

Earning all A's

BITE EARNS A'S FOR AFFORDABILITY, APPETIZERS AND AMBIANCE IN ITS TRANSITION FROM POPULAR EATERY TO PLEASING PIANO BAR. BY DIANNA STAMPLER

Breakfast by morning. Deli by day. Piano bar by night. The musical transformation of Bite, at the intersection of Pearl Street and Ottawa Avenue in downtown Grand Rapids, has created a classic new hot spot for locals and those in town on business. As you approach the intersection, the piano tunes inside can be heard over the outdoor speakers.

Bite, which opened in 2003, caters to the lunch crowd with a walk-up deli and a recently downsized market. However, come 4 p.m., Bite takes on a new look as the happy-hour crowd wanders in to take advantage of drink and food specials. Appetizer prices take a considerable plunge. A new selection of "bites" is impeccably prepared by Chef Eric Chaitin. The hummus plate is served with focaccia chips, kalamata olives and oven-dried tomatoes (\$2.95, regularly \$5.95). The seared-rare ahi tuna is prepared to the perfect shade of pink, served with wasabi aioli and cucumber salad (\$5.95, regularly \$9.95). The flash-fried calamari (\$4.95, regularly \$7.95) has just the right amount of crispiness. The chicken and apple egg rolls are hand rolled and flash fried, served with three dipping sauces, including Thai sesame, honey soy and cilantro aioli (\$3.75, regularly \$6.95). Eight other bite-sized samples round out the appetizer list.

Bring your appetite (and that of a friend or two) and dig in to the 20-ounce Porterhouse. At just \$15.95, it is one of the most affordable steaks of its size in the city.



It's piano time at 5:30 p.m. You won't find dueling pianos here: You will hear classic tunes from the '50s through today, by artists ranging from Frank Sinatra and Boyz n the City to Bruce Hornsby, Don Henley and Jimmy Buffett. Get there early and snag one of the six coveted piano-side seats, then sit back and enjoy the evening while Kevin Villo, Mark Kahny, Denny Middleton or Justin Avery tickle the ivories.

If server Adam Overhaul can sneak away from his tables for a few minutes, he'll entertain you with his raspy renditions of Wilson Pickett's "Mustang Sally" and Elton John's "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues." He's even been known to stick around for a few songs after his shift.

Off the main dining area, adjacent to the deli, is a comfortable conversation area flanked by a dozen or so black leather couches. No matter where you sit, the music is at a comfortable volume, which allows you to conduct a conversation without yelling.

In the summer, Bite takes its dining outside on Ottawa Avenue, allowing guests to enjoy the weather and the indoor music and piano bar in an "al fresco" setting.

Bite reflects a new trend in dining and nightlife in Grand Rapids. Nice crowds but not overcrowded. Great menu without high prices. Entertainment without the bump-and-grind found at other nightclubs. Whether for drinks, appetizers, dinner or dessert, Bite is the new place to unwind at the end of a long day.

For details on this Gilmore Collection Restaurant, including

Need to know before ya go-go

Cover: None

Features: Live piano music 5:30 p.m. to midnight Monday through Saturday.

Happy Hour: 4 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday; half-well martinis, B.O.B.'s House of Brews beers, select wine & well drinks, \$2.

Location: 151 Ottawa Ave. (at Pearl Street), inside the Waters Building.

Bar Attire: Casual/business casual

Bar Clientele: Young professionals, post-college to middle age.

Hours: Breakfast 7-10:30 a.m.; lunch 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; dinner 4-10 p.m.; Monday through Saturday.