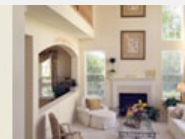




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Glen Ellyn pub grub

BY DAVID SHAROS
Daily Herald Correspondent

Posted Thursday, June 15, 2006

Generally speaking, franchise restaurants evoke images of cookie-cutter designs, carbon-copy menus and lots of corporate advertising that try to tie everything together.

Firkin and Fox in Glen Ellyn is part of the Firkin franchise, which includes five restaurants throughout the country. But once you get past the name, you realize that is where the cloning process ends.

Owner Steve Pressman has taken this 6-month-old venue and continued to tweak it throughout the current year, in order to reflect the tastes of local Glen Ellyn residents and create what he calls "a neighborhood pub."

Firkin has even added a "Hilltopper" sandwich as well as a drink to acknowledge Glenbard West High School and its team mascot.

"One of things we decided was to have the restaurant smoke-free, because we felt that is what people in the area expected," Pressman told us. "We also have made changes to our menu and gone away from some of the traditional English and American pub food in order to cater to people's tastes. We get a lot of families and sports teams in here, and we want everyone to feel comfortable."

Firkin's unique atmosphere reflects the individuality of the restaurant. Three separate rooms, including a bar area, dining room, and a sort of living room in-between offer seating for more than 100 guests. The center room, in particular, gives one the feeling of being in the great room of someone's house, complete with a fireplace and plush red seats, all housed in contrasting white faux tiled walls with black trim.

All told, Firkin is very pub-like and very homey.

We visited on a weeknight and found both the bar and restaurant areas half full. Plasma TVs were hung everywhere, and when we asked to watch a certain sports event, our wishes were immediately granted.

We began our meal with two appetizers, including an order of bacon-wrapped scallops and an order of Firkin wings. The scallops were served with slices of French bread, which seemed a little strange, as there was no dipping sauce and no one wanted to ruin that yummy bacon flavor by hiding it on a piece of bread. But the scallops had a nice texture without being overcooked, and the bacon added that something extra it seems to bring to every-thing it touches.

A full pound of wings was bathed in the sauces of our choice. We chose two of them, including a sweet chili-style our server recommended and the hot variety. Barbecue, suicide and Cajun are also available.

The wings were served with a pile of French fries, celery sticks and the usual ranch dressing. I found the flavors satisfying and was relieved to learn the hot sauce was nowhere near a five-alarm fire, and the sweet chili sauce was a nice change. All-in-all, it was a good opener for a family of four or just a couple looking for some nibblers with a beer.

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Firkin offers a number of salads, including the usual house, Caesar, and spinach and mushroom. I chose a Greek starter salad, made with lettuce, tomatoes, kalamata olives, feta cheese and cucumber. Like the wings noted above, I thought the quantity here represented a good value; the salad could easily be split between two people. The house dressing and bright flavor of the cheese worked well with the briny olives and crunchy lettuce. Other salads available include a Caesar, Greek Cajun chicken or a tuna Greek salad, so plan on making one a part of your meal.

I was joined by three dinner guests, which allowed us to really survey the entree and sandwich landscape. We ordered two different bur-gers — a deluxe and a blue cheese variety — and some of the Firkin favorites reflecting the pub influence including bangers, beans and mash, and the traditional Shepherd's pie.

Both burgers came on loaded plates heaped with fries and special bakery buns. The bites I snatched from my companions offered a slightly crunchy outer crust to the meat — which we love — and a generous-sized burger grilled to our specifications. The Deluxe included barbecue sauce, sauteed mushrooms, onion and melted cheddar. Solid pub food.

The bangers, beans and mash included four grilled sausages, two scoops of mashed potatoes and a generous portion of baked beans. My taste buds are a bit more attuned to the fennel and other spices found in mild and hot Italian sausage, so I found the flavors of this dish somewhat muted. Better was the Shepherd's pie, which included a generous cloud of whipped potatoes atop the customary meat and vegetables. There was plenty of gravy with the meat and veggies to keep the dish moist without making it soupy, and I was re-minded what a great sort of comfort food this dish is on a cool day.

Firkin serves but three desserts, and our quartet decided to try them all. Choices include a crème brulee cheesecake, a hot fudge chocolate cake and an apple dumpling. All can be served a la mode, but we decided to go al natural. For me, the chocolate cake and apple dumpling were co-winners, as both were served warm and oozing, with the cake's decadent syrup and the whole peeled apple that was wrapped in a flaky crust. To nitpick, the apple might have been a bit softer in texture to mirror the consistency of a pie, but it still worked well with the cinnamon and apple glaze crust.

Pressman's hopes for Firkin and Fox are to create a comfortable and homey place where beer drinkers can enjoy one of 12 drafts available or parents and kids can gather for a weekday meal and to watch their favorite sports team.

There is little doubt some Glen Ellyn folks are already calling the Firkin home. And for the money, it's a great value.

• Restaurant reviews are based on one anonymous visit. Our aim is to describe the overall dining experience while guiding the reader toward the menu's strengths. The Daily Herald does not publish reviews of restaurants it cannot recommend.

Firkin and Fox

411 N. Main St., Glen Ellyn, (630) 858-4369 www.firkinpubs.com

Cuisine: English and American pub fare

Setting: Casual

Price range: Ap-petizers \$4.95 to \$10.95; soups/salads \$3.95 to \$10.95; sandwiches \$4.95 to \$9.95; entrees \$6.95 to \$11.95; desserts all \$4.50

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday to Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday

Accepts: All major credit cards

Also: No smoking; carry-out service; kids' menu; parking in lot across street

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