

## **Sisson's has a steak in its new image Restaurant: Under new management, the brew pub still has an ale for what ails you, but it also has a prettier look and more upscale food. SUNDAY GOURMET**

*[FINAL Edition]*

The Sun - Baltimore, Md.

Author: Elizabeth Large  
Date: May 20, 2001  
Section: HOME & FAMILY  
Text Word Count: 735

### **Document Text**

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Like much of south Baltimore, Baltimore's venerable brew pub Sisson's has gotten gussied up. If the term fern bar didn't have a derogatory connotation, I could call it that. Not that there are ferns around; but the newly renovated Sisson's has that pretty blond wood, exposed brick look that will be anathema to people who hung out there in the '80s when it was still a neighborhood saloon.

Sisson's has new owners, a new look and, above all, a new menu. Gone is the combination of pub grub, Cajun dishes and food cooked in beer. No, that's not quite true. There are Prince Edward Island mussels steamed in Belgian oak-aged ale. Very fine mussels -- plump, fresh and grit free, with the ale a pleasant, faintly malty variation on the usual white wine recipe.

But the point is, you don't come here any longer for a brew and Buffalo wings. Or if you do, the wings are oven-roasted and grilled.

Sisson's still has house-brewed draft beer -- including its signature Stockade Ale. But it also offers almost every wine on the wine list by the glass, in case you want a New Zealand sauvignon blanc while your date has a smooth Marble Golden Ale.

Forget what was and concentrate on what is. Hope that the fat, crisply fried oysters with a drizzle of golden curry sauce are a special that night. Follow them with a delicate pecan-crust ed catfish with pearly white flesh over angel hair pasta tossed with jewel- green broccoli florets.

Or start with a seafood cocktail of steamed shrimp and lump crabmeat served in a martini glass with a tantalizing horseradish- tomato vinaigrette concoction. (For some reason, it also included smoked salmon, not mentioned on the menu, but I wasn't complaining.)

If you're having, say, Sisson's mild, flavorful McHenry Lager, nosh on a "Pig Town Platter" with fine locally made sausage, cheddar tunneled with blue cheese, grapes and cornichons.

The new Sisson's bills itself as a steakhouse. The new owners, Tom Cizauskas, Craig Stuart-Paul and Paul Morrissey, try hard to keep the steaks under \$20; but as at other steakhouses, everything else is a la carte. The pound of cowboy steak, for instance -- a rib eye on the bone -- isn't exactly a steal at \$19.95 if you add a salad and some cream ed spinach, but better than you'll do at the upscale chains. The steak, cooked as ordered, is very decent but not so superb that we need to know the name of the ranch it comes from (which is, if you're curious, the Flying A Ranch in Red Oak, Iowa).

You can't really call Sisson's a steakhouse, considering that there are more chicken, pork and seafood dishes than beef choices. Boneless chicken over penne, with sun-dried tomato pesto and broccoli florets, was unassuming but satisfying. But the pan-seared rockfish, which sounded wonderful with its lobster-chive pancake, was a dud. One fillet was fine, but the other tasted decidedly fishy.

Give Sisson's credit for making its own desserts. Even chocolate fanatics may be undone by the warm flourless chocolate cake paired with a dense-as-midnight chocolate pate on one plate. It makes the excellent cheesecake seem like a diet dessert by comparison. Sisson's bread pudding is also pleasing, but what sounded like a sure winner -- a strawberry-rhubarb tart -- turned out to be an overly sweet brown betty with not enough fruit.

My guess is that how you feel about the new Sisson's will depend on how attached you were to the old. You can still get the great beers, the food is as good as it was (but without the quiriness) and the service has definitely improved. This pretty restaurant may be too cleaned up for you, but give it a few years. It'll get its own patina.

SISSON'S

Food: \*\* 1/2

Service: \*\*\*

Atmosphere: \*\*\*

Where: 36 E. Cross St.

Hours: Open for dinner seven days a week

Prices: Appetizers, \$4.95-\$9.95; main courses, \$10.95-\$22.95

Call: 410-539-2093

Rating system: Outstanding: \*\*\*\*; Good: \*\*\*; Fair or uneven: \*\*; Poor: \*

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**[Illustration]**

Photo(s); Caption: Turf and surf: Steak and seafood dishes are served with beers and wines at Sisson's, which is sporting a new look.; Credit: Karl Merton Ferron : Sun Staff

Credit: Sun Restaurant Critic

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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