

MID-TOWN MARINA

BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

The weather is becoming consistently warm, the redwing blackbirds are about to start attacking, and the fire pits are getting put to use. That can only mean one thing: It's time to get out on the water. Time to pull back the tarps and get a bow wet. Time to bob in time to the waves as the beer cooler steadily empties. I guess. I don't know. I don't own a boat and I don't have any friends with boats. And if I did I wouldn't stand for them operating their boats while drinking. But anyway.

Out on the water, food-wise, you're good for a few soggy sandwiches and a bag of chips that you will be in constant fear of it blowing into the river. Out there it's about satiating your hunger, not enjoying a meal. Nope. Enjoying a meal is what happens when you come back in to the marina. And after being in the sun, watching it glisten off the water from one bank to the next, your face half hurting from laughing it up with your friends, there's only one type of cuisine that will do. Marina cuisine. It's like pub cuisine...except it's served at a marina. And I submit for your approval the marina cuisine at Mid-Town Marina in East Dubuque, IL.

Granted, I'm not a boat person, but I had no idea this place existed. I'm still not sure it does. I know I crossed the Julien Dubuque bridge. I know I traveled through the middle of the town, hence the name. But my mind won't let me put it together with the puzzle that is the Mississippi River. It's like being transported to some kind of...I don't know...bayou or something. And I mean that in a good way. I mean it in a way that makes me hungry. So let's get down to the food.

Marina cuisine, like its identical twin pub cuisine, consists of foods any bar with a kitchen HAS to have. We're talking baskets. We're talking burgers. We're talking pizzas. We're talking wings. We're talking wraps IF YOU'RE LUCKY. So why does it deserve a different classification as pub cuisine just for being served in a marina? Let me layout Mid-Town Marina to give you a feel since I can't give you a taste.

Imagine eating a burger like the mushroom swiss burger at Mid-Town. Imagine there's bacon on it because it was ordered by Bryce Parks. Imagine a bun that's



BUFFALO WINGS

no-BS but is definitely worthy of carrying the perfectly grilled beef patty. Imagine that instead of being asked what you want on your burger, all the fixins are served off to the side because surely someone at the table will ask, "You gonna eat those pickles?" Imagine all that...surrounded by nets, with driftwood sculptures, welcomely out-of-place seahorses and starfish, and a ship's figurehead over the bar. That's marine cuisine.

But first things first, imagine bellying up to the bar to order a round because drinking beers out in the sun is one thing, but drinking a beer immediately after coming in from the sun is a whole nuther. Imagine that bar being easily the flashiest furnishings in the place, including the black vinyl metal chairs that haven't altered their design in 50 years because you can't perfect upon perfection. Imagine how cold the beer feels going down as you're watching the Cubs win on the big screen. That's marina cuisine.

Imagine a pork tenderloin sandwich that you can get either grilled or fried, but let's face it—you're getting that bad boy fried. Don't even pretend. Imagine NOT the frisbee-sized golden fritter we all know and love, but a lovingly crafted piece of tenderloin pounded to more of a football shape, again served with fixins on the side and also a side of chips. Imagine confusing the home-made chip dip with something you're supposed to put



MEAT LOVERS AND TACO PIZZA

on the pork T, but not at all being sorry you did. Now imagine also being able to buy a quart of 4-cycle 10W-30 without even leaving the room. That's marina cuisine.

What's that? You're more of a fry person than chip? Well, well! Time to make a choice! Regular or beer-battered? That's a question you're going to answer for yourself. The good news? Whatever you choose will be the right choice. You can't go wrong. Unless you can't make a decision. If so, I bet you're just a treat out on the water, aren't you? Surprised your friends haven't drowned you, yet. THAT is marina cuisine.

But second things second. Imagine kicking off the meal with a basket of wings. You're probably picturing it exactly. The saucy kind. That orange color that under most circumstances means caution but in this case means "I dare you." Imagine sheepishly ordering blue cheese dressing because this definitely is a ranch dressing crowd, and being pleasantly surprised that they not only have blue cheese dressing...but they have the chunky kind of blue cheese dressing. Not the kind of blue cheese dressing that tastes indistinguishable from ranch. Imagine that crispy outside with the juicy nommy-ness on the inside. Imagine flats that pull apart with a confident twist. Imagine drummies nearly as big as full drumsticks. Now imagine also being able to buy





MUSHROOM AND SWISS BURGER WITH BACON

PORK TENDERLOIN

a marina t-shirt because if anybody goes into the drink, they have to wear something. That's marina cuisine.

Imagine a pizza being put down in the middle of the table. What kind? Who cares? You're too hungry and sun-drunk to argue. But if it matters to you, it's half meat lovers and half taco. (Note: Danny hates taco pizza. But before you flood him with hate mail at dining@dubuque365.com, please appreciate that he ate it anyway. For you.) Imagine that the lettuce HASN'T wilted from the heat of the pizza because it's served up fresh. Imagine a taco pizza that doesn't require all the hot sauce and sour cream in the world to be palatable. Imagine a meat lovers pizza that lives up to the name. Imagine a pizza sauce liberally applied...almost socialistly applied, that is bright in color and flavor and a little fennel-forward. Imagine a cracker crust that doesn't fall apart upon taking a single bite. Imagine all that... with a salad bar shaped like a boat that doesn't look like it will ever again serve as a boat but serves very well as a salad bar. THAT is marina cuisine.

Drinks? The bar is well stocked, though there only appears to be a few beers on tap. But one of them is Good Ol' Potosi, so that's fine. Any other beer or soda you want, welcome to Cansandbottlesville.

I've made a point of always reporting on the bathrooms at the places I visit. I'll

do so now but it's hardly fair to judge a marina based on the bathrooms. People are coming in from the Mississippi River, you know? It doesn't need to be pretty. It needs to be clean and it needs to not stink. The bathrooms at Mid-Town Marina, while not pretty, are clean and do not stink. The men's room at Mid-Town Marina had an additional feature. More of a curiosity, really. There's a heavy door, fairly new looking based on the hardware, painted shut. I couldn't help but at least try to open it. It didn't budge. Don't you try, either. I don't know where it would lead. I suspect to the outside. But what if it doesn't lead to the outside? Just leave well enough alone. THAT'S marina cuisine. ☒



MID-TOWN MARINA
 285 5TH ST, EAST DUBUQUE, IL
Hours: Sun–Thu: 8 AM–9 PM;
 Fri–Sat: 8 AM–10 PM; Bar hours vary

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](mailto:dining@dubuque365.com).