



Roasted Beet and Squash Salad - golden beets, caramelized onions, butternut squash, and zucchini all oven roasted until golden brown tossed lightly in cider vinegar and maple. Garnished with diced mixed greens, olive oil, and balsamic reduction. Photo: Andrew Lightman

Executive Chef - Dorothy Steck. Photo: Andrew Lightman



# Z E S T

Food And Fun For Families...And Everyone Else

By CELESTE MCCALL

**Z**est An American Bistro opened its doors late last year on Barracks Row. “Hip yet family friendly” was the goal of proprietors Amanda and Stephen Briggs, who live in Capitol Hill East. The parents of Brady (5) and Benjamin (3), the couple saw a real opportunity to open a bistro for families, while attracting other neighbors, business people and yes, politicians. “It was a dream of ours to open our own restaurant,” said Amanda Briggs as we talked on a warm spring afternoon after the lunchtime rush.

The Briggs have certainly succeeded. Zest is pretty to look at. The lofty, cheery interior was designed by Barbara Hawthorne Interiors of McLean. Master craftsman Peter Kerschbamer helped fashion the space from materials recycled from the building, which used to be Miller’s Reporting Service. Glossy blond wooden tables are crafted from spruce inlaid with oaken insets; brick walls are festooned with

large photos over-painted with oils. “We wanted to go ‘green,’” Briggs emphasized, pointing out the bamboo flooring and resin panels crisscrossed with natural fibers. Paint applied on walls and elsewhere is non-toxic. Zest accommodates 74 patrons inside, with an additional eight sidewalk seats.

Emerging from the display kitchen of new chef Dorothy Steck and sous chef Lance Hannan are American dishes with Mediterranean flourishes. Shortly after Zest’s debut, we lunched on caramelized beet salad, spicy jerk chicken pockets with mango dipping sauce; roast lamb on grilled flatbread with caramelized onions and feta. That last lamb dish, by the way, is one of Zest’s top sellers, along with a dinner entree, confit of lamb shanks. We’ve also enjoyed the salt-and-spice-roasted salmon with spinach risotto; olive oil poached cod and spinach fettuccine topped with grilled asparagus; roasted eggplant and grilled

shrimp napped with orange butter sauce. "With just a few tweaks (and some new specials), we've kept the same menu we had at the opening," Briggs said.

Secret of Zest's success? Briggs points out her own culinary and business background (she came from Deluxe Restaurant Group, which has three area locations). "We stay focused, and we've hired the right people." Among Zest's 25 employees is general manager Liz Goldstein who worked with Briggs at Deluxe. "We also provide good customers service and, of course, good food," Amanda added.

Management also pays close attention to details. Cocktails are custom-made with fresh fruit and other ingredients; bartenders concoct Bloody Marys from scratch. Even the horseradish is hand-muddled. Not surprisingly, Zest has an appealing kids menu, with bow-tie pasta with meat sauce; grilled or fried chicken tenders (both are \$4.95); fruit drinks and a child-sized sundae.

Besides serving lunch and dinner daily, Zest also offers Saturday and Sunday brunch, with banana-stuffed French toast, eggs Benedict, steak-and-eggs.

Prices are reasonable, with most appetizers in the \$5 to \$9 range. Entrees tags hover around \$15 to \$20. On Sundays through Thursday after 9 p.m., bottles of wine are discounted 25 percent. Happy hour goes from 4 to 7 p.m. weeknights, with bargain-priced drinks and bar food.

Zest: An American Bistro  
735 Eighth St. SE  
(Barracks Row)  
202-544-7171  
www.zestbistro.com

Hours: Sunday-Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.  
Zest is just a few blocks from the Eastern Market Metro (Blue/Orange Line). ★

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