

First look at RoCA, Court Avenue's newest restaurant



[PURCHASE IMAGE](#)

Todd Millang used the words “upscale, a little edgy, comfortable” to describe the atmosphere he and the other RoCA owners were aiming for with the new restaurant. They wanted to keep the wine bar aspect of Sbrocco, the previous restaurant in the space, but they also wanted to tie RoCA to the history of its 148-year-old building.

With that in mind, they peeled back much of the plaster to expose old brick walls, and incorporated touches such as an antique phone booth and old photographs. The ambiance is a bit “Mad Men,” and a bit 1920s speakeasy. The booths that used to hug the wall at Sbrocco are gone, replaced with high-top tables. Near the entrance is a wine wall, where bottles hang suspended on wires. Televisions on the walls play old movies—“Casablanca” was showing when I visited.

Above the bar, a large chalkboard announces draft beers and featured wines and cocktails. The long bar is stocked with an array of colorful mixers and drink garnishes that make it look like a mad scientists’ lab. RoCA is serious about its craft cocktails, and the extensive menu includes a number of ingredients I’d never heard of. I tried the aviation cocktail, made with gin, crème de violette, Maraschino Luxardo, simple syrup and lemon juice. Boozy and refreshing, it was smooth and the sweet, floral flavor of crème de violette shined through.

Service was attentive and informed. Granted it was opening night, but our server seemed genuinely enthusiastic about relating the finer points of each dish. On the menu, there are a few sliders and flatbreads, some salads and cheese and meat boards. The shared plates are the focus, and the list includes smoked chicken mac and cheese, oysters RoCA feller and drunken mussels. Most shared plates are available in full and half orders.

I decided to try the RoCA smothered tots. The tots are among the priciest appetizers at \$15, but it would be hard to pass them up. The bowl of tots is smothered in turkey, gravy, curds, mushrooms and topped with a fried egg. It's somewhat like Thanksgiving in a bowl, but even more indulgent.



I also enjoyed the shrimp and andouille flatbread (\$12). The crust was thin and crispy, and the creole sauce was flavorful but not too spicy. A bowl of beef stroganoff (\$18) proved a hearty meal, perfect for a cool evening. Meaty and rich, the dish came topped with sour cream.

DON'T MISS: Flying Mango's Memphis-style ribs

RoCA also offers a lounge area at the front of the restaurant, complete with sofas and low tables. The tasty shared plates and array of craft cocktails make it a fun spot to linger over some

food and a drink. With a sleek interior and stylish menu, RoCA is a decidedly grownup spot. Lunch hours start next week, and RoCA plans to offer brunch in the near future.

Here's a video about one of the cocktails:

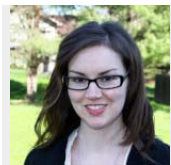
RoCA

Find it: 208 Court Ave.

Hours: 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m.-12 a.m. Friday and Saturday

Info: 515-282-3663, rocadsm.com.

About the Author



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