

Idle Hour: NoHo's Beloved Barrel Reborn

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NBC Los Angeles Says:



If Los Angeles building styles could be viewed as members of a large and loopy family, roadside vernacular architecture, or programmatic architecture, if you prefer, would absolutely be the nutty cousin who balances spoons on his nose and sings songs backwards, all to garner attention and bring delight.

It's the Cabazon dinosaurs and it's the bulldog-shaped diner seen in "The Rocketeer" and it's every outlandish vintage design conceived to catch the eyes, and cash, of early motorists. And it's the barrel-shaped structure near the appropriately attention-garnering North Hollywood intersection of Lankershim Boulevard, Vineland Avenue, and Camarillo Street.

Yep, we speak of what was formerly La Caña Restaurant, or what's often called The Barrel, a long-closed gem which is getting another longed-for shot as an open-and-in-business business.

But here's the twist: Idle Hour, the fresh handle for the bar, is actually its long-gone moniker.

Surely you remember back in the 1940s when it was called The Idle Hour Cafe & Tap Room, yes? La Caña came later, and then, after it was long closed, a designation to save the not-looking-too-great spot: Los Angeles Historical-Cultural Monument #977. That's a fair estimation, yes? If you strolled by the structure in recent years, you likely thought, or voiced, that it had "seen better days" (or some other "someone should save this place" lamentation).

1933 Group is the structure saver. When the swanky restaurant-and-bar outfit's new Idle Hour debuts on Friday, Feb. 13, it will have its same barrel-y exterior, but buffed up, with some nifty touches through the door.

Like? Well, a reproduction of the Bulldog Cafe (which had its start long before being memorialized in "The Rocketeer") and other retro-meets-2015 touches.

Plus 24 beer and cocktail taps (we weren't blowing smoke with the "swanky" designation earlier -- it fits). Think old-school sips that will include a Rickey on draft and a spin on the Manhattan called the Class Act. (And, for sure, the top-shelf, small-batch liquors associated with The 1933 Group's taverns are the stars of the drinks.)

The food blows a big ol' sloppy kiss to the '40s as well, with Sloppy Joes and Beer-Battered Fish and Chips standing as two stand-outs. Both, though, will be mighty gourmet, in the way that homey, griddle-heavy vittles weren't, for the most part, when eateries shaped like animals reigned.

People who like building stories? Your appetite is in for a whetting, too: The stained glass has been restored around the property, and the floors are "reclaimed ceiling planks." You can almost hear echoes of the 1940s laughter (which, we imagine, sounds pretty much like our laughter today).

Menus, photos, other goodies? Keep a finger on the Idle Hour site. As for the place's local champion? Why that was Mr. Chris Nichols, that vocal maven of days gone by, a man who went to the bat for The Barrel time and again.

As for what the barrel was built to replicate? A whiskey barrel, of course. You knew that.

By the by, is it a coincidence that Idle Hour debuts on the same day as the re-opening of The Hollyhock House, another bygone gem? Who says SoCal has a spotty stance when it comes to preservation? Well, plenty of people, but we do deliver on saving-of-iconic-favorites front sometimes, and sometimes twice in one day.

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