

Four-Star Mint Aims To Be Raleigh's Crown Jewel



By Jenny Fredette

Fayetteville Street has seen its fair share of metamorphosis. From business center, to political commons, to shopping hub, to pedestrian mall, to axed-pedestrian-mall-turned-major-traffic-thoroughfare, the street that connects the NC State Capitol to the Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts continues to shape-shift in a seductive dance. Her desire? To draw Raleigh's residents to their main street. To provide them with the dining, events, and atmosphere that makes them call this street their own. Someone must have known what would happen next. After all, diamonds are a girl's best friend. Fayetteville's latest expression, The Mint at One Exchange Plaza, is holding back nothing in its attempt to wow and woo the locals. Located in what was once one of downtown's marble banks, The Mint restaurant aims to reclaim the space as the "crown jewel" of downtown Raleigh. The architecture and design convinces guests of the value – a six-ton bank vault door in the entry way, strings of diamond jewels and lights hanging from the two-story ceiling. The ultra-stylish M-Bar upstairs features a jewel case inches below your drink and will more than likely have a life of its own outside the restaurant traffic. The Mint also honors the neighborhood's heritage, with

historic scenes like the legislative building and the courthouse lit by green LED lights. Money green, copper, and silver throughout the interior evoke a sense of worth and would feel right at home nestled deep within a bank's secure vault.

The Mint was conceived nearly two years ago, as city planners were on the lookout for a new tenant of the sizable 6,750 square foot restaurant space. Rick Jones, a managing partner of the New Raleigh Restaurant Group, presented The Mint concept. It would feature contemporary southern cuisine with international influence. You might order shrimp and grits, a prime cut of beef or lamb, or perhaps some lobster, but you had never seen or tasted the dish the way The Mint prepares it.

Chef Jeremy Clayton (coming from

The grandiose two-story spiral copper staircase delivers guests to the posh M-bar upstairs



Even though The Mint was still in-progress at the time of this article (note the construction supplies above and below), the design and furnishings were already impressive

Charleston's Peninsula Grill) is working overtime to infuse that sense of innovation, creativity, and truly local flavor into each dish. From North Carolina Berkshire pork, to Poulet Rouge chicken from Rainbow Meadows, to exclusively organic beef, Clayton is starting with the best ingredients to create the best results. The butter-poached lobster carries flavors of popcorn, bourbon, caramel and peanut. If they do their job right, you won't remember having a meal like this before and you won't soon forget what you had at The Mint.

But perhaps just as important as the food is The Mint's anticipated ability to create a scene. The Mint expects to draw a sophisticated crowd of professionals. They are hoping for a crowd that will create some buzz for not only the restaurant, but for Fayetteville Street as a whole.

"The Mint was started by a group of friends looking to help revitalize downtown Raleigh," said Rick Jones of the New Raleigh Restaurant Group. By placing the new upscale, four-star restaurant within walking distance of the almost-open convention center, new hotels and thousands of new condominiums, this group of friends may be able to do just that. A surprisingly large outside seating area will surely attract a crowd on warm days and even a few chilly ones, as heaters have already been installed.

The Mint, located at 219 Fayetteville Street, will serve lunch Monday through Friday, and dinner Tuesday through Saturday. The Mint expects to open its doors in January 2008. Watch for an upcoming Restaurant Review by our City Style Editor Fred Benton.

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