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## Specialties of the House

By A.K. Carroll



Photos A.K. Carroll

night out, a 21st birthday to a sunset supper. No matter the size of your party, 20, two or anything in between, you'll be treated like you're something special as you pull up a chair or sink into a bar-side booth, where happy hour takes place from 3 to 6 pm, Monday through Friday, late enough to call it a day, and conveniently running right into dinner.

The quality of Paxti's hospitality is only rivaled by that of their food and drink offerings, with sizable discounts on beer, wine, cocktails, and an ample array of appetizers offered in the bar and lounge. Bottles and drafts (regularly \$5-7) are all \$2 off with local favorites Racer 5, Stella Artois, Dog Fish Head, and Sierra Nevada's Celebration brew on their six rotating taps. Glasses of wine (regularly \$8 & \$11) are discounted by \$3 and include a Lodi Zinfandel, Joel Gott Cabernet, and Russian River Chardonnay.

Standard wells come in at \$5, with signature cocktails (regularly \$9 a piece) discounted to \$6. Paxti's has just changed over its cocktail menu and boasts the gin-based Aces and Eights - which also includes lime juice, Aperol, and Pamplemousse liqueur - as a new featured beverage. You'll also find the Paxti's tried and true Old Fashioned, made with Bulleit bourbon, bitters, Luxardo amarena cherries and sweetened with agave. On the more refreshing side is a Moscow Mule made with fresh ginger, premium pour vodka, and Cock 'n bull gingerbeer and a Pomegranate Lemonade that blends pomegranate juice, sweet and sour, and house made lemonade in beautiful sour-sweet medley with or without the Hangar One vodka and triple sec.

When you are in a place that feels like home, it is second-nature to crave comfort food - made-from-scratch meatballs, braised and swimming in homemade marinara and fresh basil leaves, oven-baked cheese and artichoke dip served with thin crisp crostini (regularly \$9-11 with a \$2 discount). They are standard Italian fare, but not your traditional bar food. "We try to create apps that are less conventional," says Ebert. He might be referring to the burrata bruschetta - a large creamy lump situated on a bed of fresh cherry tomatoes and arugula and drizzled with fresh pesto - or he may just be referencing the blissful absence of fried food.

It comes as no surprise, though, that the best deal on the menu is the personal pizza inspired by expert pizzaiolo Francisco "Patxi" Azpiroz. Your choice of two toppings - I chose mushrooms and salami - cut into quarters and served steamy hot, happy hour's pièce de résistance (regularly \$9) is devilishly delicious and only \$5 to boot. The double-zero crust boasts Neapolitan standards with a

This week's hunt for all premium small bites and discounted beverages landed at Paxti's in Lafayette, deep-dish experts who specialize in hospitality.

It may not be sports-themed, underground, or in Boston. There may not be an irritating postal worker or an unemployed accountant at the end of the bar, but if Lafayette has an equivalent to Cheers, it almost certainly looks something like happy hour at Paxti's. It may take a while before everybody knows your name, but you are likely to feel like you belong from the first time you step through the door. "We have quite a few regulars," says manager John Ebert. "We also get strangers, but they don't stay strangers long."

It is easy to see why. Paxti's combination of all-day coffee and pastries, family-friendly dining, and dimly-lit lounge space caters to crowds of all kinds - from a mid-day work break to a ladies'

shiny brush of olive oil and a savory salty finish. Whole wheat and gluten free options are also available.

You are likely to catch snatches of local events between bites of bruschetta or sips of Chardonnay, musings on the latest political debate or most recent athletic upset. "There's always a conversation going," says Ebert, and it's one to which you'd be a welcome addition. Whether you are making plans for a party or having an impromptu afternoon out, consider stopping by Paxti's. You won't be a stranger for long.

When: 3-6 pm, Monday-Friday

Where: 3577 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette

Drinks: \$2 off beer, \$3 off wine and cocktails

Food: \$2 off appetizers, \$5 personal pizza

Recommended: \$6 Pomegranate Lemonade and \$5 personal pizza





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[back](#)

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