

The iconic Al's Steakhouse is still thriving more than five decades after it opened

MtlRestoRap

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Montreal is known for some iconic steakhouses, such as Moishe's (soon to reopen), Rib 'N Reef and Gibbys. On my most recent trip to Ottawa, I got to experience the legendary Al's Steakhouse,

Located on Elgin Street, Al's was established in 1967 by Halim "Al" Saikali and to this day remains in the same family, operated by his son Sam, daughters Jane, Gloria and Barbara and grandson Justin Merner. Al originally came to Canada as a Lebanese immigrant in the 50's. Open daily for lunch and dinner, Al's has ample free parking, can host over 100 diners in private events, and features a menu that will satisfy all tastes.

Al passed away a few years ago, but he left quite a legacy. "Before he opened this restaurant my grandfather actually spent time as a dishwasher at some Montreal steakhouses such as Joe's to really learn the business," said Merner, who is one of the managers.



An appetizing serving of P.E.I. oysters.



A sizzling steak on the grill at Al's Steakhouse in Ottawa.

Make sure to sample Al's garlic salad dressing, included on a starter salad with most meals. This is so popular that it is bottled and sold in-house and in grocery stores throughout the city. The dressing was created in 1970 by Al himself and their chef at the time.

The restaurant seats 130 inside, 80 in a private banquet room and 80 on the beautiful outdoor patio overlooking a park, where we enjoyed our meal. During the pandemic shutdowns, Al's pivoted to take-out and delivery quite successfully and that format remains in place.

Let me just say that we enjoyed an extraordinary feast at Al's, with Merner providing all of the recommendations necessary to make this the perfect meal. We began with some drinks, Purple Hazes for the ladies and a grapefruit & pineapple mule mocktail for myself.

The menu has a wide array of appetizers. I started off with a piping hot bowl of chicken noodle soup. Some freshly baked rolls, with soft butter, arrived at the table. Then the sharing began: Escargots au Gratin, with in-house garlic butter; a dozen outstanding P.E.I. oysters with different sauces (we liked the nice-sized container of mignonette, complete with a convenient dropper); a burrata salad for two, including heirloom tomatoes, evoo, house balsamic, fresh basil, Maldon sea salt and crispy pieces of French bread; and tuna tartare, served with avocado, pickled radish, Asian dressing and crispy wontons.

Indeed, the meal could have been over at this point. However, the best was yet to come. After all this is a steakhouse. The ladies shared a 14-inch rib steak, cooked to perfection and already sliced, with a side of mashed potatoes. I chose the 12-ounce New York strip, which



The popular outdoor patio.

was to die for. On the side I ordered some garlic rice.

Had we not enjoyed so many appetizers, we might have shared the 50-ounce tomahawk steak. Also for sharing, there is also the Butcher's Board. It contains thick cut bacon, a sliced 16-ounce New York striploin, lamb chops, bone marrow, chicken kabobs, house sausage, jumbo garlic shrimp, vegetable skewer and crispy smashed potatoes. Merner lists the 20 oz. bone-in rib steak and the 10 oz. filet mignon as house favorites. On the seafood side you can order lobster tail, garlic shrimp, sea scallops, salmon filet, Chilean sea bass and Pacific cod to name a few.

And yes, we saved just enough room for some of their homemade desserts. The 24-k chocolate cake was sold out, but we had no complaints about sharing the lemon tart and the coconut cream pie.

Not surprisingly, Al's has attracted a lot of celebrities over the years. You just have to look at their Wall of Fame and see the likes of the legendary Colonel Sanders, Gene Simmons from the rock group KISS, multiple politicians and players from the Ottawa Senators. "We will often stay open late just for them after a game," Merner said.

Al's Steakhouse is located at 327 Elgin Street. Log on to www.alssteakhouse.ca or call 613-233-7111. They are open Sunday and Monday, from 11 am to 10 pm and Tuesday to Saturday, from 11 am to 11 pm.

Ottawa: The Metropolitan Brasserie

By Mike Cohen

Conveniently located next to the Byward Market at 700 Sussex, just steps away from Parliament Hill, Métropolitain Brasserie is home to Ottawa's largest raw bar.

Open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends, we had a wonderful summer Saturday evening dinner on their spacious patio. The weather was threatening that afternoon, but it would not interfere with our reservation for the spot is completely covered by a tent-like structure.

We started off the evening with some drinks and then took a good hard look at all of the options available among the appetizers. Some breads, rolls and butter and an order of outstanding mushroom Flatbread, with spinach, ricotta, Gruyère and truffle oil, started things off. Then came one of our favorites: a seafood platter for two (which was more than enough for three): shrimp,

oysters, mussels, snow crab, cod croquettes and scallop crudo. This could have been a meal itself and savored every morsel. There is a larger platter for four available.

There is a nice selection of main courses. The Duck Confit caught my eye, an item I do not see available at too many restaurants I frequent. It was superbly prepared, with crispy skin and served with warm fingerling salad, roasted peppers, grilled onions, black olives, fresh basil, apricot harissa toss, and lime crema. As for the others, they opted for the steak frites petit (five ounces), heart of Angus ribeye and maître d' hotel butter and Coquille St. Jacques, with seared scallops, mashed potatoes, wilted spinach, Mornay sauce, melted Gruyère & toasted Panko breadcrumbs.

While we were quite full, it was pretty hard to resist the dessert menu. We agreed to share the flourless chocolate cake, with caramel sauce and raspberry preserves. It literally melted in my mouth.



The duck confit at the Metropolitan Brasserie.

Weekend brunch is available from 10 am to 2 pm Saturdays, Sundays and select holidays. It is indeed something I look forward to trying on another visit.

For more details log on to www.metropolitainbrasserie.com or call 613-562-1160.