



ZuZu celebrates 20 years with major expansion



Vastly expanding on the Main Street block across from Veterans Park, ZuZu Napa is expanding with a gin-based cocktail bar and new dining areas opening on Sept. 28.

A favorite destination for locals for 20 years, the Spanish-inspired restaurant will also add more options to its menu of tapas and new spaces for take-out and private dining.

"There's an exciting buzz and energy in downtown Napa now, but it was a very different place when we opened in 2002. We're proud to have been here since the beginning of this period of redevelopment and growth," said Mick Salyer, proprietor.

I'm delighted to see the changes, for ZuZu has been my favorite affordable casual restaurant since I moved to downtown Napa almost 20 years ago. I've found that you can eat reasonably here – but I never seem to, for the food and drinks are too tempting.

ZuZu itself won't change much but will add cocktails. This comes with a new brewpub license that also covers the new dining area next door, once Asia Café.

They can't cut a big opening in the old building, but a door between them will allow interchange by staff.

You won't recognize the space that used to be Asia Café, however. Designed by Kimberley Nunn and Dan Worden of Shopworks, the look is modern rustic, with a Mediterranean flair, with rough-hewn wooden tables, terracotta tile floors and ironwork. Salyer and employees built the bar and other features themselves.



An all-new kitchen includes a special oven to speed preparation of paellas, normally a slow process, and a new plancha and live-fire grill will allow authentic grilling.

Thanks to the new liquor license, gin is the focus at the new bar. This makes sense as the Spanish love gin, and Spain is the largest market for gin in the world. (And likewise, the English drink the most Spanish Sherry!). Neither country typically drinks table wines before meals like many do here.

ZuZu will offer a diverse selection of gins from around the world. Bar manager Josh Weed has also created unique gin-based cocktails such as April Showers, with lavender, rose and lemon, and the Capisce, with gin, tomato water, basil oil, truffle and lime.

Of course, they'll offer other spirits and wines from Iberian and artisan Californian producers. New will be their own beer, and they're taking it seriously, with a real brewer.

ZuZu's menu draws on the culinary traditions of Northern Spain, from Galicia through Basque Country to Barcelona, while honoring the bounty of local farmers, ranchers and organic purveyors. Mainstays include boquerones (my favorite), ceviche, tortilla Española and gambas al ajillo, all made with seasonally available ingredients.

Chef Armando Ramirez will tempt larger appetites with new shared plates, including grass-fed Northern California beef, whole fish and an expanded paella program.

Salyer's "block party" now spans four storefronts, with ZuZu and sister eatery, La Taberna, the lively Spanish-style tavern that opened in 2013, bookending the new spaces. In between are the former Henry's Cocktail Lounge and Asia Café.

Hank's Takeaway, a nod to the former Henry's, offers a window for to-go orders. Find the hidden window for takeout behind the painting with its intriguing frame as you enter the new ZuZu space, but you can also pick it up outside.

The old Henry's will provide a new private dining space, a great addition to downtown.

Patio seating will continue along the four store fronts from ZuZu to La Taverna, but it's endangered. See next item.

ZuZu is open for lunch and dinner. Evening reservations are available on Tock at www.exploretock.com/zuzutapas — and they hold part of the seats for local guests.

I'll have more photos next week. It's definitely a work in process as I write this.



Keep the Main Street Mall for dining and pedestrians, not cars

During the Covid pandemic, Napa closed Main Street between Second and Third streets and allowed the restaurants there, including ZuZu, La Taverna, Napkins, Avow and the Costello tasting room, Quilt and Company, to add tables and chairs over more of the sidewalk and into the street.