

# Dining Out

## Sampling some of the borough's best meals in West Chester's premier dinner destinations. This Month: Bierhaul

***Bierhaul Farmhouse is all over the map—in the best possible way.*** Are you looking for family-friendly dining that satisfies every palate? Check. How about a place where you can bring your pups? Check. Sprawling spaces to eat, drink, and be merry, both indoors and out? Check and check. The owner is Irish, his restaurateur partner is French, the cuisine includes nods to both and the German food that might be front of mind when you think of the word "bierhaul." Although there's also excellent pizza... let's just go ahead and call the cuisine here "American, but also global."

And while it's presently (physically) on the map in neighboring Thornton, just over the Delco/Chesco line, by the time you read this their second location, Bierhaul Townhouse, will be open at the site of the former Split Rail Tavern on N. Walnut Street in the borough. We could not wait, however, and paid a visit to the flagship location to whet our appetites. The things we do in the interest of R and D... you're welcome.

A little background: James Mulally and his business partner, Loic Barnieu, opened here in late 2022 at the site of the former Pace One Restaurant & Country Inn. Any fears that they would have had difficulty filling those iconic shoes were put to rest almost right out of the gate, as my son Myles and I can attest based on our visit. The place—a 150-seat bar and restaurant with outdoor dining options—was positively humming when we arrived promptly at 5pm on an early spring Wednesday night. The owners have managed to easily sway us American locals with their collective European sensibilities. And menus. And beers. And ambience.

We opted to sit outside, given the warm and sunny late afternoon, and we were rewarded immediately when the couple at the table next to us was seated along with their dog (a King Charles spaniel – there was an intense conversation underway by the humans, so I did not catch his name, but he brought his own cushion and was a very good boy throughout his visit).

### Dining Outside, Just Outside

*Bierhaul's Townhouse location on Walnut Street opened this March, but their OG spot — just outside town in Thorndale — is worth the trip, if just for the al fresco dining.*

But I digress, as I always do when dogs are involved. Our excellent server, Bryanna, arrived to greet us and take our drink order. Even teetotalers like us can take advantage of the outstanding selections of beers here! We ordered a Free Wave Hazy IPA from Athletic Brewing Co.—I love seeing Athletic's beverages when I'm out and about; nonalcoholic beverages are all they do, and they do it well. Our second brew was a Bitburger





## Balsamic Fig Caprese

*Heirloom tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, pesto-marinated ciliengine, balsamic-soaked figs, marinated cherry tomatoes, balsamic glaze and fresh basil.*

## Fried Green Tomatoes

*with burrata, honey, balsamic, pork belly, red pickled onions and arugula*

0.0 Premium Pils, an excellent German import that I'm glad to have been introduced to here. We ended up swapping after the first sips—someone is not an IPA fan; the other is absolutely an equal opportunity n/a beer guy. Okay it's me—I'm the beer guy.

If you're an actual beer aficionado, by the way, this place is your Xanadu. People travel to drink some of the selections James gets in on draft here, and an updated list is always available on their website. The cans and bottles are also rotated in and out on a regular basis. This is not the kind of stuff you're going to find at your corner tavern.

On to the main event: food. And we were very hungry after a long and busy day running errands in the borough. In fact, it was one of those "so hungry that everything on the menu looks amazing" kind of situation. We solved this problem by ordering way more food than we typically would have, with the idea that we'd have plenty to take home. This worked out well: I ate for three days from this outing. One of the contributing factors here was the scope of the menu, and by that I don't mean the size. We've all been in a diner late at night and the menu is eight pages long and it's like an encyclopedic list of "all the foods you can get at a diner." In this case, Biehaul's food offerings are all over that map I was talking about earlier—in a great way.

Bearing in mind my publisher's standing admonition of "don't get a cheeseburger," his way of mocking my meat-and-potatoes inclinations, my eye of course went directly to the Smashburger, listed under "Chef's Favorites." Despite its tempting description of white cheddar cheese, special sauce, house pickles, grilled onion, tomato, and shredded lettuce on a pub beer bun, I moved on... but will 100% order this on my next visit.

Starting at the beginning, in the Charcuterie, Cheese, and Shareables section, we found some standard favorites like wings and hummus, but taken up a notch. The hummus is made with roasted beetroot; the wings are grilled and available in half a dozen flavors. I was leaning towards the chicken lemongrass potstickers, but in the end we opted for a couple of salads—two takes on the tomato: Fried Green Tomatoes and Balsamic Fig Caprese. The former was truly excellent: large beefy tomatoes, fried to a crispy outside, topped with a big soft creamy pillow of burrata, drizzled with honey and balsamic. The dish was finished with a scattering of arugula and pickled onions, but what really set it apart were the tiny cubes of crisp pork belly. This dish was a case study in balanced flavors.





## Reuben Cheesesteak

*Brisket pastrami, kraut, gruyere & house Russian dressing on a pretzel roll*

## Pork Schnitzel

*Breaded pork loin, white balsamic salad, pickled red onions, German potato salad, side demi*

As for the caprese—holy presentation, Batman! If we eat with our eyes, this was a visual feast. While it contained some of the same elements of the Fried Green Tomatoes, it was an "in the raw" version. Large juicy slabs of sliced yellow and red beefsteak tomatoes were festooned with basil confetti and played peekaboo with pesto-marinated ciliengine (those tiny mozzarella balls) and balsamic soaked figs. Outstanding.

Given the size of the salads, I decided to go with a sandwich as my entrée, while Myles opted for, well... an entrée for his entrée. I'm a huge fan of cheesesteaks; ditto of reubens. And given my Philly childhood, I'm a sucker for soft pretzels—I could eat one every day. So the Reuben Cheesesteak—brisket pastrami and gruyere served on a pretzel roll with house-made Russian dressing, was a lock—although I must admit that I nearly ordered the Inglorious Bratwurst based on the name alone. (I later learned that James was responsible for this and other bon mots on the menu, and I tip my writer's hat to him.) I managed to resist the generous serving of fries, somehow, but Myles helped with those. We spent most of this meal eating off each other's plates, in fact.

Myles ordered the Pork Schnitzel, a perfectly portioned piece of pork loin with just the right amount of breading—tender and flavorful with a bit of crunch—and served with a side salad dress in white balsamic. It's a good thing he was eating my fries, because I couldn't keep my fork out of the German potato salad that accompanied it—absolutely bangin.' Potato salad is an art form. I'll die on this hill. And Bierhaul's is art.

The place was packed by the time we called it quits, and the lovely Bryanna brought us boxes. We skipped dessert but we did...order a pizza. Yes, that's right—I said it. It was partly the number of pies we saw going past us to other tables. It was partly that we were so into the caprese salad that we just saw the pizza as a logical next step, opting for the Burrata Margarita. And it was partly James's menu caption for the pizza section of the menu, The Passion of the Crust. What can I say? I'm charmed by words. And burrata, apparently.

In addition to their new hot spot in the borough, the team here is converting the upper floors of this location into a small hotel. Because why not? With all these people here eating and drinking, all these dogs and kids, they're right at home. The empire is small and local in scale, the vision is global in scope. Bierhaul is on the map.

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