

Whaler's Tavern offers an exciting menu in a relaxed, non-stuffy atmosphere

Banner image by Brian Rapoza.

Restaurant spotlights are my favorite thing to do. I am a foodie through and through, and outside of history I can't think of anything more fun to write about. Of course, I wouldn't let everyone know about the places that aren't good – if there isn't a spotlight here, it's because I haven't done it yet, or they aren't worth writing about!

With this spotlight, I get to mingle both my favorite topics in one: food and history based on the eatery's location. The Quahog Republic's "Whaler's Tavern" is the new guy...er...gal...um...insert non-triggering, androgynous, pan-identity pronoun yet to be created so as to offend no one. I like this place. I really, really like it. Since it's new, we haven't fully bonded, but I think it's a romance that may blossom and turn into love. Once I've ironed out its identity, I'll know what figurines to top the wedding cake with.

Enough with the peripheral commentary – let's discuss what the Whaler's Tavern excels at. I've subtitled each section in case you want to get to the goods straight away.



*Is this real life?
(Erik Horsley)*

The Whaler's Tavern did not arrive without a buzz as it's the third "flavor" of one of the Quahog Republic's eateries. The one in Falmouth has been facetiously dubbed "Dive Bar" and the one in Onset is aptly named "Waterfront Eatery." These places have burst on the scene and grown in popularity so rapidly because they offer something different. Something people have wanted. They filled a need of locals. This echoes the maxims in the business world "Give the people what they want." and "Find a need – fill it."

Well, the people were fatigued with eateries. Replicas and copy-cats are a dime a dozen. Once a restaurant comes up with a brand, gimmick, or theme and succeeds with it, others will follow. However, they will always be chasing the "tail of the dragon" because copying isn't the method of a creative, innovative and passionate mind. By the time, you have copied the original, he, she or they have already moved onto something else exciting and new.

This is the case with the Quahog Republic and explains their rapid success since opening in 2008. The Whaler's Tavern is no exception. Here is an eatery that altered its New England theme, brand of service, and menu, to fit the character of the city. They have paid respect to the city's history with their name, location and menu items. This isn't a cookie cutter application, one-size-fits-all. They have married with New Bedford by taking the best elements that make the Quahog Republic's eateries so darn good, and pairing it with the rich, local history and carefully selecting the downtown location – specifically a historic building on North Water Street.

Not that city officials would allow it, but how depressing would it be if a chain restaurant placed itself downtown? The positive aspect about chain restaurants is that they replicate

something that *works* – something that people want and enjoy. But it's a snapshot of what the public wants at that particular time. The downsides are obvious – menu fatigue, inflated prices, revenues go out of state, etc. One of the things that makes Whaler's Tavern so great is that it keeps these positive aspects and sacks the negative ones.

Arrival, Atmosphere, Architecture

I can't say enough about the interior of the Whaler's Tavern – the antique wood walls and decor make it feel like stepping back in time. It's almost akin to the inside of a whaling vessel. I'd imagine the interior would look similar to a pub or tavern in the 19th century. Mind you, this isn't a theme park – it's not in your face, but subtle.



The interior resembles a 19th century tavern with all its trappings. (Kristen Mitchell Hughes)

On my first visit, I went with Rachael and we were greeted by a very friendly bartender. It was in between lunch and dinner – typically a slow time for anywhere – so she was able to come out from behind the bar immediately and serve us. I can't be alone in that I love any bar, pub or eatery that has lots of exposed antique wood or stonework, right? The antique windows, which look original, are a nice touch and one this history lover enjoyed. There were a number of city and regional themed paintings and wood art on the walls and I noticed a William A. Wall's "Gosnold at the Smoking Rocks" print right away. Behind

the bar were two casks, a rather odd glass jar containing some secret concoction, and a number of liquor bottles.

One thing about the setup at the bar that I really liked is that the back bar is where the the tap handles were. Not in your face forcing you to navigate around them or gaze between them to talk to the bartender. The front bar had no clutter or taps, just a few jars of condiments and straws. It makes the bartender seem more accessible and makes the place feel less cluttered. Subtle touch that was clearly thought out.

The lighting came from a number of lanterns suspended from a chain. Of course, if it were yesteryear they would contain candles, but again I love the little odes to history. The overall ambience is a relaxed, non-stuffy one. Co-owners Erik Bevans and Tom Hughes (they co-own the other two Quahog Republic establishments too) have really succeeded in carefully crafting the look and feel of a 19th century tavern.

Grog, Argh!

The menu which is made to look like charred parchment, came in two separate pages: one page for food, the other for drinks. I sincerely dislike poring over a menu that is multiple pages long. It seems like those places have an identity crisis and I often wonder how good someone can be at cooking 200 separate dishes. A sort of jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none.” The size of this menu smacks of “Here’s what we are really good at. These dishes are what we specialize in.”



*Whaler's tavern
has it all:
cocktails, wines,
beers, a variety
of Rums,
Scotches, and
Bourbon Whiskeys.
(Kendra Darcy)*

There were 13 wines and 3 champagnes to choose from: all between \$6-\$12 a glass. Of course, you can also purchase a number of them by the bottle. A dozen bottled beers (including cider) and 14 kinds of draft beers were offered. The varieties and brands can be seen here.

The rest of the drink menu consists of 13 cocktails and a number of originals and classics like a **Bloody Mary**, **New England Daiquiri** (Privateer Silver Rum, fresh lime juice, splash of ginger beer, fresh grated ginger garnish), **Dr. Flynn's Cask Ages Mai Tai** (Secret recipe smuggled from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel on Waikiki beach, cask aged for perfection) or the **Cantaloupe Martini** (3 olives, watermelon, orange juice, fresh lime and Marie Brizard watermelon. Chilled and served straight up.) If cocktails are your thing, you really need to check out the rest of that menu.

Finally we come to the Rums, Scotches and Bourbon American Whiskeys. The rum list is a massive one: 25 different brands of rum to choose from. Can't choose? Get one of three Rum Flights of cherry-picked 1 oz. pours of 3 different Rums.

If Bourbon American Whiskey is your thing, you have 7 to choose from – **Berkshire Bourbon** (made in Sheffield, MA), **Woodford Reserve**, **Booker's**, **Basil Hayden**, **Elijah Craig** (12 year), **Old Overholt Rye** and of course **Knob Creek**. Served in a 2 oz. glass with prices starting at \$8.

Prefer a Scotch? You have 5 Single Malts to choose from:

Glenlivet (12 year), **Laphroig** (10 year), **Macallan** (18 year), **Balvenie** (14 year Carribean Casked), or **Balvenie Single Barrel** (Sherry Cask 15 year).

Grub, Argh!

At the time of day when I first went, it was too early to drink. (Yeah, go ahead, say it – I’m a lightweight) so we were there to eat. I looked over the menu and the very first thing that caught my eye was “**Raw Bar.**” At a tavern/pub? This is a good development! Best of all is that they could be ordered by the piece. Want three quahogs and three oysters? You got it. No need to order by the dozen or half dozen – order only what you want.

Appetizers included standards like Caesar Salad, House Salad, Tuna Tartar, Cod Cakes, chicken wings, stuffed quahog, and Kale soup. There were some rarer or original appetizers too: *Tavern Salad* – crisp greens, sun-dried tomato, grilled asparagus, mushroom & wholegrain mustard vinaigrette. *Truffled Parmesan Fries*: tossed with shredded and grated Parmesan, truffle oil, and scallions. *Poor Man’s Surf & Turf*: stuffed quahog and a 1/4 hot dog.

We opted for 3 each of the oysters, quahogs, and chilled shrimp. We also figured a good measuring stick for any New England eatery would be to try their chowder, so we ordered the Quahog Chowder (\$6.50 bowl): Applewood smoked bacon, tender Red Bliss potato, & cream.



The “*Monsta Lobster Salad Roll*”: heaping

pile of fresh tail & claw meat lightly dressed with Hellmann's Mayo on either a butter toasted Brioche roll or mixed greens.

I can't tell you enough how perfectly fresh these were. The quahogs and oysters came with wedged lemons and a homemade mignonette sauce that was the perfect compliment. I've eaten a lot of quahogs plucked fresh myself from the sand and these reminded me of them – that quintessential ocean flavor, the right amount of natural saltiness and sweetness. The shrimp – which were HUGE – came with a tangy cocktail sauce.

The chowder? Mind-bogglingly delicious with generous amounts of quahogs, a perfectly seasoned “almost clam boil-like” broth, and the right amount of potatoes. Clearly made from scratch. This wasn't a potato soup masquerading as quahog chowder – a pet peeve of mine – this was a quintessential quahog chowder. Oh, man were we off to a great start.

Sandwiches consisted of a 1/4 Hot Dog, Crunchy Cod, Marinated Chicken, B.L.T., Veggie Burger, and a Beef Burger with a variety of toppings or “extra provisions,” like Swiss, American or Cheddar cheese, raw or caramelized onion, Blue Cheese, Applewood Smoked Bacon or a fried egg. All are served with a choice of bread: fresh baked white, wheat, bulky roll or Portuguese pop. The **Specialty Sandwiches** were four in number: the very popular *Monsta Lobster Salad Roll* – heaping pile of fresh tail & claw meat lightly dressed with Hellmann's Mayo on either a butter toasted Brioche roll or mixed greens. The *Swordfish Sandwich* – fresh cut swordfish steak, Italian herbed with sun-dried tomato, caper relish on butter toasted bun. *Gaspar's Chourico Melt*-griddled chourico with caramelized onion, melted Cheddar cheese, lettuce, mustard aioli on a

butter toasted Portuguese pop. Finally, the one I opted for: one of my favorite sandwiches on the planet – a *Cubano*.

The Quahog Republic's version was authentic and legit! It was described as "slow roasted pork and honey glazed ham, chopped pickles, marinated red onion, Swiss cheese, chipotle aioli, on French bread. Baked hot; brushed with butter, wholegrain mustard and grill pressed." I've eaten a lot of Cubanos in my day, and the golden standard of course, are the ones I've had in various places in Florida made by Cubans. This one was as authentic as any I've ever had, excepting the Chipotle aiolo which was a nice, subtle touch. It was also the largest one I've ever been served – so large in fact, that Rachael regretted ALSO ordering the Cubano because there was enough to go around.

Our choice of sides were the golden French Fries – slightly larger than those you would get at a chain, golden as advertised and appropriately salted, in other words lightly so you can adjust to taste.

The **Flat Breads** come in traditional cheese, pepperoni, shrimp scampi and a daily special. There is also a section for **Shellfish Sautees** – either sauteed littlenecks or P.E.I. Mussells. Finally, the **Main Entrees** are Crunchy Cod Fish & Chips Cod Cakes, Country Style Ribs, and Swordfish Steak.

The available **Sides** are grilled asparagus, butter toasted Brioche, creamy coleslaw, golden french fries, baked beans, tri-color pasta salad or the vegetable or starch of the day. There are Daily Specials offered and it's a good idea to check every week to see what they are. You'll find things like Avocado & Beet Spinach Salad, Gouda Baked Oysters, Country Fried Chicken, Monty Cristo Egg Roll, Meatballs and more.

On subsequent visits I've tried the Flat Breads (Pepperoni – \$10) and the Beef Burger (w/ Blue Cheese) – half pound certified Angus beef burger, lettuce, tomato on a buttered

toasted bun. (\$9.50). The burger was rather large and came with a healthy portion of their golden fries. This was cooked EXACTLY as I ordered it (medium-rare) and the Blue Cheese was the real deal: generous amount of chunks, not a cheap sauce. A life changing experience! I kid. I kid.

Erik Bevans and Tom Hughes

Their motto is “Live life to the fullest-Give back to your community-Relax.” or “Live-Give-Relax!” They hope to accomplish this with their hand-crafted cocktails, extensive Rum selection, mouth-watering fare, affordable pricing, and late night food (serving food until 11:00pm). In addition, they want to promote an intimate atmosphere by not having live music. “What?” you say? You won’t find live music at the Whaler’s Tavern – they don’t offer it so that you don’t have to scream to have conversation. There IS music from a Jukebox, but that music is kept to a level low enough that casual, relaxed conversation can be had. Yeah. Some days I want that.



The relaxed atmosphere means you can enjoy conversation without trying to compete with the music. (Katie Nelson)

Erik and Tom are not some new kids on the block: Erik opened his first restaurant – a rustic beach bar that would become a model for the Quahog Republic and its motto – in 1997 on Mashnee Island. Tom was already a successful entrepreneur when he teamed up with Erik in 2007 to begin the Quahog Republic

Company. They are mature and experienced entrepreneurs who joined forces to create something special and they seem to have a Midas touch – they have opened an additional three restaurants in the last 6 years. The Whaler's Tavern is a culmination of all that experience, business savviness, and passion. They brought it all to bear in late June 2015, officially opening the Whaler's Tavern's doors to the public.

Why New Bedford you may ask? Tom explained: "People called/call us crazy! After Erik had to leave his first restaurant located on a great waterfront spot, we moved forward as business partners to accomplish a dream. We opened the Quahog Republic Dive Bar in a run down strip mall in Falmouth. People said we were crazy and that it wouldn't work. They were wrong.

We opened our Quahog Republics' Waterfront Eatery a few years later in Onset Village, again people thought we were crazy and that it wouldn't work. They were wrong again. Now we opened in New Bedford, some people still don't get it. All I know is it's working. We say, we may be a little crazy (you have to be), but we see potential in places others may not, and adapt as necessary. We say, Why not?"

Well, I like crazy people. The world would be boring without its eccentrics. So, I'm glad they chose New Bedford because I enjoy what the Whaler's Tavern offers in terms of atmosphere, fare, drinks and affordability. It's a place I've frequented many times since my initial visit and a place I enjoy relaxing alone at or with friends, over drinks and food without having to shout at one another.

The Whaler's Tavern is positioned perfectly when it comes to parking, if Elm Street garage isn't your thing, there is usually Union Street to park on. You may get lucky and find a spot on North Water Street or one of the side streets, maybe even the small parking lot on the corner of North Water and Union Streets.

A loyalty card program is also offered whereby a customer receives a point for every dollar spent. Once you earn 300 points you get a \$15 Gift Certificate to be used on your next visit. Points can be accumulated at all three Quahog Republic locations.

So, if you are looking for something a little different, love a Raw Bar, enjoy not shouting to maintain conversation, consider yourself an aficionado of Rum, Scotch or Bourbon Whiskey, you'll want to give the Whaler's Tavern a shot...or three shots...Scotch, Rum and Whiskey, one after the other.

So what's in the odd glass jar containing some secret concoction? You'll have to head to Whaler's Tavern and ask!

Quahog Republic's Whaler's Tavern

24 North Water Street

New Bedford, Ma

Phone: (774) 206-6303

Hours of Operation:

Open daily 11:30am-1:00am, kitchen open until 11:00pm.

Facebook: facebook.com/pages/Quahog-Republic-Whalers-Tavern/1622420264703137

Website: quahogrepublic.com/

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