

Aged to Perfection: Boulder Cork

By Stephen L. Brauns



Photo by Chris Morris, gdcapture

Recently, my wife asked where in Boulder I would like to go for a birthday dinner. Being in the foodiest community in America the options were seemingly endless. It had been a long week and all I really wanted was to relax, enjoy a cocktail and have some good food. The choice was easy...I asked to go to the Boulder Cork, a timeless favorite.

If you have been in Boulder long, chances are good that you have enjoyed the Cork and understand why it has been here for forty-two years. The Cork is comfortable, the service calmly professional and the food is consistently first-rate. Restaurants are only as good as the people that run them. At the Cork, the staff is not a revolving group, but a team led by five members with more than 146 years of service—all at the Boulder Cork. Alan Teran has been owner of the Cork for more than thirty-one years after taking it private from the Chart House group that had the Cork & Cleaver franchise as part of their corporate network. Manager Donna Karmeris has been in charge of operations for thirty-two years. Chef Jim Smailer has been in command of the kitchen for thirty years, his Sous Chef Greg Larson and Assistant Manager Gary Silverman have logged twenty-seven years each.

A restaurant has no chance of survival in Boulder, much less lasting forty-two years, if the food is not high quality, if the service is lame or the establishment is not inviting. Teran has guided the Cork masterfully, but he is much more than a restaurateur; he is one smart and savvy businessman. After several years in management with Chart

House, now part of the Landry's Seafood restaurant group, Alan saw the writing on the wall. He had different ideas on how to do things which complicated the relationship with his immediate boss, so he asked to buy the Boulder store and left the corporate pressure cooker behind and moved to the tranquil environs of Boulder.

Lessons learned in the corporate world, mostly what not to do, serve Alan, the Cork and Boulder well. First, he treats his staff as intelligent people capable of making decisions benefiting the customer and the Cork. Treating staff well ensures a well-run operation; remember, five members have 146 years of service experience at the Cork. It speaks volumes about the manner in which Teran steers his business. You don't have a staff with that kind of tenure unless they are respected. Management staff set their own hours, they receive benefits and share in the profits they help generate. They also work 40-hour work weeks in order to avoid burnout which contributes significantly to the turnover rate in other restaurants. While working for the Chart House, Alan repeatedly watched revenue take a dip every time there was a management change. Alan knows that the Cork is well managed, well operated and the staff understands the opportunity they have.

Alan states firmly, "Steak is what we hang our hat on. It's what we do." The steak at the Cork is all natural from Vintage Natural Beef, raised by a group of like-minded ranchers in the Western Sierras. The cattle are raised on both grass and grain in low-stress ranges, developing

high-quality, tender and flavorful beef. Their hamburger is Colorado-raised at the Bear Mountain Ranch and comes from Scottish Highlander cattle, a tender and very flavorful choice.

The evening we dined at the Cork was a special night. Alan hosted a reunion of the staff from the Cork & Cleaver days including guys from the 60's, 70's and 80's; there were people from Scottsdale and Phoenix with a good dose of the early Boulder staff. All seemed happy to be back, remembering when Boulder was Boulder in their minds. Pioneers always believe they were the first. Some of these guys certainly pioneered a place very much smaller and calmer than the Boulder of today. A mass of madras shorts and slacks, worn by many who attended the reunion, were part of the wait uniform back in those stylish days of yore.

The Cork is a special place. It's locally owned and operated by people who care and know how to run a successful enterprise. Your happiness and return patronage is what keeps the Cork going. Alan and his staff understand and have been doing the job as a team for the last 27 years.

Alan could still be in the corporate food grind or he could be here, running his Cork, playing some golf and riding bikes with his daughter; I think he made the right choice...Boulder.

The Cork is located at 3295 30th Street in Boulder. For more information or reservations, please call 303-443-9505 or visit www.bouldercork.com.