

CENTERPIECE

HOT

'A little cool, a little chic': Taylor House brings new spirit to an old space

By KRISTA G. FARRIS Special to The Winchester Star
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Ethan Lieberman, left, and Daniel Gilbert have opened the Taylor House restaurant on the first floor of the historic Taylor Hotel at 121 N. Loudoun St. on the Loudoun Street Mall in downtown Winchester. A grand opening was held Oct. 1.

Jeff Taylor/The Winchester Star

The Taylor House restaurant opened last Thursday in the heart of Winchester's Loudoun Street Mall.

Owners Ethan Lieberman and Daniel Gilbert say the establishment offers an elegant yet approachable dining experience.

“We’re upscale casual,” Lieberman says. “A little cool, a little chic,” Gilbert adds. “We want everyone to feel at home here. We have the charm of a good cocktail bar, coupled with great food and a good staff that can tailor your experience.”

“We created a modular, open layout so that we can move tables to accommodate groups of all sizes,” Gilbert notes.

The Taylor House is located on the ground floor of the historic Taylor Hotel at 121 N. Loudoun St., hence the restaurant's name. The hotel opened in 1848 and has seen many incarnations since then, including a Civil War headquarters, McCory's Department Store, a telecommunications center and, most recently, Macado's restaurant.

The iconic three-story downtown building is an example of Greek Revival-style architecture, with white columns and a perron featuring two symmetrical curved staircases leading up to the porch.

The basement level is being readied to open as 1848 Lounge.

Inside the Taylor House, diners will find thyme green walls with tan, leather-like benches, creating a soothing yet sophisticated atmosphere. The owners decided to expose some of the old brick on an accent wall. An epoxy finish on the floor was ground down to reveal muted dark concrete.

Marbleized tabletops enhance a polished tone in the dining room. Pendant lighting with ambient lantern-like sconces complete the elegant, approachable look.

It's not stuffy. But, it does feel special.

The menu, offering American cuisine with coastal European contributions, is similar. Chef Jon Harrington and his team serve familiar foods with added flair.

For Lieberman and Gilbert, one of their favorite menu items is Steak Frites. It's an 8-ounce prime hanger steak with hand-cut fries. “It has a Parisian sauce with a rich herbal note,” Gilbert says.

During the restaurant's soft opening in late September, the Taylor House Burger, a Hereford ground beef burger with aged cheddar, shallots and chipotle mayo that's topped with candied bacon, was a crowd pleaser.

While some diners may crave the menu's hearty beef dishes or a bone-in heritage pork chop, the brightness of the Halibut Piccata might appeal to others. It's served with capers, candied lemon and grape tomato on a bed of watercress.

Herb roasted chicken, lobster risotto, and paleo salmon are among the other entree offerings.

There's also a full array of salads and appetizers that feature familiar items with a twist.

You might want to kickstart a tasty meal with Boursin Balls, featuring Boursin cheese lightly crusted in panko breadcrumbs and served with hot honey from Gilbert's bees, or Grilled Shrimp Skewers with a pop of green goddess dressing.

Lieberman says Taylor House's Spinach Artichoke Dip is unmatched (he has eaten his way through Northern Virginia's spinach and artichoke dip offerings, taste-testing along the way). "It's got the best delivery to the mouth," he says, in appreciation of the thinly sliced crostini that complements the dip.

Desserts include a cookie skillet with ice cream, limoncello mascarpone cheesecake, and chocolate lava cake.

Families are encouraged to come. The children's menu includes grilled chicken, burgers, salmon, steak, and grilled cheese.

Lieberman grew up in Winchester. Gilbert lives in Berryville. Both are thrilled to use the experience they have gained as owners of other restaurants in the region to bring their particular vibe to the Taylor House.

"We decided to create a place in Winchester we would enjoy," Lieberman says. "We want everyone to feel welcome, the more the merrier," Gilbert adds.

"This is one of the prettiest, most distinctive buildings on the walking mall," Gilbert says. "The walking mall has a bright future. There are places here that are already cool. We want to be part of making this area a destination spot. We want to help set the tone. We don't think elevated service needs to be unaffordable."

"We love restaurants. We love food. We love drinks. And we love serving others!" Lieberman adds.

Taylor House seats 80. The back porch provides outdoor seating overlooking the Taylor Pavilion. The duo plans to open 1848 Lounge before the holidays. Outdoor seating in front of the building is planned for the spring.

"We had a gentleman come in Friday during our soft opening who sat at the bar. Without being prompted, he wrote a genuine, glowing review on the Winchester Foodies Facebook page. He wasn't a friend. He wasn't family. Yet, he felt compelled to write the review," Gilbert says, admitting that it warmed his heart and left him a bit misty-eyed.

To make a reservation at the Taylor House, visit: taylorhouse1848.com. The restaurant is open seven days a week. Hours are: Sunday to Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday/Saturday from 11 a.m. to midnight.

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