



A happy crew—John, Diane and Anna -- at Baker's Crust Artisan Kitchen Hilltop

Refreshing Baker's Crust

By Jeff Maisey

After nearly 22 years in business, Baker's Crust husband and wife owners John and Diane Stein have hit the refresh button.

Rebranding a well-established, highly successful restaurant can be a challenge, but they nailed it with a whole new look, bar, and menu. May I introduce you to Baker's Crust Artisan Kitchen?

Baker's Crust began in October 1993 as a small artisan bread bakery in the Hilltop North section of Virginia Beach. The Steins partnered with Felipe Bulan, who had operated a small town French bakery outside of Paris. The business was fashioned after a petite café serving sandwiches, salads and fresh breads.

In 1995, Baker's Crust rolled-out its second location in the Ghent neighborhood of Norfolk. This was their initial foray into operating a full service restaurant. Since that time, Baker's Crust has expanded with locations in Chesapeake, Williamsburg (New Town), and Richmond (Cary Town and Short Pump).

In rebranding Baker's Crust to Baker's Crust

Artisan Kitchen, everything from the menu, logo, chic décor and even the new heavy wooden front door has been done at the Hilltop location.

While Baker's Crust has long been known as a breakfast and lunch hotspot, the Steins wanted to develop a dinner and bar crowd. Changes to the menu go a long way in making this goal achievable.

"We spent the last few years researching menu categories that we feel set ourselves apart and stay true to our principles," said John. "We use the highest quality ingredients and try to stay innovative on our food. Over the last four years we've introduced very traditional Neapolitan pizza. Felipe and I went to New York and we did a pizza tour of the old restaurants that had been there for years. Then Felipe worked with a certified Neapolitan pizza expert in California. Felipe being the master baker that he is developed an incredible dough. It's baked in an all oak wood fired oven."

In the burger category, the restaurant now

features New Zealand grass-fed black angus beef. They grind their own beef. Unique burger selections include Smoke Chipotle Gouda, Tomato Tarragon and Applewood, Egg & Cheddar. For vegetarians try the Portabella mushroom burger.

Entrée style items were also reconsidered. Highly recommended is the Shrimp & Grits. The staff provided input before the item made the menu. Ground grits, heavy cream and milk, pork belly (instead of sausage) and a sautéed chili butter compliment the large Tiger shrimp. Short ribs are slow roasted in Allagash White beer. Both the Fish Tacos and Fish & Chips items

use New England haddock.

To ensure fresh, non-GMO produce, Baker's Crust has started an environmentally controlled greenhouse farm in Suffolk. From farm to fork, all harvested items are used within three days. It operates year-round.

"We've changed some of our salad greens to baby kale and changed our dressings," said Diane. "We're using oils and vinegars from Medina, Italy. We're not adding sugars or preservatives so the dressings are much cleaner. They are delicious."

Salads include Summer Kale & Cranberry, Roasted Beet, Shrimp & Mango, Baby Kale Caesar and Grilled Salmon.


For tasty sandwiches, a wide array of choices include the Swanky Sweet Potato Biscuit (fried buttermilk chicken, honey beurre blanc, cayenne aioli arugula), Manhattan Panini, Maw's Chicken Salad and Jersey Grinder.

In expanding its nighttime appeal, the bar area has been greatly enhanced at Hilltop North to include high tables, plush lounge seats and an attractive bar featuring 23 craft beer taps, 20 craft beer bottles, and 9 wine taps.

According to Anna, the assistant manager, the restaurant will expand its focus on beer dinners, Steal the Pint Nights, and innovative beer cocktails where brew is mixed with all types of creative ingredients. Baker's Crust incorporates craft beer into some items: O'Connor's El Guapo IPA is used in its croutons, beer bread and the Crafty Chicken sandwich.

The Hilltop North location will become the new standard with its warm aesthetics highlighted by black industrial ceiling, metal lighting and reclaimed wood.

It has all come together nicely for a re-imagined popular destination.

"There's so much history in Old World principles that are true to the integrity of food," John said. "That's what we have been all about since the beginning. One of the hardest things a company can do is rebrand itself. After 22 years, people know us as a certain concept. But I think we can do it." 



YUMMY: Shrimp & Grits with pork bellies



Tap display at Hilltop location