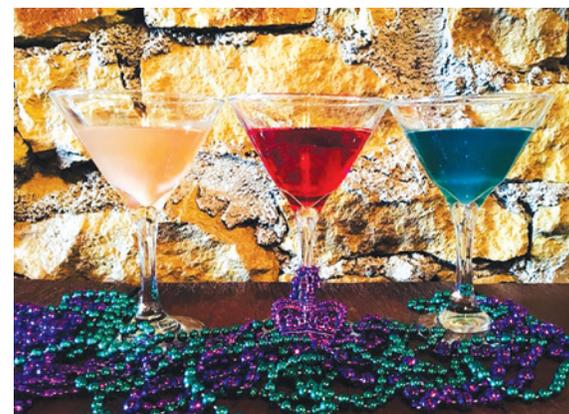




AIN'T YOUR MAMA'S SANDWICH



CONDUCTOR HATS



MARTINIS

THE JITNEY WINE BAR

BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

Q. What do you do when you live in a small town and you're looking for a place to go for a nice glass of wine?

A. You open one.

At least that's what you do if you live in Monticello, IA and your names are Erin Cox and Katie Farrowe.

Named for the Milwaukee Railroad line that united Eastern lowans, along with their cargo and mail, from Calmar all the way up to Cedar Rapids, The Jitney Wine Bar resurrects the old train's tradition of bringing people together. And there is no better way to do that than with great wine and dining.

Cox and Farrowe are Monticello natives who moved back after getting their wanderlust out of their system (both Cox and Farrowe attended college in Missouri. Cox has lived in New York and Chicago, Farrowe met her husband and head chef Angus in Los Angeles), and they bring the big city feel and expectation of quality with them to their establishment.

Stepping into The Jitney is like stepping into a large bar car of an old train. I assume. I've never traveled by train so I have no frame of reference beyond what I've seen on TV and movies. But this place is filled with so much Jitney train history, I feel safe making that assumption.

The entire span of the bar has a to-scale map of all the stops along the Jitney line embedded in it and forever preserved in a glossy finish. The bar also features purse hooks fashioned from old Jitney railroad spikes. Behind the bar are genuine Jitney train conductor hats (it turns out that the owners had relatives who worked as Jitney conductors).

The tables are interesting. They are constructed with large crosscuttings of trees marking each place setting. I tried to count the rings to see how old my place setting is, but by then I'd already had a beer and a few of their signature martinis, so I couldn't count on much at that point. The tables mean that it's nigh impossible to squeeze another friend in on the party, but there's no lack of seating.

There's a small stage for live music, comedy, and karaoke. As a karaoke junky, I long to shake it up on that stage with a mic in one hand and a glass of wine in the other.

To stage left (house right) there's a huge chalkboard handy for listing any specials for both food and

drink, but on the night of my visit, it was decorated in a chalk mural of the TARDIS, the USS Enterprise, the Millenium Falcon and, if my memory serves me, Serenity, doing battle against some big interdimensional space being. If that space being was a reference to some other bit of pop culture, it was lost on my nerdy self. In any case, it was proof I had found my people.

To stage right (house left) there's a cozy little couch and coffee table set up to optimize your chill. The whole vibe is chill, capped off with some warm lighting and walls adorned with local artists.

My visit to The Jitney doubled as a date destination. Because everyone knows that food columnists got mad game. I got there a bit early because my mad game does not preclude my nervousness and it offered me a chance to interview co-owner Erin Cox who looks a lot like June Diane Raphael. I enjoyed a beer to steady my nerves and I gots to tell you. If you or YOUR date aren't really wine people, the beer selection at The Jitney is tops. They take great pride in their beer selection and didn't have any of your standard domestic beer selections until quite recently. And they added them begrudgingly. Again...MY people. Their selection is capital enough that you can order flights. And friends...I've ordered beer flights all over the United States. And don't get me wrong...I love those paddles that look like they're just as good for spanking as they are for carrying beers to your table...but don't they always seem precarious? Like any second the whole mess will spill? The Jitney seems to think so, too. Their beer flights come in a rack. A beer rack. A rack of beer holding your beers firmly in place. No threat of spillage. It seems so obvious, but I rarely see flights presented this way.

Once my date arrived we took part in one of the partnering events that takes place at The Jitney, in this case Christmas tree ornament decorating. I told you, I got game. It was the perfect place to don an apron, have a drink, chat with your date and other patrons, and suck at painting.

Once we'd embarrassed ourselves with our lack of talent, we grabbed a table and got down to the sipping and nomming. And I tell you...you wouldn't think that a wine bar in Monticello, IA would be jumping on a Tuesday night, but holy crap! We're lucky we grabbed a table because they filled up FAST. On a Tuesday night! It wasn't even a

live music night. It's a testament and proof to how inviting and, well, cool this place is. Don't worry. It's not painfully cool. It's not total hipster cool. You are cool enough to be there—EVERYBODY is cool enough to be there.

I'm afraid to admit that while at The Jitney Wine Bar, I did not order any wine. Oh, they have wine. They have wine in spades. It's not a curated collection with a sommelier wearing one of those weird tasting cups around their neck bothering you about the notes of teak and a ambergris finish. Their wine selection is small but carefully selected. White, rosé, or red—sweet or dry. With all the major varietals well represented, you WILL find the wine for you.

What's that? You say you're not in to beer OR wine? Well that's quite a sad existence you lead, but The Jitney STILL has you covered with signature cocktails. In fact, and this might explain why it was so jumping on a Tuesday night, it was 'Tini Tuesday when I visited. You could get a flight of signature martinis...so you bet I did. I was careful to consume them slowly over the course of the evening so as to not get too sloppy on my date (again... game) but I really wanted to house those cocktails. They were great each and every one. At some point in your life you need to be at The Jitney for 'Tini Tuesday.

The only downside of 'Tini Tuesday is the full menu is not available. When you think wine bar, do you think barbecue? Neither did I until that fateful night. The Jitney always has great food to offer, but the weekends are for smoking meats, yo. I did not get to partake of their ribs or smoked half chicken, but I did not leave unbarbecued. Several of their delectable sandwiches (and probably flatbreads if you ask nicely) feature their pulled pork and smoked chicken. But I'll get to that.

First the apps. The starters. Whatever you want to call them. The Jitney calls them "On the Spot Plates," and they feature choice selections of La Quercia meats. Charcuterie is something that has always been around but has only recently been called charcuterie around these parts the past few years. A plate of high quality cured meats, sausages, and cheeses. My date and I ordered the wonder that The Jitney calls Little Bit of Everything and it lives up to its name. We were treated to La Quercia's Berkshire prosciutto, lomo (cured pork tenderloin), coppa (a traditional Italian salume), a wonderful blue cheese, an aged cheddar, hummus with pita,

and various olives and nuts. It wasn't a cheap appetizer at \$29, but La Quercia is worth it, and we're lucky to live in or around a state where La Quercia makes some of the best charcuterie meats in the world.

Then our entrées arrived. My date stole my order and got the smoked chicken sandwich, leaving me with my second choice, the Ain't Your Mama's Sandwich. I was not disappointed. The smoked chicken sandwich is pulled smoked chicken sautéed with gravy, plus smoked gouda and caramelized onions on a Chicago style French roll. They had me at caramelized onions. Luckily, I did not repulse my date so much that she did not allow me to try her sandwich. It was perfect. No slouching on a Tuesday night for The Jitney. No way. I look forward to going back and trying that smoked chicken all by itself. I was warned that the Ain't Your Mama's Sandwich was kind of rich and I wouldn't be able to finish it. Friends, they were right. I was not able to finish it. But I wanted to. It's smoked pulled pork, prosciutto, pepper jack cheese, hummus, sun-dried tomato spread and rémoulade all on the same Chicago style French roll. It's like they compiled a list of all the best things in life and put them on a sandwich.

I've made a habit of scouting out the restrooms at the places I write about. I sent my date on a reconnaissance mission of the women's restroom. She has reported back that they are clean and had a lovely peacock decor motif. I did not see the restrooms first hand, but the important part is that they are clean.

I know what you may be thinking. You've been hurt before. You've found cool bars before and they didn't last or they changed so much that it's not even close to being the same bar you fell in love with. But friends, it will surprise and delight you to know that The Jitney has already been around for six years—six years! And judging by the traffic I saw on a Tuesday of all nights, The Jitney should be your regular hang out (or date meet up) for years to come. ■



THE JITNEY WINE BAR

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THEJITNEYKITCHEN.COM

Hours: Tue–Thu: 3–10 PM; Fri–Sat: Noon–Close

Prices: \$8.50–\$29

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.



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