

JEN EATS VEGAS



By: Jennifer
Burbank



Jennifer Burbank is the owner of **FNOM Worldwide**, a Las Vegas event company. If there's a restaurant that you would like for Jennifer to review please e-mail Jennifer to review please e-mail jburbank@fnomworldwide.com

RUNNING my event business occupies about 95% of my world, so I take full advantage of free time when life affords it by eating my way around our fabulous city. However let's just say that I may intentionally plan meetings, or "eatings", around lunch or dinner just for the sake of deleting the restaurants lingering in my Yelp bookmarks. So I digress, let's be real, I'm eating 100% of the time whether I'm busy or not. With that said I feel it would be a great injustice not to share my vast cornucopia of dining experience with you, because it just might lead you to discover something exciting and new or could even save you some hard earned cash that would be better spent elsewhere. Either way it would be my absolute pleasure to be your guiding dining light!

CLEAVER is the new brainchild from award winning mixologist and restaurateur Nectaly Mendoza. Mendoza was Beverage Specialist for the Light Group before he ventured off in 2009 to conjure up his own successful concoction, Herbs & Rye. Since its inception Herbs & Rye has become arguably one of the most revered local watering holes in the city. As I write this I reminisce on some of my own boozy Herbs & Rye memories that emanated from a few too many dealer's choice spirit forward cocktails.

So what do you do when you find the formula to success? Naturally you take the recipe and expound upon it. That's exactly what Mendoza did with his latest endeavor Cleaver, located on 3900 Paradise Road, formerly occupied by Ruth's Chris and Toscano Italian Steakhouse

When you pull into the busy parking lot the first thing you'll notice is the massive LED vintage style Cleaver marquee, a sharp contrast from the humble signage at Herbs & Rye. The inside of the restaurant has an old school steak house charm melded with contemporary chic décor. There's a sizable collection of Steve Payne artwork, the restaurant could dually function as his mini gallery. You'll find everyone from Eddie Murphy to Martha Stewart portrayed in a noble light.

We started the night with a few cocktails. Our server was very helpful in the decision making process which led me to discover "Ready Fire Aim". If you love smoky spicy cocktails this is a must! Pineapple, lime, honey, and spicy bitters are beautifully blended with mezcal to pack the perfect punch. I also sampled the Improved Cocktail, Cleaver's twist on an Old Fashioned, constructed with whiskey, bitters, maraschino, absinthe and sugar.

Normally I'm a whiskey girl but "Ready Fire Aim" was the clear winner.

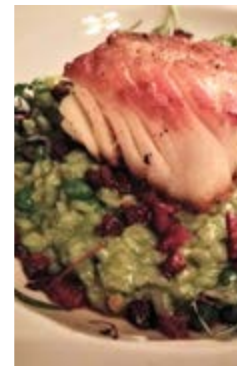
While savoring our cocktails I took my time studying the extensive wine menu and was impressed by the selection. I chatted with the Sommelier to get his suggestions because it wasn't exactly a Quintessa kind of night. He immediately gained my favor with his no pressure attitude and tell it like it is candor. We ended up landing on an average Slingshot Cabernet Sauvignon that was easy drinking for the price point

While waiting for the wine to decant I spotted Nectaly buzzing around the restaurant making his rounds as a good restaurateur should. He eventually made his way to our table to make sure everything was up to par and took a moment to share some laughs over a classic Herbs & Rye anecdote.

While perusing the menu I noticed that a few of the H&R favorites, like the Spicy Mussels and Prosciutto & Asparagus Flatbread, had made their way into Cleaver's starting lineup. We opted for the Tuna Tartare served with avocado, tobiko caviar, black sesame seeds, cream, cucumber and crispy rice paper! It was a nice way to start the meal.

For the main course I went for the Sea Bass with pea mint risotto prepared with Spanish chorizo and preserved lemon.

My meat eating counterpart ordered the Surf & Turf that comes with a 9 oz filet mignon, red wine glaze, a 9 oz lobster tail, asparagus and mashed. All in all, it was a good value but both of our meals needed a few modifications to make them unforgettable



The service was praiseworthy. From the moment I called in to request a booth to checking in on us while we were dining, the hostess was both lovely and accommodating. It was 8:00pm on a Saturday and although Cleaver was slammed we never had to search for our server.

The perfectly balanced cocktails have always been the star of Herbs & Rye and Cleaver follows suit, but the menu offers an excellent selection for casual super late night dining. If it's 2am and you're hankering for Butchered Meats, Seafood & Cocktails your best in this city is Cleaver

Inside Tip: Ask to be seated at a table in the bar area, there's less noise there than in the main dining room. **REAL**