

EPICUREAN EPISODES

TAPS Restaurant and Tap Room: A Classic Combo -- Nuff Said

by Alexander Phillips

Beer lovers rejoice! Your prayers have been answered. Owner Eric Lafranchi's new Kentucky Street restaurant, TAPS, takes a classic, all-American combination – hot dogs and beer – and elevates it to a level that approaches the sublime. Featuring what is perhaps the largest selection of draft beers in all of Sonoma and Marin counties and an extensive menu of what celebrity chef and writer Anthony Bourdain fondly refers to as “meat in tube form”, TAPS is the perfect place to reconnect with the simple pleasures of good food, good beer and good friends.

Set in a spacious, wood-paneled room beneath the historic Petaluma Hotel, TAPS makes a warm and inviting impression. Antique beer signs and posters pepper the walls, and a row of glowing flat-screen TVs line the wall above the bar. On the evening of our visit, several groups of friends had gathered at the bar to take in the Canada-Finland Olympic hockey game.

First, the beer. With 30 beers on tap and not a macrobrew in the house, TAPS' selection runs the entire gamut of the beer universe, from the biting hoppy Bear Republic Racer 5 IPA to the complex, spicy maltiness of the St. Bernardus Abt 12. TAPS really necessitates multiple visits to sample all of the incredible brews. For the inexperienced quaffer, the beer list may at first appear overwhelming, but it soon becomes clear that the servers and bartenders are extremely well-trained and ready to help. Our server, Tracey, was not only pleasant, but also seemed to know the beer list backwards and forwards. She listened to our various taste preferences and helped to point us the right di-

rection, even going as far as to let us sample several different beers before we settled on our orders. Among our favorites were the Schneider-Weisse, a yeasty wheat beer from Bavaria, and the uniquely sour Duchesse de Bourgogne, a traditional Flanders red ale. And the teetotalers among us need not fret. In addition to serving Clausthaler non-alcoholic beer, TAPS offers seven (yes, seven) varieties of bottled root beer.

If one had to pick a genre of food to pair with a great beer, one would be hard-pressed to come up with a better partner than the hot dog. It's clear that hot dogs are fast becoming one of the biggest food trends around, as evidenced by the explosion of gourmet wiener stands all around the Bay Area and by the recent media blitz surrounding Vancouver's famous Japadog stand. TAPS features nine diverse hot dogs, from the classic to the wild. We loved The Chicago, a traditional Windy City-style dog with mustard, sweet pickle relish, onions, tomatoes and peppers topped with a fat dill pickle spear and nestled into a soft poppy seed bun. Eric has so much respect for the Chicago way that he insists on having the bun and relish imported from Chicago, and after our first bite we understood why. Another favorite was the B.L.T. No, it's not what you're thinking – it's better. Far better. Not for the faint of heart (or stomach), the B.L.T. is a deep-fried bacon-wrapped hot dog, topped with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise. As the menu correctly points out: “Nuff said”.

While TAPS may be a carnivore's heaven, the menu does feature a number of salads, including a very fresh Caprese Salad with basil, tomato and soft mozzarella, all

drizzled with a tangy balsamic vinaigrette.

In another nod to Eric's Windy City roots, TAPS offers ten Italian beef sandwiches. Those who have had the pleasure of digging into one of these monstrosities of meat in Chicago understand the appeal of thin-sliced beef au jus on a soft roll, and Taps really gets it right. We loved the Classic, stuffed with steaming slices of tender beef and topped with caramelized onions, roasted red peppers and mushrooms. For the more adventurous, try the Sloppy Jonnie, in which the aforementioned beef is smothered in house-made chili, chopped onions and nacho cheese.

If all of that doesn't wake up your salivary glands, TAPS also prides itself on some of the spiciest and most delicious Buffalo Wings this side of the Empire State. TAPS' secret wing sauce comes in three “stages” of heat: Stage 1 packs a bit of a punch, Stage 2 will likely have you dabbing your forehead with your napkin, and Stage 3 will have even the most-hardened wing-lover grasping for his or her ice water. The real secret here is that even at their spiciest, the wings' heat never overwhelms the classic Buffalo flavors, and the fire is certainly nothing a glass of Belgian ale can't put out. On “Wednesday Wing Nights,” TAPS prices its offerings at 50 cents per wing.

Eric Lafranchi set out with a simple mission: to serve the delicious, classic foods that he grew up loving alongside an incredible selection of beers from both far and near, and to do so in a manner that will have his customers coming back time and time again. With TAPS, Eric has succeeded in the most complete way. Nuff said.

THE PETALUMA POST Tastes of Petaluma



Courtesy TAPS Facebook



Eric Lafranchi and his taps/courtesy TAPS Facebook



An order of Stage 1 Buffalo Wings/photo by Terry Smith



BLT: Deep Fried Bacon Wrapped Dog, Lettuce, Tomato and Mayo/ photo by Brant Ward, San Francisco Chronicle

POST NOTES

TAPS Restaurant and Tap Room
205 Kentucky Street
in The Petaluma Hotel
707.763.6700

Thu-Sun, Open for Lunch & Dinner
11:30 AM to 11 PM
Mon-Wed, Open for Dinner Only
4PM to 11 PM