

My favorite martini



Photo by Ellen Bullock

Bartender Jeremy Durrin puts the finishing touches on a Purple Gecko after making an Appletini and a Spotted Monkeyat Destare.

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Clinton -

When 28-year-old Lisa Wong was elected mayor of Fitchburg last month, she celebrated in style at an establishment whose name means “awakening” in Italian.

Coincidence? Christopher Iosua, owner of Destare, thinks not.

“She’s a very progressive thinker,” he said, “and I think she found in Destare a very progressive destination to have her celebration.”

For 10 years, Iosua has been developing properties in Fitchburg, hoping to inspire an awakening on its Main Street. With his new martini and wine bar, Iosua and his partners Lance Dellogono and Paul Guguen may have done just that.

From the day it opened in June, Destare has stood out among Main Street’s storefronts. With its warm red lampshades, exposed brick walls and nightly crowds, the city’s first wine and martini bar is making itself a destination for people from all over Central Massachusetts.

“We’re not only the first martini and wine bar in Fitchburg, but we’re now drawing crowds from Worcester, Harvard, and even Manchester, New Hampshire,” Iosua said.

Destare’s owners want it to be a place where people of all ages gather to enjoy each other’s company and possibly a fine drink or a glass of wine. Perhaps they’ll enjoy a dessert from the North End or a light appetizer while taking in nightly entertainment.

“Our goal was to create something that was a fusion of a martini bar with the style of a North End café. Something for people who just didn’t like to hang out in a bar room,” Iosua said. “We made trips all over the world, and these trips had a lot of influence over what we’ve done here.”

In Dublin, they discovered the Cheeky Monkey, a martini made with Ketel One vodka, apple juice, passion fruit juice and ginger ale. In Thailand, the Black Sin, made with Imperial vodka, dark crème de cacao, Tia Maria, and chocolate chips.

“We’ve taken martinis that were the house martinis at places around the world — the ones that made that particular bar famous,” Iosua said. “People can come in and do a sampling from around the world. We have the most extensive martini menu around.”

But Destare isn’t just about martinis. The bar’s wine selection is also to be noted, Iosua said, and for those looking to sample new vintages, he suggested the wine flight, which allows you to sample any three whites or reds on the menu. It’s also the only place in the area where one can purchase a glass of Louis XIII Cognac, which goes for \$75 per glass and gets your name on Destare’s “Wall of Fame.”

Destare is not a restaurant — and never will be — but if you find yourself in search of a light meal or a taste of the North End for dessert, Iosua said its menu will find a way to please just about anyone. Features include a grilled Panini sandwich, bagel chips served with a spinach artichoke dip, and a cheese quesadilla. For dessert, the tiramisu is about as tasty as the amaretto-based martini that shares its name.

Awakening old architecture

The walls of the Dickinson Building — in which the martini and wine bar are now housed — were instrumental in shaping what Destare is today, Iosua says. Once the site of Delile’s home goods store, the building was vacant for more than 50 years before Iosua purchased it.

“Other developers tried to create something special there, but they all started with condo projects that never got off the ground,” Iosua said. “My philosophy was that no one will want to purchase a residential unit in a building that lacked excitement. It has beautiful architecture, but nothing else. I had to create something that was worthy of being a regional draw.”

Guguen’s commercial construction experience used the building’s original tin ceiling and sweeping archways to create an establishment with a vintage feel. A few modern touches — funky, yet simple chandeliers and a waterfall behind the bar, give Destare a progressive edge.

“We spent a lot of time trying to create that vibe,” Iosua said. “We wanted to create a place that doesn’t feel like a bar room — really wanted that different, unique feel.”

And while Destare is making Main Street a destination again, Iosua hopes to further that draw by leasing the building’s remaining space to other “progressive” businesses. This month, Fat Jack’s

Cigar Bar will open in the building, and Iosua says he hopes to find a restaurant to fill other open space in the building. The top floors will be converted into condominiums.

“It’s really our goal for people to park in the garage and upon entering the building, will find something that appeals to them no matter what their tastes are,” Iosua said.

Tasting success

Success has been rather easy for Destare since it opened last June. Patrons have acted as its best marketing tool, spreading the word about the drinks, food and entertainment offered there, Iosua said. And though not one dollar has been spent on advertising, it’s not uncommon for there to be a waiting line outside the establishment on Friday and Saturday nights.

“It has been a fun time seeing such wild success,” Iosua said, and while he was confident that the idea of Destare was one that would succeed, it has trumped even his most optimistic estimates. “I was convinced in my mind that we were 16 to 18 months ahead of the curve.”

Now, Iosua says he’s hoping that Destare’s success will spread to Fat Jack’s Cigar Bar and other business that will follow — not just in the Dickinson Building — but in Fitchburg’s downtown.

“We are blessed with being able to be in such an interesting and dynamic space,” Iosua said. “Destare would never have survived in a strip mall.”

Destare is located at 320 Main St., Fitchburg, with free parking available right down the street in a municipal lot. Visit www.destare.com for more information about the bar, its function rooms, and special events, including New Year’s Eve.