

The Striped Pig

At The Striped Pig, 917 Main Street, the delight is in the details. Part speakeasy, part gourmet riff on bar food classics, Redwood City's newest restaurant is where a Sidecar can be paired with housemade Pigs in a Blanket or hand-cut curly fries dipped in a squid ink aioli.

For culinary buddies turned co-owning chefs Andrew Mitchell and Erik Romme, it's not about recreating the wheel, it's about perfecting it. "Nowadays, everyone sous vides. It's like no one knows how to cook anymore. So we decided to steer clear of the sous vides and the chemicals, and just focus on good ol' cooking," Andrew said.

The emphasis on "good ol' cooking" is not the just the foundation of The Striped Pig, which opened in October, it's the basis of Mitchell and Romme's nearly decade-long friendship. Bonding over similar working styles while cooking together at Menlo Park's Marché, Romme said, simply, "We just clicked."

Though Marché's closing took the chefs on different paths — Mitchell to Woodside's Station One and Romme to Madera at Rosewood and the Stanford Park Hotel — the two kept in touch, getting together to cook, cater and collaborate. Conversations about opening a place together ebbed and flowed until they decided to take the leap two years ago.

From the start, Menlo Park native Mitchell and Colorado-raised Romme knew what kind of restaurant they wanted to open.

"We wanted a place that we would want to go to on our days off," said Mitchell, who attended culinary school after discovering a love of cooking while recovering from a snowboarding accident.

"Yes," added Romme, "except we're always closed on our days off!" He laughed at the ironic plight, the curse of many a chef.



Erik Romme and Andrew Mitchell

Romme's career also had an auspicious start. He attended culinary school after being released from the Navy's nuclear physicist program. Perhaps not so auspiciously, he got his release after being hospitalized for an asthma attack and full-body hives halfway through basic training. If Romme did not know that he was supposed to be a chef and not in the Armed Forces, his body certainly did.

The chefs also knew where they wanted their first location.

"We knew we wanted to be in Redwood City, to be a part of this community and the boom that's happening here," explained Mitchell.

For Mitchell and Romme that community has two segments, that of the city at large and that of Redwood City chefs. "The chef circle is great here, we all support each other," added Romme. They also partner up. In December, Mitchell and Romme paired with craft butcher Ben Roberts of Gambrel to host an intimate, multi-course dinner event. Tickets were limited to fifteen guests, the number of seats at the horseshoe-shaped bar that takes center stage at the restaurant.

"It gave us a chance to showcase our fine-dining skills, highlight (Roberts') products, and connect with the communi-

ty," Romme said. On the heels of the first event's success, Mitchell and Romme hope to host similar soirées in the future.

Knowing the goal was to create a restaurant that they would enjoy as patrons, the decision to focus on cocktails and a menu of elevated bar food at the Striped Pig came naturally.

"We wanted to focus on craft cocktails and create a menu that paired with the drinks. But we realized that people also want to come in and dine, so we added heartier dishes like the hamburger and Cornish hen," Romme said. "We had so many ideas when we started creating the menu, it was hard to choose."

Narrowing the selection was a challenge; it helped that the chefs were certain of one thing. Everything, except the bread and gelato, would be made in-house. Even the hot dogs for the Pigs in a Blanket.

"That's (Romme's) job, mostly," Mitchell laughed. "He spends hours just making mini hot dogs." Romme may have drawn the short straw on that one.

While Mitchell and Romme enjoyed curating the small plates, the real fun was the cocktail menu.

"That was a great three weeks. Lots of fun trial and error," Mitchell said with a devilish grin.

Split into two categories, classic and crafted, the menu reads one part history lesson, with homage paid to the early days of drinking with Old Fashions and Negronis, and one part adventure story.

Names of drinks such as the bourbon and Limoncello "Angry Italian" or the bourbon and jalapeño syrup "Blood of a Saint" are insights not just into Mitchell and Romme's creativity as chefs, but also into the fun that they are having in their partnership and new community. **C**

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