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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009

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the *bank* job

Right under our noses, the Raleigh Restaurant Group converts a bank into a luxurious new restaurant.

WRITTEN BY: LISA MORGAN

By day, One Exchange Plaza on Fayetteville Street in Raleigh is a bustling thoroughfare for state employees, executives, businesspeople, politicians, street musicians, and locals. By night, the marble building with a swirly “M” on the front door holds a wealth of possibilities as The Mint Restaurant.

Opened in January 2008 and located a block from the Convention Center and two blocks from the City Market and Moore Square Art district, The Mint is at the heart of Raleigh’s downtown district.

“We really got in at the right time for downtown Raleigh. It’s the downtown renaissance,” says Robert Royster, a Jacksonville native and one of the restaurant’s owners. “We felt that it was a new beginning for downtown Raleigh, an opportunity to invest back into the city that’s given us all so much.”

Rick Jones had the vision for The Mint four years ago, and soon a group of five investor families, including Royster, had joined together to create the Raleigh Restaurant Group. Together they devised a plan to bring the ultimate dining experience to burgeoning downtown Raleigh.

8,000 hand-stitched crystals

The Mint caters to its customers before they even set foot inside with complimentary valet parking. Inside, the vestiges of the building’s bygone days decorate the opulent dining room. The Mint was once a bank, and the restaurant owners incorporated emblems of the past in the interior design, right down to the teller windows that now hang as glass-etched, LED-lit relief sculptures portraying historic Raleigh landmarks. And who can miss the six-ton bank vault door at the entrance?

The soft hues of money — mint green, gold, and copper — along with 8,000 glittering hand-stitched crystals by McConnell Studios in Raleigh hanging from the ceiling, create a glamorous atmosphere perfect for private parties and dates. Panels of polished copper-colored marble dress the walls. Sleek, cathedral-sized windows afford tall views of the streetscape outside. Rich tapestry, rich atmosphere, and rich food create what Royster calls a “dazzling dining experience.”

Diners can choose to dine à la carte upstairs in the M-Bar, a stylish bar decorated in the same color scheme as the dining room, charged with live jazz performances and spirited conversation. The bar is decorated like a jeweler’s counter with jewels sparkling beneath the glass top.

The best way to start a glitzy meal is with a cocktail, such as The Mint’s signature Saint of Circumstance cocktail,



The dazzling decor of The Mint Restaurant sets the stage for a wonderful meal.

containing the elderflower liqueur St. Germain and Sauvignon Blanc.

The Mint has a wealth of wines to choose from — 500 to be exact. No matter what you choose, one thing is certain: You’ll receive VIP treatment from start to finish.

When I sank back into one of the deep, cushiony banquettes, or what Royster jokingly refers to as the “mafia booths,” I felt like I was living out a scene from a glamorous movie.

Extreme tasting

Gourmet thrill seekers can take a culinary bungee jump by choosing the entrees of Chef Jeremy Clayman’s tasting menu with popular dishes such as the butter-poached lobster with the combined flavors of popcorn, bourbon caramel, and peanut, or a dish of poached kangaroo with blueberries. Or, diners can go for the more traditional dishes from the à la carte menu, such as beef tartare, an artisan cheese plate, or grilled filet mignon.

Clayman, formerly of the Peninsula Grille in Charleston, South Carolina, is capable of all sorts of culinary feats. Driving Clayman's endeavors is his belief that once the chef earns the trust of customers, he or she can then take them down a more adventurous food path.

"There's everything from steak on the menu to tuna to kangaroo and bison. We do have something for everybody," Royster says.

Clayman, a Charlotte native, attributes his love for local food and cooking to his North Carolina upbringing, including visits with grandparents Arnold and Ethel Cook of Stoneville.

Clayman's cooking style can best be described as contemporary Southern cooking with global influences. Clayman's cooking brings Raleigh in good company with other well-known Southern dining municipalities such as Charleston and New Orleans.

If you plan to impress that special someone or just want to experience a special night on the town, The Mint is sure to please with unique entrees, star treatment, live jazz music, and a glitzy atmosphere. □

 **The Mint Restaurant**
219 Fayetteville Street, Raleigh • (919) 821-0011
www.themintrestaurant.com

THE MINT'S SWEET POTATO CRABBY HASH

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
½ cup diced (roasted 350°, 15 minutes) sweet potato
½ cup black-eyed peas (cooked)
½ cup lump crabmeat
1 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon chopped chervil
2 ounces brunoise (very small dice) red and yellow peppers
1 ounce brunoise shallots
1 ounce minced garlic
Pinch salt and pepper

After black-eyed peas and sweet potatoes are cooked, heat oil over medium heat in a sauté pan, and sweat garlic and shallots. Add potatoes and beans; sauté for 2-3 minutes. Add crabmeat and peppers; sauté for 2 more minutes. Add heavy cream, and simmer for 3-4 minutes. Finish with salt and pepper and herbs.

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