

H Street Country Club

Working Hard For That Ace

BY MONICA CAVANAUGH



TOP: The Country Club's signature indoor golf course. Photo: Courtesy of Lisa Carey Design.

BOTTOM: The downstairs game room. Photo: Courtesy of Lisa Carey Design.

The H Street Country Club is the latest addition to H Street, NE, a budding contender for DC's hippest nighttime destination, having opened its doors at the tail end of May. The timing couldn't have been more appropriate for the themed venture – what two things scream summer more than icy margaritas and miniature golf?

The Country Club, yet another novel brainchild of uber-developer Joe Englert, pairs modern Mexican fare with that favorite warm-weather pastime.

“Joe’s an eclectic guy,” said co-owner Blair Zervos, when asked about the unexpected combination. “I think because it didn’t make any sense is why he was such a proponent of it.”

Zervos and third owner Ricardo Vergara are no strangers to the theme-bar arena, nor to Englert’s unique schemes, having already partnered with him on another H Street staple.

“We had just entered into a deal with Joe to become part owners of The Red & The Black,” said Zervos, referring to the New Orleans-themed pub just up the street. “When he said he was working on [the Country Club,] we said ‘sure, let’s do that as well.’ We’ve been on H Street now for a little over a year and a half, and it’s been great.”

The name Englert has become synonymous with all-out execution when he has a theme in mind, and the H Street Country Club is no exception. There is no subtlety involved in the décor in the two-story space. Faux golf lockers line an entrance that leads to walls bedecked in argyle print and light fixtures made from putters and links of chain.

The downstairs is devoted to light food, fun and drinks. A roomy bar is where you’ll find your libation of choice, including fresh mojitos and the highly-acclaimed signature St. Norita margarita.

Pool tables (rented by the hour,) professional shuffleboard tables and two skee-ball lanes provide relaxed entertainment, while the kitchen offers up treats like lobster tostadas, tamales, and chile con queso.

Upstairs you’ll find the main dining room, and a menu of Tex Mex classics with an upscale twist. Lamb enchiladas, snapper Veracruz and pork rib carnitas serve the savory palate, while coconut flan and pineapple enchiladas tempt the sweet tooth.

The menu, devised by lauded chefs Ann Cashion of Cashion’s Eat Place and Taqueria Nacional, and Teddy Folkman of neighboring Granville Moore’s, is carried out by Eat Place alum Pablo Cardoso.

Seasonal changes and daily specials are on the horizon, but Zervos said they’re easing into the menu they’ve got.

“We want to become really, really, really good at the current menu, so that we’re satisfied that every dish is coming out perfect. Once we get it down one hundred percent, we’ll start introducing daily specialty dishes, seasonal stuff, that sort of thing.”

Wander on back from the dining room and you’ll find the piece de resistance: nine holes of DC-themed miniature golf, complete with bulbous meter maids, zombie ex-Presidents and a teeny tiny Ben’s Chili Bowl.

Lee Wheeler, an Arlington artist who has worked with Englert on many of his various forays into the weird and wonderful, did all of the interior design work, includ-

ing the course. Birdhouse light fixtures dangle happily into the stairway, while iron squirrels with golf balls between their teeth are stopped mid-scurry on the walls.

Much praise has been bestowed upon him for the masterful tongue-in-cheek-ness of the Country Club, as well as the golf course and its often hilarious takes on DC life, but Jack Nicklaus he is not – early puttmasters have lamented the sometimes discouraging level of difficulty, especially after a few pre-dinner spirits.

“The Lincoln Memorial was really difficult,” laughed Zervos. “We were going to put in an easier ramp, but we liked that it’s more difficult and challenging.” Not to leave you totally in a rut, a begged-for change was made: “We did put some Astroturf at the top so the ball stays up there instead of rolling back.”

There have been some growing pains in all aspects of the Country Club, as reviews of food and play have been mixed thus far, but Zervos and Vergara have been putting the time in to ensure the place reaches its full potential.

“We get a lot of feedback on a daily basis,” said Zervos. “We’re definitely listening. We take it all seriously, and we make changes and try to adapt and evolve so that we can become better and better.”

Once they’ve lit our hearts afire, they’ve got some buttering-up to do downtown.

“We’d like to put nine more holes on the roof by next summer,” said Zervos. “But we’re not sure how the city will feel about people hitting golf balls off the roof,” he laughed.

Might we suggest tempting them with a pitcher of those St. Noritas?

H Street Country club is located at 1335 H Street, NE. Contact them for information or private party reservations at 202-399-HSCC (4722). Find them online at www.hstreetcountryclub.com.



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