

## BEHIND THE BAR



Chris Wirt thrives on creativity at Pearl's Place and Pantry

# A Pearl of a Place

**W**hen Chris Wirt thinks about his current role as the general manager and bar manager at Pearl's Place in Manchester, he can't help but believe he was in the right place at the right time.

On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wirt said Manchester's year-round population has nearly doubled. Like Wirt, many of them welcome greater dining diversity and epicurean adventures. So when Pearl's Place and Pantry, a

restaurant that specializes in Southern cuisine, opened on Memorial Day Weekend, Wirt came full circle.

"It's been going fantastic, honestly," Wirt said.

Rather than shy away from a restaurant and bar experience that goes against the grain of more traditional Vermont tendencies, Manchester residents and visitors really enjoy it.

When Wirt moved to Vermont from the northern New Jersey area seven years ago, he recalled that restaurant and bar diversity was lacking in town. But as Manchester's population grew, things changed pretty dramatically under

BY ROBERT COOK | PHOTOS BY DAVID SEAUER



chards and other herbs and vegetables, he is also incorporating those homegrown items into the restaurant's menu and as drink garnishes.

Chris provides his homegrown berries, peppers and tomatillos for the chefs and uses them in the drinks served at Pearl's Place. Additionally, he makes fruit juices, hot sauces, and jams that are used in some of the restaurant's spirits.

This summer he made a pink tea with homegrown mint and chamomile, strawberries and courants from his farm.

Before he became the GM and bar manager at Pearl's Place, Chris paid his dues in the Manchester area tending bar for six years. After working at the Copper Grouse of the Taconic Hotel, Chris helped open the Union Underground in Manchester before becoming bar manager at the Dorset Field, a golf and tennis club.

The ownership group had plans in the works to open Pearl's Place and after working at the Dorset Inn for a half a year, Chris was named its GM and bar Manager when Pearl's opened in May.

Their collective research told them a Southern-style restaurant would be a big



Pearl's Place and Pantry in Manchester, VT.

hit in Manchester, which includes Robert Todd Lincoln's Hildene and the Equinox Hotel. It was right on the money.

Chris said he and his staff found themselves working at a fever pitch from the first day they opened their doors. When asked how Pearl's Place got its name, Chris said the restaurant's owner, Lauren Bryant, always loved the name and felt it was a great Southern-sounding moniker. This inspired her to bring a Southern-style restaurant to the Green Mountains. Pearl's Place also includes a painting of a southern lady with a string of pearls around her neck.

"There is a big pearl necklace hanging on a giant bull in the bar area, and people get a kick out of it," Chris said.

The restaurant can accommodate up to 100 people inside with outdoor seating for another 60 people, Chris added.

For Vermonters who love Country music, they are in luck, because it is playing all the time. Chris said the atmosphere at Pearl's is casual and lively. The outdoor area has a stone patio and a gravel picnic area for families to play outdoor games like giant Jenga and cornhole.

At Pearl's Place, patrons can order all things Southern including appetizers like pickle fries and Bayou Deviled Eggs, Smoked barbecue brisket, southern fried chicken and shrimp and grits topped off with a slice of bourbon pecan pie.

The cocktails that Chris and his staff serve are just as eclectic for palettes that love their southern brand.

Spirits like the Dixie Sazernac and the Cartel Margarita complement in-house creations like the Pearlicious that uses Deep Eddy's Peach Vodka, the Savannah

Slammer made with Southern Comfort whiskey and Sloe Gin, and the Mint Conditioned Mojito that infuses rum, lime juice and fresh mint from Chris's garden.

"When I knew I was going to come on board and manage this restaurant, I did a ton of research about Southern classic cocktails," Chris said. "I did some experimenting at home and combined different ingredients to create unique spirits with little twists. I think we have done a really good job."

Chris said they will rotate different drinks depending on the season. They will surely add a good old-fashioned Mint Julip to coincide with Kentucky Derby Day next spring. In the meantime, Chris said they will create some special concoctions that will cater to skiers at Stratton Mountain Resort and Bromley Ski Resorts, as well as the snowmobilers this winter. Chris said Pearl's Place is located right along the route that skiers and snowboarders take to get to and from the mountain resort. They are also located right off the snowmobile trail network in town. There will be plenty of hot spirits for the après-ski crowd, Chris added.

As the general manager and bar manager, Chris doesn't always tend bar. But he still welcomes the chance to pitch in and practice his craft. Behind the bar at Pearl's Place, Chris is in the right place at the right time.

"The bar will always be my home in the restaurant."

Chris rotates different drinks depending on the season, often incorporating his homegrown fruits, herbs and vegetables.



**Pearl's Place and Pantry**  
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