

LA JOLLA LIGHT

Nautilus Tavern has that neighborhood feel in La Jolla



Nautilus Tavern sits at 6830 La Jolla Blvd. in La Jolla. (Jeanne Rawdin)

It was just a matter of time until WindanSea residents got their neighborhood tavern back. After La Jolla Tap & Grill closed its doors last year at 6830 La Jolla Blvd., Nautilus Tavern partners Leigh Gibson and Mike Garcia had their eye on the spot. When they opened their taven in October of last year, the neighborhood had a watering hole again.

Nautilus Tavern has a sister restaurant, Pillbox Tavern, in Solana Beach. When Shelly Velez, the head chef at Nautilus, was thinking up the menu, she said she took her cues from Pillbox where she used to be head chef.

"When I opened Pillbox, 'coastal cuisine' is what they called it. This menu stems from that one," Velez said. "I'm a very old-school, downhome cook. I'm not really doing a lot of fusion. I like to do classic, very clean cooking. Sometimes, I'll put my own little twist on it here or there, but not a whole lot."



Shelly Velez, head chef at Nautilus Tavern in La Jolla (Jeanne Rawdin)

The décor has been brightened, too. "There was a lot of dark wood and greenery on the walls — we took all that out, just kind of opened the place up," she said. "We did some lighter color schemes and made it more inviting. We also installed garage doors that open in the front to the patio for a more inviting look."

Open for brunch, lunch and dinner, Nautilus Tavern has 30 beers on tap, including many local craft brews. The menu includes an array of sandwiches and diversely flavored wings — everything from maple bacon bourbon to habanero barbecue. The Grown-Up Grilled Cheese sandwich (five types of cheese with sliced bacon and tomato) is a consistent favorite. The Smoked Cubano sandwich is also popular, made with smoked pork, Canadian bacon, pickles, melted Swiss, and dijonnaise served on telera bread.



The Grilled Mexican Caesar Salad includes artfully arranged romaine wedges drizzled in avocado Caesar dressing and topped with pepitas, parmesan, tomatoes, blackened chicken breast and fried shallots.

Every night, the menu has a different theme. Mondays, it's burgers and beers. Then it's on to

Taco Tuesdays, Wine Wednesdays, and 20 percent off wings Thursdays. Fridays are all about mac-and-cheese variations.

"I want the neighborhood to know I love feeding people," Velez said. "All the sauces are made from scratch; I take pride in that. I want people to say, 'Hey, let's go down to the Tavern,' instead of hanging out at home."



Smoked Cubano Sandwich at Nautilus Tavern in La Jolla
(Jeanne Rawdin)