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## New Kid on the Block

By A.K. Carroll



Photos A.K. Carroll

Few things satisfy quite like an order of nachos - crisp corn tortilla chips fused together by molten melted cheese and topped with corn, beans, and sundry sauces - so when I see them listed under the starters section of the menu, I order on impulse. They are gooey and crunchy, loaded with a generous serving of savory pulled pork that is drizzled in sweet barbecue sauce and garnished with fresh jalapenos. There is something familiar about this go-to bar food, but also something a bit different; like I've had it before, but never quite in this way.

That is much the feeling you will get when you set foot into The Fourth Bore Tap Room & Grill Pub, the latest project from restaurateur Michael Karp (of Forge Pizza and Table 24). Located in the corner pocket of Orinda's Theatre Square (the former digs of Karp's Barbacoa), the new brewpub was hand-

crafted for locals, with a menu that features bar food favorites like fish 'n' chips, grass-fed burgers, mac 'n' cheese, and pulled pork nachos.

The taproom's name is taken from the latest addition to the Caldecott Tunnel, whose first two bores were started in 1929 and completed in 1937. Black and white photographs of the tunnel's construction are scattered across the pub's walls, giving a hint of history to a space that is far from old. The Fourth Bore is the second of Karp's concepts to take its name from East Bay transportation arterials, the first being sister restaurant Table 24, which is named after the nearby highway.

The restaurant retains its most noteworthy (and arguably its best) feature: a blazing outdoor fire pit with plenty of comfy contemporary patio chairs for those who are sipping drinks or waiting for a table, which you are likely to do until the pub's initial popularity settles into a steady rhythm.

Any new concept has some kinks to work out. The night I stopped by I was seated surprisingly quickly (having arrived a little later than my reservation), but then waited quite some time between interactions with my server. The service was great when it came, with friendly smiles and helpful recommendations, but it seemed to be spread too thin. Perhaps we Lamorindans are hitting The Fourth Bore harder than expected. My table was also uncomfortably drafty, with only a thin red curtain separating me from frequent bursts of outside air each time the door opened. A cozy corner table or bar-side seat would offer a much different experience.

Regardless of where you sit, you are likely to start with a beverage. Karp has partnered with brewmaster J.J. Phair (of E.J. Phair's Brewing Company) to create a brewpub that is as much about drinking as it is about eating, with a beer list that features over 30 craft beers from some 20 different breweries. The pub's 30-tap system was crafted from reclaimed lumber and built by Phair himself, who plans to brew a few select beers exclusively for The Fourth Bore. You can also choose from a selection of local wines and cleverly crafted cocktails, like the Matchless Orinda or the Tunnel Vision.

The food menu was designed by executive chef Jonathan Williams, formerly of Table 24, and leans heavily toward comfort fare, with a portobella sandwich and mixed greens salad as the only straight-up vegetarian options. Though Williams' Boston roots are most clearly evidenced in the creamy house chowder, lobster mac 'n' cheese, and Fourth Bore Trifecta - a mini bread-bowl of clam chowder, lobster slider, and 4-ounce pour of beer - the chef's proudest items are the St. Louis ribs and the wood-fired chicken wings, which are smoky, spicy, and tender to the bone. The menu

is varied without being overly ambitious, and includes three salads, four burgers, several sandwiches, four mains, and a selection of starters, some of which could be meals in themselves. Williams plans to make changes in the next couple of weeks, based on the initial response of his guests.

A bit of a nibbler myself, I was perfectly pleased to find The Trifecta, which allowed me to try not only the house chowder, which was creamy and hearty without being overly rich, but also the lobster slider and a sampler of the Kolsch. The bread bowl was nothing to write home about, but the side salad I added was surprisingly large and fresh, with a creamy house vinaigrette that complimented thick chunks of cucumber and juicy baby tomatoes.

Any delusion I had of eating a "sensible" meal went out the window when I set eyes on The Fourth Bore brownie - an oozing square of just-baked batter sprinkled with sea salt and topped with a massive scoop of vanilla bean ice cream. Few things love each other like molten chocolate and slow-melting ice cream, both of which were gone before I knew it.

As a restaurant that's named after a tunnel, it is only fitting that the brewpub's biggest problem seems to be traffic. Given a little time and experience, that is almost certain to settle down. In the meantime, grab a beer or order some nachos. Make a visit to The Fourth Bore and find something familiar about the new kid in the neighborhood.





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