

Dining | updated: 3/25/2015 2:37 PM

Bobbers in Lake Zurich making a splash with fresh food, craft beer



Bobbers' Hangover Burger comes topped with grilled onions, pepper jack cheese and a fried egg.

Gilbert R. Boucher II | Staff Photographer

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Owner Bobby Razes returned to his hometown of Lake Zurich after college and realized the area was ripe for a lively night spot with great food and a laid-back atmosphere. The old Eng's Teahouse building came on the market, and Razes began constructing his vision. With a focus on the lake theme and a twist on his first name, Bobbers opened in early December. The 1920s building at 710 N. Old Rand Road was gutted and redesigned to complement the surrounding neighborhood and take advantage of the lakefront views.

Motif: You'll know you're in the right place when you see the red and white glow of the jumbo-sized bobber outside. A span of glass allows a panoramic view of the lake across the street. The large windows can open accordion style to give the entire bar an indoor/outdoor feel during warmer months. The spacious bar area features red uplighting and oversized fans suspended in a lofted ceiling crisscrossed by beams. There are five flat-screen TVs indoors.

Wood-look tile floors and uniform driftwood tables with black upholstered seating add to the spare, modern feel. Nine high-top tables accommodate diners and a bar comfortably seats 15. An L-shaped dining area borders the bar area and seats anywhere from two to five people at 11 low-top tables. A 35-gallon built-in aquarium anchors the wall opposite the entrance and a retractable garage door forms the wall to the right. In warmer weather, this will allow seamless access to patio seating where Razes plans to feature fire pits, sofas and a large flat-screen TV.

Food: "Keep it simple, but do it right" was Razes' mission when it came to creating the menu. The chef prepares appetizers to order, including mega nachos with house-made tortilla chips and chicken wings tossed in your choice of six different sauces. We sampled the delicious white Wisconsin cheddar, hand-battered cheese curds and the loaded tots with a generous portion of spuds fried to a golden crisp and topped with bacon, cheddar cheese, sour cream and chives.

We selected several entrees including the BBBLT with "bacon, more bacon, more bacon," lettuce, tomato and mayo on thick Texas Toast. Main dishes are paired with a choice of plain tots, hand-cut french fries, curly fries or a side salad.

The juicy, generous half-pound burgers come with a choice of toppings. The hangover burger arrives smothered in grilled onions and pepper jack cheese and topped with a fried egg.

We also liked the freshly breaded and seasoned chicken tenders, which were light and crispy.

Razes says the menu continues to evolve, but here's hoping they keep the funnel cake on the dessert menu. The melt-in-your-mouth treat was hot and fluffy, topped with a perfect sprinkling of powdered sugar.

Liquid consumption: The original Eng's Teahouse passed down its classic mai-tai variant, dubbed Eng's Kiss, but it's Bobbers' craft beer selection drawing in the crowds. With more than 30 beers to choose from, and more rotated in all the time, Bobbers offers the latest offerings from smaller breweries. Current best-sellers include Lagunitas IPA, Allagash White and Left Hand Milk Stout.

We tried the signature margarita, the Bobberita, made with Cuervo Silver Tequila, blue Curacao, Rose's lime juice and triple sec and garnished with lime and a floating mini-bobber. It was worth the \$9 price tag and appealed to both the eye and taste buds. To share with friends, you might try the half-gallon Fish Bowl which serves two to three people for \$14. Gravel made of candy Nerds anchors a potent mix of vodka, rum, pineapple, Sprite and blue Curacao.

Crowd: The atmosphere is casual and locals have inquired about making reservations, though currently all seating is first come, first served. We arrived just before 7 p.m. on a Saturday and found the bar almost full with a mix of families enjoying dinner and others with drinks and appetizers. By 9, there was an energetic feel in the bar with patrons ranging from 20 to 60 years of age, including a large birthday party and a standing-room-only crowd.

Music: The night we were there the digital jukebox was in full swing. The popular cellphone app, Touch Tunes, allows customers to control the bar's jukebox with their mobile phones and has been a hit so far. Bobbers has hosted a DJ night and has plans to include trivia nights and live music as well.

Service: The hostess welcomed us and sat us immediately. Our charming server was knowledgeable, recommending his favorite burger and taking the time to explain the different options on the menu. The owner stopped by between appetizers and entrees.

Parking: There are ample free spots in the side lot.

Overall: Bobbers is settling into a groove in preparation for an upcoming grand opening. With a great location and lakeside views, Bobbers offers a new alternative for locals looking for a casual meal or an evening of drinks with friends.