

eat & drink

Short rib sandwich
LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE PHOTOS

Sandwiches at Wyler Road

\$7-\$14 at Wyler Road, 3581 W. Belden Ave. 773-661-0675

WORTH A TRIP

By Michael Nagrant | REDEYE

I got a little cranky when I first walked into Wyler Road, a new Logan Square sandwich emporium. It was my mental decor and ambience checklist that was ticking me off: chalkboard menus, reclaimed wood backbar, industrial light fixtures made out of electrical conduit, aquamarine-colored barstools and white medicine cabinets that looked like they were ordered from a hospital supply catalog. I'm so over reclaimed wood decor. The next time I hope to see worn timber is when I'm really old and start touring Midwestern barns on long RV trips. Plumbing and conduit decorative fixtures have been tired since the rooth Chipotle opened. Chalkboard menus should only be used if you're a turn-of-the-century-founded Parisian bistro.

This was all kind of a surprise because the folks behind Wyler Road (the name of the restaurant is a nod to a road in Burlington,

Wis., where two of the owners grew up) are the same people behind The Burlington, where they somehow managed to create a non-ironic dive bar with good live music. In contrast, Wyler Road felt like it was created by a computerized restaurant interior design generator whose algorithm was based on a greatest hits of hipster-friendly Chicago dining rooms. With so much "been there, done that" on display and a menu of 20 very different sandwiches plus another eight salads and sides, I didn't expect much from the food.

But in making that judgment, I didn't consider that executive chef Forster Sorensen is a veteran of two of my favorite Chicago spots: Au Cheval and Green Street Smoked Meats.

"That group was on top of its game and technique," Sorensen said. "I learned so much. Hogsalt definitely made me what I am today."

What he is today is a wildly creative

sandwich artist. Alongside chef de cuisine Shay Linkus, Sorensen designed and built every sandwich on the menu. The offerings at Wyler Road aren't so much sandwiches as they are "dinner on bread," as Sorensen puts it. Most of what's pressed between two pieces of bread here is intricate, the result of fine kitchen techniques and so much attention to detail you could eat the creations as composed dinner plates even if you shy away from carbs or have a gluten intolerance.

Hopefully neither of those situations is the case, because it would be a tragedy if you couldn't sample the crackling, buttery toasted pain de mie (a fancy French name for white sandwich bread or a Pullman loaf) or the crusty, featherweight bubbly interior of the batard (another fussy French term for a short baguette) that most of Wyler Road's selections are served on.

The heft of a regular baguette would over-

whelm the wispy curls of sliced bacon and tender panko-crusting clam bellies drizzled with housemade lemon aioli (\$14). But the batard, made by Fire & Water Bakery in Logan Square, was so airy it made a very complementary wrapper. Aioli is usually heavy and rich, but thanks to the kitchen cutting the mayo with a touch of tangy sour cream, the chive-studded condiment lightened the whole sandwich.

The crispy crust of the batard was also the perfect foil for the silky shreds of gravy-slathered short rib dotted with funky bits of Moody Bleu blue cheese and circles of frizzled shallot, a fun riff on steak and onion rings (\$12). The demi-glace was winy and rich and burst with grassy, limey notes of coriander. The shallots wafted a sweet curry powder perfume.

The trusty BLT (\$9) also got an update with panko-fried green tomatoes with a bright acid-



Chips at Wyler Road

ity that cut through the Sriracha and white wine-spiked butter, thick planks of bacon and the dripping yolk of a freshly fried egg topper. There were also a few pieces of hydroponically grown bibb lettuce stuffed in here to cover the “L” portion. Though the lettuce had a nice buttery flavor, I am of the opinion that BLTs require the cool crunch of iceberg lettuce at all times, and I missed that here.

Each sandwich was served with a healthy portion of house-fried Kennebec potato chips. I liked that they were light and dappled with dozens of air bubbles, a consistency more in line with Frito Lay’s Munchos than a thick and heavy kettle chip.

They offered the chips in three flavors: salt and vinegar, spicy or plain. Spicy—a blend of sugar, Sriracha, curry powder, chili powder and coriander—reminded me of the Better Made hot barbecue chips (Detroit’s answer to Jay’s) that I grew up loving. Sorensen said they had a hard time finding a good vinegar powder, so they soaked the potatoes in vinegar before frying them and then finished with a splash of malt vinegar and salt. Unfortunately, the vinegar flavor was barely detectable on the batch I received and not as punchy as I would have liked.

Not everything here is a sandwich. There are a few side salads and appetizers on offer. As a Wisconsin-inspired restaurant, there are cheese curds, which I didn’t try. What I did try, however, was the heavenly hangover helper, aka potato balls, which are deep-fried mashed potatoes larded with Hook’s 2-year-old

aged cheddar, dripping with sour cream and housemade Cheez Whiz spiked with Worcestershire sauce, and sprinkled with a topping of garlic-cured bacon bits. My only quibble is that the velvety mash inside the fried balls need a touch more salt.

There was also a selection of six draft cocktails on offer. I’ve had some pretty watery and flat kegged cocktails lately, so I wasn’t optimistic about the ones at Wyler. But it turns out they’re made in small batches and mixed daily with fresh juices. The

Watermelon Basil Daisy cocktail burst with lime and a cooling swoosh of melon. Spicy herbal notes from a basil simple syrup and hints of citrus from a splash of orange curacao liqueur provided nuance and depth most draft cocktails don’t have. And when you consider most cocktails around the city clock in at \$12-\$14 these days, the \$8

price tag was pretty refreshing. After finishing my meal and basking in the glow of that cocktail, I started to appreciate the low-key dining room. The eclectic crowd—from the typical mid-day

brunch set nursing their Friday night hangovers to families—made for a lively and comforting alternative to hanging out in a boring coffee shop. I think I’ll warm to the room more over time. One thing I am sure about, though, is that Wyler Road is serving some of Chicago’s very best sandwiches.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE. REDEYE@REDEYECHEGAGO.COM @REDEYEATRINK



St. Alphonsus presents

OKTOBERFEST CHICAGO

Sept. 25-27, 2015

Southport & Lincoln Ave • Chicago
Fri. 5pm-10pm • Sat. 11am-10pm • Sun. 11am-7pm

Beer, Brats, Bands, a Blast!

<p>Southport Main Stage</p> <p>Friday 5:30pm • Ed Wagner's Lustige Blaskapelle 8:30pm • Wedding Banned</p> <p>Saturday 11:00am • Euro Express 12:45pm • South of 80 2:15pm • Jimmy's Bavarians 5:50pm • The Polkaholics 7:55pm • 16 Candles</p>	<p>Parking Lot Stage</p> <p>Friday 5:30pm • Stache 8:30pm • Die Musikmeisters</p> <p>Saturday 4:30pm • Ed Wagner's Lustige Blaskapelle (2 sets!) 8:00pm • Trippin Billies</p> <p>Sunday 2:00pm • Ed Wagner's Lustige Blaskapelle</p>
---	--

TWO Craft Beer Tasting Nights!
Friday & Saturday, 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm
Purchase Tickets Today...
Only 600 Spots Nightly!

PLUS!
Watch all the football games on the jumbotron on Sunday!

\$5 Daily
Benefits St. Alphonsus

For info: 773-868-3010 • ChicagoEvents.com