

Stars Rooftop & Grill Room is a place for celebration, combining three concepts – events, fine dining, and a rooftop bar.

Located at 495 King Street in Downtown Charleston, Stars has preserved local history, initiated the movement of expanding King Street, and created a place where locals and tourists alike can experience the magic of a night out in Charleston.

What To Eat At Stars Rooftop & Grill Room

Mid-July marked the debut of their Summer menu. Taylor Jacobs, Director of Food and Beverage, at Stars Rooftop & Grill Room, says it may be one of the best menus they've ever done. What sets it apart? Chef Ivan Aguilar went in search of recipes and menu items from great seafood restaurants and grill rooms in the 1950's, reinventing each with a modern twist.



Prep work in the kitchen at Stars



Chef takes the kitchen staff to forage

To start, try their ceviche, one of their new appetizers and a fast favorite of Taylor's. He also recommends the Chop Salad – chicories, romaine, salami, prosciutto, tomatoes, red onions and feta vinaigrette.

Heather Greene, Director of Operations at Stars, recommends their fig salad – mixed greens, roasted figs, goat cheese, pickled red onions, and mustard seed vinaigrette.

If you like oysters, Heather highly recommends the Oysters Bingo – spinach, kale, lardons, asiago cheese & brandy – saying "I've always loved the Oysters Bingo. We've had it on the menu from the very beginning." It's also a favorite of the owner, and a menu staple he's featured in several of his restaurants.

One entrée they can all agree on? The Rib Eye. One pound, spit-roasted and grilled on an open flame, it's accompanied by crushed new potatoes, onions, fennel parsley and bordelaise.

Of course, it'd be remiss to skip dessert. The post dinner menu includes a cake flight (Raspberry Coconut Tres Leches, Mocha Baileys, and White Velvet Birthday Cake – yes you read that right), Dulce De Leche Bananas Foster, Charleston Pluff Mud Pudding and Stars' Espresso Martini.

What To Drink At Stars Rooftop & Grill Room

As the August heat approaches, Heather recommends trying their frozen cocktails. Available are Frozé, Mimosa, Sangria, and Heather's personal favorite ("a frozen drink that's not sweet – for me I like that") the Italian Spritz.

Drinks to-go was a huge hit when restaurants in Charleston were forced to shut down due to the pandemic. Heather and Taylor have worked the to-go drink counter since, saying "it's something fun that people liked, and we enjoy doing it."

While they're not sure how much longer frozen to-go cocktails will be available, they hope to have them for as long as possible. In other words, make haste and visit them at the to-go counter while you can.

Dining in? Their Frozé is available on their menu, alongside several craft cocktails. Take in the star-filled summer sky from their rooftop bar while enjoying a Lavender Lemonade – Prairie Cucumber Vodka, Lillet Blanc, and Lemon Juice – or an El Matador – Espolon tequila, Elderflower Liqueur, Southern Twist Ginger and Jalapeño, and Fresh Grapefruit Juice.

There's also a well-curated list of spirits to imbibe, and a wine list that's sure to have something everyone in your party will enjoy.

Brunch At Stars

If you've heard of Stars Rooftop & Grill Room, you've heard about their brunch. Where many restaurants only do brunch on Sundays, Stars has made it a weekend-long event. Their high-end buffet styled brunches are well known and coveted. "The fun thing about the brunch used to be that you had this hot line in the back and you could get omelettes and pancakes – all kinds of things to order. Then in the front it was salads and desserts and cheeses – the desserts were what everyone loved, just this huge display," Heather recounts. "It's nice to have people come in and start their Saturday off with brunch at Stars and then go to the rooftop for a drink afterwards."



The Rooftop at Stars

With COVID, Stars has had to make some adjustments. Their brunch menu is now a la carte. Menu items include Cast-Iron Cinnamon Roll, Pulled Pork Hash, Chicken & Biscuits, and Stars' Southern Benedict.

“The a la carte menu has been great, so we’ll see what happens after COVID if we go back to the buffet or continue with a la carte,” says Heather.

What Inspired

Stars Rooftop & Grill Room?

Keith Jones, the owner, owns multiple restaurants across the country and is always thinking about the next place. In particular, he’d been wanting to do something high-end with a rooftop. When the opportunity presented itself Keith saw a vision that many thought was unlikely.

Opening in October of 2012, only 7 years after the repeal of the mini-bottle law, King Street had yet to become a place where people went out and celebrated. At the time the location for Stars was the furthest down King Street.

Heather remembers thinking, “oh gosh, this has got to grow, people have to come down here. Now they’re way past us and they keep on going. He [Keith] had that vision that King Street would be what it is right now and I think the vision of having it [Stars] be a place of celebration was before its time too.”

Taylor adds, “You have to create a place where people can come not only to celebrate birthdays and special occasions, but a place where people want to come everyday.”

The name Stars was inspired by the incredible 360 degree rooftop view. During their first visit to the location, “the skyline was extraordinarily clear with a perfect view of the stars, especially the Milky Way.” Guests can experience a brilliant sunset or starlit sky while enjoying craft beverages, light bites, and a view of Charleston’s historic architecture – something Keith took care to preserve in his own establishment as well.

The History Behind The Building

What we know as Stars Rooftop & Grill Room started out as Leon's Menswear in the 1940's. A family run business, it was open for decades before it became an antique mall for 10 years. When Keith bought the establishment, it was a complete warehouse, leaving them with a blank slate.

The original flooring was hardwood – except for the terrazzo entryway. Keith contracted a company in Charlotte, NC to extend the terrazzo flooring throughout the grill room, preserving the Arts & Crafts style. Each rondelle light was custom made by a company in Savannah, GA to match the flooring. Reclaimed walnut from North Carolina brings the decor together, creating a grandeur reminiscent of celebrations past and present.

You might also notice that their front windows are not the typical flat storefront windows you'd expect. They once housed mannequins and clothing displays, and are original to the building.

Even their neon sign pays homage to the past, replacing the haberdashery inspired man wearing a hat with a chef. The neon colors are the same as they were in the 40's.

Three Concepts, One Roof

With fine dining on the first floor, 2 rooms for events on the second floor, and a rooftop bar, Stars flows from top to bottom.

"People who have events love it because they can have their event on the 2nd floor and either start with a cocktail party on the front part of the rooftop, or end their event with people going to the rooftop," says Heather.

Taylor adds that "You could have dinner with your bachelor or bachelorette party and then be able to go up to the rooftop after without having to get everyone together, get an Uber or walk down the street to another bar. It's all here."

It's also a perfect location for couples looking to elope or have a micro-wedding during the pandemic. With so many struggling to find a way to celebrate the start of their lives together, Stars wanted to provide a space where couples can gather with loved ones safely. All-inclusive receptions can be booked Monday – Friday between 10am and 3pm, in the Wilkinson Room or on the Rooftop, for up to 30 people. Couples can design their prix fixe menu or have an hors d'oeuvre reception with a mix of cold and hot menu items, as well as a small cake and a champagne toast. Additional food and beverages can be added a la carte. Stars is currently taking reservations for August – December. Heather encourages couples to call sooner rather than later.



Taylor Jacobs, Director of Food and Bev at Stars Rooftop & Grill Room

While making sure that all 3 concepts flow smoothly can be a challenge, the staff at Stars say there's "an electricity that we all feed off of." On weekend nights, their grill room is transformed into a night club, patiently waiting as the final guests of the evening finish their meals. By 11pm the DJ begins to set up his booth. Diners can enjoy cocktails on the main level or take in the view from the rooftop while the music gets started.

It's more than just electricity though. Much of the staff has been with the company since the start – a rare occurrence in the Food and Bev industry. Heather and Taylor have both been with the company for 10 years, since before Stars even opened.

When I asked what made them love working at Stars, Taylor replied "every day is a different challenge. I also think it has a lot to do with the people we work with. I love my work family and working for Keith – he's one of the fairest employers that I've ever worked for in the restaurant business." Heather agrees, adding "Stars in particular – it's something different every day. It takes a very strong team to run it, and because of that I think

the team at Stars is very close. We have bar tenders that have been with us since we opened."

Looking Towards The Future

One of the things they miss the most is being able to operate as normal. "When Stars runs, there is a vibe in there. There's energy in there. The servers pick up on it and they're all in a good mood. The customers pick up on the servers' good attitude...that's what a lot of us have really missed, is just that feeling of working as a team and feeding off of each other and just having fun," says Heather. Taylor adds, "it's hard to get into a groove [right now]. There's only so much you can do with half the amount of people in the restaurant."

With the current pandemic, Stars Rooftop & Grill Room is going above and beyond to keep their customers and staff safe and healthy. At 50% capacity, tables are spaced to embrace social distancing. Servers are all wearing masks. Menus have been adjusted to adapt to less business while still offering the incredible seasonal food Stars is known for.

While the staff at Stars pride themselves on following all of the regulations and then some, it's "really a disheartening and strange time you know. You try to be hospitable and go over there and be positive with your staff and keep everybody upbeat – it's hard times," Taylor says.

"It's even worse with the rooftop – we all try to stay positive for the employees but then you're up there with a mask on... I think 'it's so hot' is the most common thing we say, but this is what we have to do right now," Heather adds. "I'm looking forward to a time where the stress level is down and everybody gets back to doing what they love to do."

And yet, despite each new change and regulation, the staff at Stars manages to create a moment in time where we can find joy and cause for celebration – even if it's in something as small as a bowl of ceviche.

"The best piece of business advice was given to me by my dad, Jim Dixon. He always told me the best way to ensure a good experience for a customer or guest was to set expectations from the beginning... If a guest knows what to expect they are oftentimes much happier with every aspect of their visit. This is increasingly important with all the adjustments we all have had to make during the COVID pandemic," Heather says.

Current Hours at Stars Rooftop & Grill Room

As restaurants navigate each new update and regulation during this pandemic, Stars' hours may change as well. Be sure to keep an eye on their Instagram page for the latest updates or call ahead.

For now, you can enjoy their new 50's inspired summer dinner menu Friday and Saturday from 5:30pm to 10:30pm.

Over the weekend, enjoy Stars' new tasting menu. Featuring different items each weekend, the tasting menu has been a creative outlet for the kitchen staff as they experiment with new flavors and techniques. Items are condensed and perfect for sharing.

Weekend brunch has been temporarily limited to Sundays and starts at 10am until 2pm.

The rooftop is open Monday – Thursday from 4pm – 11pm, Friday and Saturday from 2pm – 11pm, and Sunday from 11am – 11pm.



And if you stop in at the to-go counter, say hello to Heather and Taylor and let us know what you think!

Fine Dining at Stars

By Samantha Paternoster | August 10th, 2020 |
