

Horn of Plenty

Whiskey-brushed Angus burgers, herb-crusted rack of lamb, pan-seared trout ... the menu at the Horn Saloon shatters stereotypes about "bar food." What's more, the bar is in Camp Verde, of all places.

THE HORN SALOON IN CAMP VERDE may forever change the way you think about bar food. Or strip-mall restaurants. Or Camp Verde, for that matter.

camp verde

The restaurant is named for a brawling 1870s-era bar, built at the edge of Fort Verde, that served warm beer and whiskey that was "downright dangerous." But the modern-day Horn Saloon has about as much in common with the original as it does with Cracker Barrel, which inspired the modern remake.

Though located in an unassuming strip mall, the Horn Saloon is a pleasure

to behold, with stained concrete floors, ochre-painted walls and a lacquered pine bar inset with turquoise. Comfortable leather chairs surround tables of polished wood or granite. Southwestern Indian jewelry and pottery fill display cases. Indian rugs hang on the walls.

Owners Barb and Steve Goetting moved to the area about 10 years ago from the Washington, D.C., area — Steve had always wanted to move to the West — and settled on irrigated land along the Verde River.

"We were tired of going over to Cottonwood [for dinner]," Barb says. "We

thought if Cottonwood can sustain all that, Camp Verde can have one little restaurant."

The original concept was a wine bar with a twist.

"I wanted to be the Cracker Barrel of wine bars," Barb says. But instead of a country store, Barb envisioned something along the lines of a Southwestern trading post, with good food to accompany the wine list.

The business plan evolved to include craft beers, and the food "just took off."

Executive chef Peggy Fuller, who has a passion for locally sourced ingredients, came to the Horn from Sedona's Elote Café, and the menu reflects that sophistication.

There's a burger on the menu, but it's whiskey-brushed Angus with grilled onions, smoky bacon, fresh avocado, Havarti cheese and roasted-chile aioli. The dinner menu includes dishes such as herb-crusted rack of lamb and pan-seared trout.

Even so, the restaurant has remained faithful to its roots, with 16 craft beers and 20 wines on tap. The wines are kegged under pressure using a combination of nitrogen and carbon dioxide. That prevents oxidation, so every glass is served as the winemaker intended. The system also allows patrons to order premium wines by the glass.

Plans are in the works for a winery across the street in the renovated Boler's Bar, now a gallery with a wine- and beer-tasting area. Eventually, Barb envisions a Sunday kitchen for the space — a kind of "summer camp" for high-school kids who would prepare dinners under Fuller's direction using fresh, local ingredients. Another fresh take on an old idea.

— KATHY MONTGOMERY



PAUL MARKOW