

Pick a floor. Any floor. Enjoy a meal, a cocktail, the historic ambience. When you feel the power of a passing train on the track just outside your window, you know you're in a singular restaurant in our area—The Mill in Hershey.

After nearly 40 years of sitting vacant, the historic former Curry Feed Mill has been upgraded into three floors for dining, each with its own bar and distinct feel. On The Mill's fourth floor is a small lounge with tables and armchairs where guests can gaze upon the structure's magnificent wood beams and check out what everyone's having for dinner down below.

In 2012, Pennsylvania natives Jim Rafferty, Bill Delinsky and Executive Chef Joe Mishler began a new chapter in the building's life, taking ownership of the historic property.

"Talk through the town was that it should open as a restaurant," said Mishler. "But no one, as I like to say, had the *cojones* to do it."

The undertaking was huge.

An addition was built to incorporate the elevator, kitchen and bathroom areas, but the 100-year-old structure remained intact. Polished to a glory it probably never knew as a storehouse for coal and grain, most of the original wood was kept in the restoration. What isn't original is either recycled or new to support the structural integrity. In September 2014, the restaurant opened for business.

Today, The Mill offers a simple, honest food and drink menu that changes with each season. The restaurant partners with local farms and farmers markets as much as possible while fresh, never frozen, seafood comes in from the Atlantic.

Due to the sheer volume of orders going through the kitchen compared to smaller restaurants, Mishler said that The Mill isn't strictly farm to fork.

"That term's overused to a point, but we try to get as local as possible," he said.

A PASSION

Mishler and his staff, including sous chef Nick Martino, smoke and cure meats in-house, such as the thick-cut bacon steak, smoked sausage and veal short ribs. Pastry chef Daria Astorino takes advantage of the proximity to Hershey Co. and incorporates the local chocolate into many of her desserts.

"I come from an Italian family, so it was all about food and being in the kitchen and eating and drinking,"

said Mishler, a 25-year veteran in the kitchen. "I just have a passion for it. I love it. It's nice to like your job when you go to work every day."

One of The Mill's more popular dishes is a twist on deviled eggs that comes with a honey Tabasco kick, said Mishler. Also, the calamari, veal short ribs and the Mill Standard Burger are favorites. Mishler is putting a whole smoked chicken on the fall menu, meaning that you'll need to bring a hearty appetite and/or friends to prevent leftovers.

Domestic and international wines are available by the glass or bottle, as well as a rotating list of drafts and craft beers by the bottle. Handcrafted cocktails that have been turning heads include a jalapeño margarita made with Tanteo jalapeño tequila, Cointreau, agave, fresh lime and muddled cilantro. Also worth trying in season is the heirloom tomato mojito made with fresh tomatoes and basil, Absolut vodka and a pinch of ground black pepper.

AN IMPRESSION

Open every day, The Mill covers a lot of territory.

Early in the week, there's lunch and dinner service with a happy hour menu and drink list. On Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, you can catch live music on the third floor and stay to take advantage of the late-night menu. Of course, there's everyone's favorite hair-of-the-dog tradition known as Sunday brunch.

That's where I chose to explore the menu. Each offering is hearty and served with a medley of petit-diced fruit. To start, I tried a house sangria made with fizzy red Lambrusco, white wine and fresh blueberries. The bloody Mary was also very good. Just spicy enough and served with a big, fat olive.

For brunch, my party was seated in a corner booth on the stonewalled, first floor dining room for a sampling of The Mill's egg dishes. We started with the Farmers Frittata, a kind of egg pancake that reminded me of my mom's with its blend of potato, sausage, bacon, roasted red pepper and melted cheddar for \$12. For the same price, a slice of Garden Quiche is baked in a light crust with broccoli, spinach, red pepper, onion and Gruyere. To round things out, the 6-ounce Chateau Steak and Eggs was expertly prepared. The sliced, certified Angus beef is served over home fries and topped with two fried eggs for \$15.

A highlight of the meal was the smoked cherry tomato that accompanied The Mill Staple Salad. Flash-fried for easy removal of the skins, the tomatoes are then smoked to infuse a deep, almost bacon-like flavor.

Considering the attention to detail paid to a little tomato or the effort put into restoring a piece of Hershey's architectural history, a visit to The Mill is sure to make an impression. And as the seasons change, Chef Mishler and his staff are dedicated to upholding the integrity of the food and the drinks served year round. **E**

The Mill is located at 810 Old West Chocolate Ave., Hershey. To learn more, including hours and reservation information, visit www.themillinherseyrestaurant.com or call 717-256-9965. Photo by Ali Waxman.

A MILL BECOMES THE MILL

Long-abandoned, a former storehouse has found new life as an exquisitely restored restaurant.

BY JULIE VITTO

