

IT'S NEW TO US BY JEAN STRATTON

Main Street's New Clocktower Cabana Patio Bar Is a Big Hit at the Princeton Shopping Center

"Let's meet at the Clocktower Cabana!"

That's the buzz among customers who are flocking to this nifty new patio bar at the Princeton Shopping Center.

Just opened on July 24, it has already made a name for itself.

"It's fun, relaxed, and we love to sit outside," report Princeton residents Sue and Chase Hunt, who recently enjoyed an informal dinner at the Cabana. "We are sure it's here to stay, and we will definitely be back."

Adds Lewis Wildman, owner of Jordan's, the Shopping Center's popular card and gift shop: "There is finally a nice place to sit and relax in a beautiful surrounding. It adds a different feel to the Center, and it will be a great meeting place."

This is just the news that Sue Simpkins and John Marshall, owners of the Cabana and Main Street's Euro-American Bistro at the Shopping Center, want to hear. Plans for such a patio bar have been in the works at Main Street for several years, and now the time was right.



A "SHORE" THING: "The most exciting thing to happen to the great outdoors since the shore was added to New Jersey!" This is how enthusiastic customers have responded to Main Street's new Clocktower Cabana Patio Bar in the Princeton Shopping Center. As shown in the photo, customers can't wait to sample the Cabana's specialty beverages or informal lunches and dinners.

A "Shore Thing"

"I'd been thinking about this for some time," explains Mr. Marshall. "I never have time to get down to the shore, and I felt this was a way to bring the shore here. The experience is geared to what you'll see at places at the shore, with the same kind of specialty drinks. And the Cabana is modeled on what you'll find there."

"We evoke memories of the shore, and we have the fun shore and island-type drinks," adds Ms. Simpkins.

"We call it a 'Shore Thing'!"

Adjacent to Main Street's outside dining area, the Cabana is situated under the Shopping Center's clock tower structure. It features a 360-degree bamboo bar, surrounded by indoor/outdoor wicker chairs (with cushions that match the terra cotta decor of the Cabana), tables, and bar stools.

"We wanted it to be very comfortable and to mesh with the surroundings," notes Ms. Simpkins. "We have tried to create a place where people can come and meet friends and relax. Everything is more casual and informal now, and people like to be outside. There is really no place in town to go and just have a cup of coffee and a little snack. We can offer that here."

"We're very unstructured," points out Mr. Marshall. "There are no rules. You can sit here and enjoy a smoothie and relax, or have lunch or dinner — whatever you feel like. When you're here, you feel the same relaxed mood as is the case at the shore."

The only restriction, really, is that all alcoholic beverages must remain on the designated premises. Non-alcoholic drinks can be removed, taken to another Shopping Center location, such as the Thursday night band concert setting.

People are certainly finding their way to the place. All ages — from young singles to grandparents to families with babies — are coming; and then, they're coming again.

Dining Concept

The Cabana is an extension of the Main Street dining concept, believes Ms. Simpkins, who opened Main Street's Kingston cafe and bakery 25 years ago.

"I started Kingston as a catering company to bring fresh home cooking to corporations. The catering began to branch out, and then we opened the Bistro. It was really all about bringing back quality food to the Princeton community. The Cabana is another way to do that.

"Also, we have always wanted to give value at the right price. And we always thought we have 'Monday through Thursday' food, not pretentious weekend dining."

Adds Mr. Marshall: "We feel it's all about the dining experience and value and fair pricing. This is another way to enjoy our food. It's almost another venue, a new mood."

Visitors to the Cabana can enjoy as much or as little from Main Street's Bistro menu, as they wish. This also now includes the very popular Grazing Plates, which can be mixed and matched to share with friends, if diners choose. Such choices as Moroccan lamb sliders in mini pita pockets with Tzatziki sauce; feta mousse and heirloom tomato salad with kalamata olives and red onion; whole steamed artichoke with lemon aioli and drawn butter; garlic-rubbed bruschetta; and shrimp cocktail gazpacho (three large fresh shrimp served with chilled gazpacho cocktail) are among the favorites.

"We will also be introducing lobster rolls Thursday through Sunday," says Ms. Simpkins. "These are classic lobster rolls, with big chunks of freshly-steamed lobsters. We also have fresh corn chowder, and all the salads are very popular in summer."

Frozen Delights

Drinks are fun at the Cabana. The menu is packed with frozen delights, cocktails, smoothies, and iced teas and coffees of every variety.

Frozen oasis drinks include such specialties as margaritas, Kahlua Cabana, Hawaii 10, and Malibu Mayhem. Bahama Mama, Mai Tai, and Cabana Cooler are favorite cocktails, along with martinis of every kind — from Pomegranate to Peartini to Summer Breeze, Frenchini, and Lemon Drop.

Smoothies include Cappuccino, Pina Colada, strawberry, peach, and banana, among others, and popular frozen oasis blends feature Jammin' Java, Peach Melba, Mocha Jamocha, Lava Flow, and Raspberry Beret.

Iced tea choices range from Charlotte Berry Farm, Florida Grovestand, and Georgia Peach to Arnold Palmer (iced tea and lemonade) and Miss Belle's "Sweet Tea." Iced coffee also has many options, such as hazelnut, cinnamon caramel, and raspberry chocolate. For those with simpler tastes, iced tea and iced coffee are also available plain and unadorned, without the "accoutrements".

The emphasis on "going green" is important in all areas today, and the Cabana is no exception. Clear cups for non-alcoholic drinks are able to be composted, and sustainable bamboo has been used for the bar.

"We have bamboo sheeting on the outside of the Cabana, and the bar itself is bamboo," points out Mr. Marshall. "We also try to have organic produce as much as we can. I hope we have created a noteworthy place in all ways."

Destination Place

"I think it will become a destination place," adds Ms. Simpkins. "I look forward to watching what happens. I can hardly wait to see who's coming in and what's happening each day. I think it will generate a lot of energy for the Shopping Center. Also, you're bound to meet someone you know here. One of our friends told their daughter, who had just gotten off a plane, not to go home, but to come straight to the Cabana!"

In addition, says Mr. Marshall, "I met a family the other night who said Prince-ton has really needed a place like this. The mom said she was at the concert Thursday night, and knew she just had to bring her family back. People also enjoy the setting under the trees, where there is often a cool breeze."

Hours are flexible, note the owners. "At the moment, we're opening at lunchtime and continuing throughout the day and evening. We stay open even after the Bistro closes. There are no limits to timing now. We'll see what the customers want. No reservations are necessary."

So far, the customers are interested, intrigued, and enthusiastic. "People say 'This is the coolest place,'" says Mr. Marshall. "How cool is that!"

For more information, call (609) 921-2779. Website: www.mainstreetprinceton.com.