

TWO HOT PVD BARS, REVIEWED

The East End and Bayberry Beer Hall couldn't be more different.

December 19, 2017 by Karen Deutsch



The steak platter with fingerling potatoes and whole roasted garlic. Buttermilk biscuit with butter poached crab. Photography by Angel Tucker.

The East End

People who peddle booze — in this case, Gil MacLean of Bottles Fine Wine — know exactly how to market it. In designing the East End, the first restaurant from the people behind Bottles, MacLean turned to Kyla Coburn's moody vantage point to create a space that makes a shot of scotch seem not only hedonistic but illicit. There's a Prohibition feel to the place, a suggestion that activities within the teal walls are sanctioned because they're taboo.

It's a historically good spot for bad behavior: Plenty of people in Providence have stories about their days at the old Cafe at Brook. "It's the first place I could sit at the bar and have a drink," says a guy at the bar. "I was sixteen and every sip tasted like I was two steps away from being punished." But the East End isn't the least bit interested in kids. It feels like a naughty Parisian enclave filled with blue velvet banquettes and black booths that look like your favorite busted up boots. The restaurant fits seventy people, but it's the corners that fill up first, every bend in the room an opportunity for a fling or the prospect of it.

If the attitude is dirty romance, the language at the East End is liquor. Gilded taps line the wall, only outdone by a collection of whiskey so large it approaches awesome. It would be easy enough to make a liquid meal for dinner but the real menu mimics the cocktail approach: one part familiar, one part audacious. Bar snacks — olives, nuts, pickles — are accessories, and the outfit is far more sultry. Charcuterie is aggressive: rotating bacon and sausage, foie gras torchon and smoked bluefish pate have no interest in subtlety or the people who seek it. Adventurous diners pile duck mousse onto drippy cheeseburgers and scarf down butter poached crab served on crispy biscuits (\$12), but the backbone of the restaurant is built on much larger plates.

There may be single people scattered around the room, but the East End loves an affair and feeds people accordingly. Platters for two or more come in several themes: seafood, chicken, meat and a harvest vegetarian. A \$50 tray of food may seem numbing for a night at the bar, but the food is ample. A whole whiskey-brined chicken represents the backyard beer crowd, served with baked beans, buttermilk biscuits and an iceberg salad with ranch dressing (\$39). Paired with a Miller High Life, it asserts itself against the European backdrop of the copper bar: This is hardcore Americana.

But if the teasing tassels of the chandeliers and the wooden herringbone ceiling are what stir your aesthetic, East End's steak platter is the culinary muse. Slices of sirloin, fingerling potatoes roasted in beef fat, charred bread and ripe bulbs of roasted garlic shift the mood to red wine and soften the edges of a bar that thrives on hard liquor. The well-seasoned staff is complicit in the evening plan, whatever form it might take. "This ain't my first time at the rodeo," says one bartender and the restaurant agrees: No one wants a kid at the table when there's an adult to take their place.

244 Wickenden St., Providence, 433-9770, theeastendpvd.com

Wheelchair accessible. Street parking.

CAPACITY Seventy.

VIBE A shots party with Anais Nin.

PRICES \$4-\$49.

