

May 9, 2018

MILLER'S PUB

134 S. Wabash; 312-263-4988

4 diners @ 7 pm

Cuisine: American pub food + Greek diner influence

Opened: 1935 as a bar by the Miller brothers

Purchased: 1950 by Greek brothers Pete, Nick, and Jimmy Gallios. The youngest brother, Vannie bought in in 1953.

Present time: Youngest brother Vannie is still around, and the next generation of the Gallios family still runs it.

THE PLACE

When we enter through the fabulous wood doors inset with etched leaded glass, a charming, dapper, silver-haired guy steps up. He seems to be expediting all the action.

"Are you the owner," I ask.

"If I was, I would be up on the Gold Coast," he laughs.

"But you have been here a long time?" I persist.

"Oh, yes, since 9 this morning." (Also since 1964.)

And just like that, I'm in love with this place.

In 1950, the Gallios brothers bought the business from the Miller brothers who originally opened it as a bar in 1935. I don't know the original address, but in 1989, the rented building was renovated, and the Gallios brothers moved Miller's to 134 S. Wabash. By that time, the brothers had three other restaurants in the Wabash/Adams neighborhood.

I haven't been to Miller's in ages and couldn't begin to remember what it used to look like or what the remodeling was about, but my friends were all over it. The inside of the elaborate entranceway looks Bavarian. There used be two entrances and the room was previously a warren of chopped up claustrophobic spaces, I'm told. No matter where you were, you were in a cramped space. Now it's wide open. No other updates. Basically the same look. Still done up in dark woods, dark green leather (leatherette) upholstery, and tartan plaid carpeting. Why tartan? I have no idea. Double-decker copper lantern chandeliers. The tables are those deli-style flip-ups that can be converted to seat six in a nano-second. Quite sure that none of the furnishings are new. This was about room configuration. It's a smooth-running operation. The redo took six weeks.

Heavy with testosterone clientele and career waitstaff types. **Guys, guys, and more guys are eating ribs and hoisting a few at the bar and in the booths.** A few couples here and there. The place seems to defy any specific demographic or age range. A familiar place to hang out, meet up after work. A neighborhood feel in the Loop under the El tracks. Order a massive sandwich (or the ribs), some not-crisp-enough fries, and a brewskie.

Plasma screens are scattered around, and the joint stays open till **4 am, seven days a week.**

SERVICE

Like I said, it's a smooth running operation. Everyone here is an old hand. We love our waitress, Lana. Anyway, I do.

When Mr. Dining tries to order a Bloody Mary, **Lana forthrightly talks him out of it.** "Bloody Marys are for morning. It's just not going to taste right now," says Lana.

And so it goes.

THE MEAL

DRINKS

Wabash old fashioned \$11

In an old fashioned glass, the menu says.

FEW Bourbon, club soda, angostura bitters, muddled orange and house-made banded cherry, Demerara sugar [partially refined light brown cane sugar coming originally from Guyana.]

Gimlet

"What kind of gin?" Lana asks.

"Top shelf," I respond.

Since I agreed with Lana about the Bloody Mary, she and I are now laughing and bonded. **New and totally temporary best friends.**

Pick-A-Mule \$11

Four Roses Bourbon or Titos Vodka or Dan Fulano Blanco Tequila
Gosling's Ginger Beer, bittercube, Jamaican #1 Bitters, lime

The **drinks were uniformly bad.** Weak. Watery. "Lana, what's going on here?" Lana babbles on and on, something about how Miller's can only do a two-ounce pour. Now you tell us! The romance might be over.

Mr Dining sticks it out with his mule, my girlfriend switches to red wine, and Lana has the bar make me a *second* gimlet, apparently with more than 2 ounces of booze.

My friends are not thrilled, Mr. D. doesn't care, and I fall back in love. **This isn't a restaurant, it's an experience.**

BREAD

A basket of **Turano's bread**. We've all seen and eaten Turano's a thousand times and we knew what to expect. But it didn't live up to our expectations. It was not warm; it was **thick and dense and dry**. Less than fresh, we think. Butter came as wrapped-in-foil pats.

APPETIZERS

Jumbo shrimp cocktail (5 to the order) \$12.25

Bland to flavorless. Thank goodness for the cocktail sauce.

HOUSE SPECIALTIES

Miller's world famous B.B.Q. ribs, full slab \$20

B.B.Q. Canadian back ribs

Sides: french fries, salad with creamy Ranch dressing

So Lana loves Twin Anchors ribs and I don't. I learned this because she warned me that if I were a Twin Anchors fan, I wouldn't like Miller's ribs. Perfect. I don't like Twin Anchors fall-off-the-bone ribs. Not only that, **I order my Miller's slab on the crispy side. And I order my fries well-done.**

The **ribs were passable** mostly because I love to gnaw bones. Even though I like my ribs pretty dry, these should have come with sauce. They needed sauce. I suspect the absence of sauce on the side was an oversight. **The fries were better than the ones that came with the cod, because I had specified well-done.** The salad, mundane in that deli way. **Time-warp salad**. Not very good, rather endearing.

Ribs also came with a **boiled-to-death ear of corn**. Not the least bit endearing. I could have wrung the water out of it.

Fish & chips \$12.75

Beer-battered cod, french fries, coleslaw, tartar sauce

Oops. This was pretty bad. I didn't ask Lana, but if I had to guess, I would say that these fillets came from a vendor, prebreaded. And the fries were pale. This is about when my girlfriend asked why I suggested this place for dinner.

"Because I heard they remodeled, and it's a Chicago classic," I whimpered. "I wanted to see if it has held up over the years."

OPEN-FACED SANDWICHES

Roast prime rib of beef, 8 oz. \$22

Au jus, mashed potatoes, horseradish cream sauce

Sides: mashed potatoes and coleslaw

Reminded me of Win Schuler's, a roadside chain in Michigan that is known for its prime rib. That is to say that Miller's prime rib is very OK. Thick and pink, reasonably tender, and it has that eye of fat that keeps prime rib juicy.

NIGHTLY SPECIAL

Blackened grouper sandwich

I fell down on the job. I didn't taste my friend's grouper, but he reported that it wasn't bad. Looked exactly like the fish & chips plate but with a grouper on a bun instead of squares of fried cod.

DESSERTS

God, no.

THOUGHTS

I'm glad I went. The whole place is a kick, and I had fun. I did not have a very good dinner, but I had fun. And this place has plenty of fans and regulars. It's sort of a phenomenon.