

# Nightcap



## Bartender Meets Chef

Kitchen and Bar Morph into One Space at Stone's Cove KitBar in Northern Virginia

By Kelly A. Magyarics

// *Recess for adults* is how Founder B.J.

Stone describes Stone's Cove KitBar, his new unique food and bar concept in Herndon, Va. At the 86-seat "bar kitchen" about 30 minutes west of Washington, D.C., watching the creation of both food and drinks is the star attraction for guests.

"ChefTenders" hold court behind what serves as an open kitchen, prep area, bar and serving station. Each is equally responsible for mixing cocktails and pouring wine and beer as well as prepping, cooking and serving the menu's small plates, flatbreads, entrées and desserts. According to Stone, ChefTenders are hired based on their personalities, rather than prior kitchen or bar experience.

"You can't teach someone to be nice," he says.

"Edibations" — porcelain appetizer spoons filled with a small nibble and a spirit-based sauce — are the perfect introduction to the venue's fork-meets-cork philosophy. Seared Bourbon-marinated

beef (\$10) is joined with Gorgonzola, smoked bacon, green onion and a liberal dose of Maker's Mark; steamed shrimp (\$9) are topped with celery, horseradish, lime, Old Bay and more than a splash of ABSOLUT Peppar. Beyond simply pairing a cocktail or spirit with a dish, Edibations attempt to seamlessly incorporate the two. The result is a kicky, synergistic explosion of boozy flavor.

The shared prep space somewhat limits the options available on the drinks list, which is created by Executive Chef Eriksson Hill and includes approximately nine options. Still, some rotate seasonally, like the Blood Orange Collins (\$9) with Bombay Sapphire, limoncello, rosemary and soda; and the Blueberry Bourbon Smash (\$9), which mixes Maker's Mark with lemon syrup and blueberry ice cubes. Evergreen favorites include the AC/DC-inspired Dirty Deed (\$9), a Dirty-Martini-meets-Bloody-Mary concoction with Tito's Handmade Vodka, dry vermouth, lemon, tomato and a horseradish- and gorgonzola-stuffed olive.

A mostly domestic list of wines by the glass and bottle is joined by bottled and draft beer, all designed to sip alongside shareable dishes like a BLT-esque Mackinac Flatbread (\$9) or the build-your-own Blue Crab Margarita Wraps (\$15). The latter arrives with bowls of lime wedges, coarse salt and raw sugar to garnish the wraps, which provide zestiness as well as an enticing crunch next to the rich crab and creamy avocado.

Stone strives to maintain freshness by permitting only three cooking methods: convection oven, wood fire and plancha. No cross use of tools means no worry of cross contamination, and well-designed elements like refrigerated pullout mise-en-place drawers maximize space and keep ingredients safe and contained. And although he says KitBar's setup doesn't particularly save money on the cost of products, employees' multi-tasking does translate to a saving on labor.

Couples and small groups of patrons can sit on the many stools surrounding the



"ChefTenders," like David Gregg (top right), reign at Stone's Cove KitBar (left) by simultaneously mixing drinks and prepping food for guests.

large bar/kitchen, while larger groups can dine at six-top tables at the corner of each bar or at one of several high-top tables by the entrance. Stone admits his venue is not only female-friendly, but perhaps female-focused, and notes he frequently sees groups of women celebrating a birthday, meeting for book group or just catching up. Yet, you are just as likely to see couples out for date night, and he estimates that 20% of clientele is comprised of regulars who have become dedicated fans since KitBar's opening in March.

Management already is seeking out spots for additional locations, and Stone hopes to take the concept nationwide. In the end, he just wants three things for all guests: "Be nice, have fun and pay your bill." **NCB**

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