

RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Oyster bar yields some 'Pearlz'

BY DEIDRE SCHIPANI  
The Post and Courier

Pearlz Little Oyster Bar set up shop where the former Marie Laveau's and then Uni Bar once delivered a taste of New Orleans and then the ultimate in raw foods — sashimi and sushi. Channeling the animus of these former tenants, Little Pearlz delivers the essence of a fine oyster house.

It is a small place with two outdoor tables, a short run of a raw bar, four booths and two community tables for eight. During happy hour it hustles like the raw bar at Grand Central (N.Y.) with a steady stream of commuters coming in for a brew or specialty martini and the happy hour menu.

In an era where the restaurant wattage is to go big, the folks at parent company TBonz went small when it came spawning a second Pearlz Oyster Bar west of the Ashley. The "oyster girl" is on the wall surging her blue-plate special and a concrete wall wears the bar's signature moniker. Bright, white subway tiles lend a sparkling image to the raw bar area where the shuckers command center stage. Servers deftly balance beers, plates and platters of the bivalves.

There was a time when eating oysters did not occur in the summer months. Their season was the months with an "r" in them. However, unlike much of our food chain,

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Oysters are now on the menu year round. The summer avoidance came from the fact that as the waters warmed, the oysters would spawn. With all of their energies focused on reproduction, the texture and the flavors were not as bright and briny, the oyster body itself thin and flaccid. Today with aquaculture and the whole farmed shellfish industry you can have a Hama Hama or a Blue Point any month of the year.

The menu at Pearlz is predominantly seafood. A token burger (\$8.95) and filet mignon (\$19.95) prepared Oscar-style with crab meat, asparagus and bearnaise sauce can be had, but why? The hot Lowcountry summer is perfect to order a bivalve snow ball — a dozen (\$9.95) oysters on the half shell, quivering on their bed of shaved ice accompanied by a bracing cocktail sauce, a tart mignonette, a wedge of lemon and salty crackers. Wash them down with lightly hopped lager from New South brewery or a chilled glass of Champagne.

The clam chowder (\$3.95, \$5.95) is prepared New England-style with potatoes, thyme and tender bits of clam body in a milk-based broth.



BRAD NETTLES/STAFF

Unlike many versions where this soup could be called "potato" chowder, this recipe is rich with clams. The gumbo (\$3.95, \$5.95) does New Orleans proud. The trinity of peppers, onions and celery, a proper roux, spicy andouille sausage, along with shrimp and oysters will make your mouth sing.

The menu at Pearlz is straightforward. The preparations are simple and when they step out of the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple Stupid) equation, they remain true to the dish. The lobster roll (\$12.95) tastes like it never left Ken-

nebunkport. It's flush with lobster meat, mounded into an open-top hot dog roll, slightly grilled to toast the bread, and has no filler, just the pure taste of lobster. Spicy peel and eat shrimp (\$9.95) are steamed in beer and Old Bay, bringing a taste of Baltimore to local shrimp. The fish taco (\$7.95) is napped in crema, garnished with cabbage and a mild pico de gallo sauce.

Our neighbors at the community table had high marks for the ahi tuna roll (\$9.95) glazed with teriyaki, crusted with sesame seeds and

tartar sauce or cocktail sauce, and a whole mess of condiments (should you wish).

We can speak for the oyster po' boy, the bivalves gently fried and plucking apart easily on soft hoagies. It's not Louisiana French bread, but the rolls are quite good.

Much of the menu is a smorgasbord from the fryer,

including the shrimp, flounder, oyster and crawfish platters (combo of two for \$11.25, combo of three for \$13.95). Po' Boys also makes an appetizer called Cajun Mudbugs (\$8.25), hot and spicy, breaded crawfish tails with tartar sauce.

Another popular seller: Po' Boys' half-pound cheese-

## Pearlz Little Oyster Bar

Neighborhood Favorite

**PHONE:** 769-0350.

**ADDRESS:** 9 Magnolia Road, West Ashley.

**FOOD:** ★★★★★

**SERVICE:** ★★★★★

**ATMOSPHERE:** ★★★★★

**PRICE:** \$\$

**COSTS:** Appetizers \$3.50-\$9.95; soups and salads \$3.95-\$10.95; oysters \$3.50-\$9.95 (dozen); entrees \$8.95-\$19-95.

**VEGETARIAN OPTIONS:** Limited unless one eats seafood.

**BAR:** Full service bar; happy hour 4-7 p.m. Monday-Friday; martini menu, New South draft beers.

**HOURS:** 4 p.m. until.

**DECIBEL LEVEL:** Animated.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Yes.

**PARKING:** Street parking and rear lot.

served with a sauce based on wasabi and a crisp cucumber and seaweed salad.

The catch of the day varies. You pick both the cooking method: blackened, fried, pan-seared or grilled; and the sauce: Bearnaise, teriyaki, chili citrus, tartar, casino butter or pineapple relish. This mix and match entree is served with a well-executed Charleston red rice side and grilled asparagus. Our mahi-mahi was hot off the grill, tender, succulent and fresh.

Homemade potato chips were the only disappointment. There was nothing special about them.

Most reviews begin with

**OTHER:** Kids menu, late night menu, happy hour menu, no reservations.

**WHAT DID YOU THINK?:** Go to [www.charleston.net/preview](http://www.charleston.net/preview) and share your opinion about this review and Pearlz cuisine.

**RESTAURANT FACTS:** Rating criteria include quality and presentation of food, service and ambiance, while taking into consideration the type of restaurant — elegant, night out or neighborhood favorite.

### WHAT THE STARS

**MEAN:** ★Fair, ★★Average, ★★★Good, ★★★★★Excellent, ★★★★★★Extraordinary  
**PRICE:** \$ least expensive, \$\$\$\$ most expensive.

a phone call and friendly Michael knows how to take that call. He knew all the answers to the "r" month and oyster-eating dilemma, how all of their seafood is sourced and monitored. He was welcoming, provided his name and extended the invitation, "Please give us a try," and "Ask for me, I'm Michael."

Efficient service by a well-informed waitstaff and an overall awareness on the part of the whole staff created a very pleasant experience.

There is an energy about Pearlz Little Oyster Bar that makes you want to return, often. For us, it was a bit of heaven on the half shell.

## LUNCH COUNTER

### Po' Boys

**ADDRESS:** 6251 S.C. Highway 162, Hollywood.

**PHONE:** 889-4988.

**HOURS:** Mon.-Sat., 11:30 a.m.-2 a.m.

Marla Cavallaro is from Connecticut instead

of Cajun country, but her Hollywood restaurant is flavored with a healthy dose of the bayou.

And of course, her po' boys are a featured item. The signature sandwiches come in four types: oyster (\$7.75), shrimp (\$6.95), flounder (\$6.75) and crawfish (\$8.25).

Cavallaro dresses them with

tartar sauce or cocktail sauce, and a whole mess of condiments (should you wish).

We can speak for the oyster po' boy, the bivalves gently fried and plucking apart easily on soft hoagies. It's not Louisiana French bread, but the rolls are quite good.

Much of the menu is a smorgasbord from the fryer,

burger (\$6.75), stacked with lettuce, tomato, onion, mustard, mayo and ketchup. All the sandwiches come with crinkle-cut fries dusted in Cajun seasoning.

The cheese sticks (\$6.50) are hand cut and breaded, and the wings coated in any of 13 different sauces. If you like the wings at Famous

Joe's on Savannah Highway, you'll like these, too. Cavallaro owns both joints.

With pool tables, a scattering of dollar bills stapled to the ceiling, and football soon on television, Po' Boy's makes a good home for Hollywood homebodies and anyone else.