



GAYLIFE

Maryland's LGBT Community Newspaper

Joe Squared

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Published November 17, 2008

Since we're not fans of tapas or crepes, finding a place to eat within walking distance before or after a movie at "The Charles" has become a challenge ever since the Zodiac closed. Less than two blocks away, the new "Joe Squared" was a place we had to check out. (The name seems to originate from the fact that owner, 28 y/o Joe Edwardsen, likes to make square pizzas! Why square pizzas? "Because the box is square, of course" is Joe's most rational answer...). Joe Squared is: a bar, a place to hear live music (7 nights a week – no cover!), a place to get pizza (and sandwiches and salads and soups and risotto) and has a mostly younger following—easily more than half of the customers appear to be under 35. (Despite the fact that Marty was last under 35 more than 35 years ago, he doesn't feel out of place here....) It's a deep narrow space (in a past life, it was the "Pump Room" restaurant). The front has been opened up with large sliding glass doors (when it's warm out, Joe Squared takes advantage of the vast deep sidewalk in front and has created a pleasant outdoor eating area cordoned off by some potted evergreens). The musicians (live music normally starts around 10 p.m.) are positioned right at the entrance; there's a long bar with adjacent lounge area tall tables; and then there's the restaurant at the rear. Seating in the dining area is snug and there's interesting local art displayed on the walls. There are 3 booths against one wall, banquette seating against the other wall and a row of 6 tables positioned close together in the middle. (If this feels a tad too "intimate" and you're averse to getting into a conversation with the people sitting next to you, you can also get food at the tables in the lounge or at the bar.)

There's a lot on the menu to look over. Pizza is the star here. (An extraordinary new pizza oven that heats up to 2,000 degrees and cooks a pizza in like 3 minutes was just being installed our last visit here.) There are 15 "signature" pizza combos that come in sizes from 10" to 16" (\$10-\$22), but the menu wonderfully lets you design your own pizza from a mix of doughs and toppings—cheeses, meats, veggies, fruits and fresh herbs. (But with so much to choose from, John wonders why there isn't soy cheese as an option too???) There are 15 starters/appetizers (\$4-\$8), a couple dozen sandwiches (\$8-\$11)—all of which come with a side salad or fries and also come in a "small" sandwich size or "large" sub size, 10 entrée salads (\$9-\$12) and 10 variations of risotto (\$7-\$15) plus nightly specials!

We've visited here twice and enjoyed the food. We've tried the "Fried Zucchini" starter (\$5) and both enjoyed the thin slices cut on the diagonal, dipped in batter and deep fried with marinara sauce for dipping! Marty's tried a small "Flag Pizza" (\$13)—it's supposed to look like an Italian flag—and liked it! (though wished that he tried one with some of the unusual available toppings). He's also tried the small Lamb Cheese Steak sandwich (\$9), opting for the fries, and loved it. John tried the large Calamari Parmigianino (\$10) sandwich with a side salad; he thought it was different and scrumptious and the included side salad with mixed greens was darn good too. (Geez! There's 7 other "Parmigianino" sandwiches variations to try too!) John also enjoyed the Steak & Pepper Salad (\$12) with lots of freshly grilled steak, roasted peppers and feta over fresh spinach. This made for one heck of an entrée salad. Service was slow because there was so much take-out/delivery service going on. The new super hot oven should help speed things up!

With good, reasonably priced food, live music and a location near "The Charles" and the new "Load of Fun" art gallery and "Single Carrot theater across the street, Joe Squared has a lot going for it.