

The Night of the Laughing Gorilla



Twenty-four hours before *The ProJo* blew the cover on the Laughing Gorilla, I had used my sleuthing techniques to discover its existence, and I immediately told *Motif*, “I want to go to there!” (because Liz Lemon is my spirit animal). I won’t pretend I wasn’t bummed when I saw that Gail Ciampa had stolen my mojo yet again, but nevertheless, I was intrigued by this new pop-up restaurant and had to see it for myself.

The Laughing Gorilla is a catering company that started in spring 2016, its founders focusing on “fun and flavorful experiences” that are inspired by street food classics from around the world. Over the summer they made appearances at downtown events like the Hope Street Block party and PVDFest, and participated in RI Food Fights Taco Mania, but it wasn’t until the owner of Kitchen, an infamous breakfast/brunch spot off Carpenter and Dean streets in Providence, needed to close shop for six months that the pop-up restaurant was born. Converting the small space from a 14-seater to a 21-seater by re-arranging tables and adding “bar seats” to the kitchen counter, the folks at the Laughing Gorilla are now proudly serving lunch and dinner. Their pop-up menu is small, utilizing many local ingredients, and they keep a somewhat malleable schedule (Tuesday - Friday lunch, “Taco Thursdays,” and dinner Thursday - Saturday; it’s important to check out their [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) page for the latest times and menus). And I’ll admit it — it was their photo of a Three Cheese Grilled Cheese that did me in.

The night we finally went to the Laughing Gorilla was the night of The Great International Beer Festival. My date and I had powered through as many beers as possible in 1.5 hours because we knew we wanted to make it to dinner *before 10pm*. (They have no closing time, but they will leave when people stop coming in, usually around 10pm.) We kept an eye on the clock, but as way leads to way, we were easily distracted by copious amounts of alcohol. By the time we arrived to Carpenter Street — on foot, mind you (safety first!) — it was already 9:50pm, and the street was dark and empty.



A soft glow came from Kitchen's window as my date and I peered inside, certain we'd missed the opportunity to eat. We didn't see any other diners, and they looked prepared to lock up. "Oh well," I sighed. "Maybe another time."

"Let's just ask," my date said, and opened the door.

Before we could even get the words out, we were greeted with cheers from inside, from Chef JT, one of the founders; Leigh Vincola, also an owner; and Craig Hughes, a cool dude with a beard. "Awww yeahhh!" JT cried. "Come on in!"

Surprised by their joy, we thought surely they were being sarcastic. "Are you sure? Because really, we don't want to make you stay open just for us."

"We're here for you!" they insisted. "Plus, we might be getting a surprise visitor," JT said with a wink as we were handed menus.

We chose to sit at the bar, essentially the copper-toned outcropping beneath the line where food would normally come out. It was unusual to be inside Kitchen at this time, so dimly lit, with darkness outside its windows. I felt like we were characters in a novel embarking on a journey, and this was where we knew underground allies would care for us. A world within a world. I noticed breakfast specials still scribbled on the blackboard on the wall, and I told my date about the two-hour line I once waited in to eat breakfast. "I wrote a blog about it," I told him.

As for the dinner menu, I barely remember glancing at it. Our decision took less than 60 seconds. There were five items and we ordered 60% of them: a Green Salad with shaved vegetables, Red Wine Braised Chicken Thighs with broccoli rabe, and Jerk Shrimp with roasted butternut squash and pineapple salsa. We stuck with water, even though wine and (Revival) beer are options, beca



use we needed to rehydrate. We mentioned our attendance at the GIBF, and JT spilled the news — the surprise visitor they were expecting was Sean Larkin.

Sean Larkin is [a beer celebrity](#), the Brewmaster at Revival Brewing Co., and I may have squealed. I thought, *Wow, what are the odds? We miss him at the festival and catch him at dinner!*

Turns out the odds were slightly in our favor because Larkin is the third owner of Laughing Gorilla, but that did not quell my enthusiasm.

In the meantime, our food started rolling out. My date and I shared everything (people who don't share food cannot be my friend), beginning with the salad. It was simply done, but a perfect appetizer. "It's very evenly tossed," noted my date. He had envisioned a house salad with sliced cucumbers and carrots sitting atop lettuce with figure-eights of dressing painted on. This was not like that.

Then came the chicken, and for me, it was love at first bite. I may forget a lot of things in my life, but I will never forget this chicken: It was so (close your ears) *moist* and richly flavored, it should be considered a delicacy. I couldn't stop making love sounds as I chewed. (Sorry to all the witnesses.) The only time I've ever had anything like it was in Greece, in which their hand-raised chicken marinated in a wood oven all day. This chicken came from Baffoni's Poultry Farm, and JT's culinary expertise transformed it into a life-changing meal.

The jerk shrimp arrived around the same time as Sean Larkin, so my food bliss co-mingled with my fanfare. I remember tasting a unique blend of flavors, from the spice of the shrimp to the sweetness of the squash to the tartness of the salsa. We enjoyed our food as well as the conversation with owner, chef, brewmaster and Hughes, who proudly showed us pictures of his 1-year old daughter and told us the story of how he won over his girlfriend's affections.

This was the epitome of a pop-up experience, one that doesn't happen every day and could not be expected to happen every day. But the folks at the Laughing Gorilla are indeed your allies, welcoming you in the night with their food and friendship, even if you — or they — are just passing through.

Visit their FB page for pop-up times and menus facebook.com/laughinggorillapvd