

Life Behind Bars: Sweetgrass

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 13 August 2014 06:31



Walking into the bar at Sweetgrass is like taking a step back in time. There's a classic feel to the room like a beach house from a long ago family vacation back in the days of wood paneled station wagons and transistor radios.

A strong vintage vibe permeates the place from the plank flooring right up to the club chairs and low-key lighting. The building sits at the edge of the Dataw Marina, nestled in a canopy of live oaks and palmettos. Restaurant and bar patrons are treated to spectacular sunsets framed by the marsh and the boats.

It's easy to imagine certain seagoing types knocking back a drink or two at the bar.



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I can picture Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos perched on a pair of the throwback aluminum bar stools sipping Mojitos and swapping lies while Captain Fuentes refuels the Pilar down at the docks. If Travis McGee ever tires of Florida, he might find a slip for The Busted Flush right here. He'd be the big sandy haired guy nursing a gin next to the beautiful, lonely woman with a past who's in need of a "Salvage Consultant."

Not much has changed in the recent transition of ownership. And this is a good thing. Why fix it if it's not broken? Chef Penn Ten Eyck's even kept the list of specialty cocktails. The names may look a little familiar if you've cruised the Marina. The Sweet Thing, Adagio and Last Fling are all boats. In fact as Bar Manager Chelsey Mills points out, all of the bar's specialty beverages come from marina occupants



. One of the bar's venerable best sellers, the Dance Aweigh, is named for a boat that belongs to former owner Lauren Tillapaugh's parents. We are familiar with this particular beverage.

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"It's fresh squeezed lime juice, mango rum and ginger ale," says Mills. "It's the perfect refresher for a hot summer day." Indeed, they do go down easy. (Perhaps too easy, thought McGee.)

According to the bar menu the Sea Buff, a blend of Malibu rum, Midori and lemonade, will "make you want to sail the high seas naked!" Pick your drinking partner carefully if you're having more than one.

Mills pours the finishing touch – a splash of Grenadine – into a champagne glass of Prosecco, pineapple and peach juices. The result is "sunset in a glass." It's almost too pretty to drink. Almost.

Sweetgrass also offers a terrific wine list that covers a lot of territory and variety for a great value. The beer list includes the usual standards with a selection of rotating taps featuring local and seasonal brews. If you're in the mood for a nosh at the bar we highly recommend the woefully understated Sweetgrass wings. They are so much more than just wings. And if you're in the mood for a martini, go all Don Draper and indulge in Chef Penn's decadent Beef Tartare or Chicken Livers en Croute. In the meantime, I'll have another Dance Aweigh while I ponder the makings of a Busted Flush. Cheers.