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Spoon and Stable

Strong management, chef's high profile a boon



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Editor's note: Each month, Dennis Monroe will review a restaurant on its business proposition, based on his years in the business as an attorney and former CEO of a multi-concept restaurant company.

THE HOTTEST RESTAURANT IN THE Twin Cities right now is Spoon and Stable in Minneapolis' North Loop, a highly desirable area for retail and restaurants. After working with famous chefs in New York City, owner and award-winning chef Gavin Kaysen decided to move back to Minnesota to try his own hand at ownership.

Based on the metric detailed in my February column, here's my assessment:

Management: Spoon and Stable has strong management. General manager Bill Summerville ran the successful La Belle Vie for years, as well as Sea Change and other high-profile restaurants. Another La Belle Vie alum with a big impact is pastry chef Diane Yang. And Kaysen created a diverse and elegant menu.

To the guest sitting at the kitchen counter, Kaysen has a calm and nurturing style. The back-of-the-house financial management isn't on display, but from my observations on the floor, everything seems systemized and organized.



The popular bar area at Spoon and Stable seats 38.

Rating: 4 out of 4

Décor and Investment: Money was well spent on the décor, fitting the ambiance of the North Loop neighborhood. David Shea did the restaurant design with significant input from Kaysen. It has certain minimalist components, which contribute to its warm, sophisticated ambiance. There is a two-story wine room, and an open view of the kitchen with seating that brings diners into the experience of preparing food. Given its popularity, the bar area might be a little small, even though it includes high-top tables around the front window.

My guess is the décor and leasehold build-outs had a substantial price tag, but the décor fits the food pricing.

Rating: 3 out of 4. The only reason for nicking this category is I think it will be somewhat problematic to get the return we like to see in restaurants (in the 20 percent range) given the type

of investment in the furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Potential Revenue: Kaysen told me they average 1,400 to 2,000 covers per week. There are 84 seats in the main dining area, plus two private dining areas (one holds 24, the other 12) and a bar area that seats 38. My average ticket price estimate with wine (per seat) is \$60 to \$80; possibly higher early because guests will be foodies who tend to spend more. Private dining has huge opportunities with the lack of other quality options in this neighborhood. From what I can gather from the waitstaff, there are 2.5 turns per night on the weekends and 2 turns on weeknights. Revenue should be in the plus column, and Kaysen should be able to sustain the restaurant with those numbers. If table turns were 1 or 1.5, with the type of investment, it would be problematic.

Rating: 3 out of 4, but only because

it's difficult to get the type of revenue you want with only 84 seats in the main dining area, and that puts a lot of pressure on table turns.

Menu and Pricing: The menu is priced on the high side for Minnesota, but not to where Minnesotans would shun the restaurant, particularly foodies. Prices span starters (\$9 range); chilled appetizers (\$14-\$16); pasta dishes (small dishes from \$11-\$13, large dishes from \$18-\$20); fish entrées (\$25-\$28); land entrées (\$25-\$29); pot roast with foie gras (\$39 and delicious); and sides are \$8. Pricing is such that people may order an extra plate to sample. Specialty cocktails are \$13. Wine by the glass is a little pricey (\$9-\$19). Overall, pricing should ensure people will dine both for special occasions and on a regular basis.

Given the overall detail per plate, prices may have to be slightly higher to achieve the type of profitability I think is deserving of this type of restaurant.

Rating: 3 out of 4

Back-of-the-House Labor: Here labor seems a little overstaffed. I noticed they tend to get in each other's way on occasion. I'm not sure the expediting is efficient. That being said, the restaurant has huge talent and sitting at the kitchen table watching the staff work is a joy.

Rating: From a business standpoint, I

would give this category 2 out of 4.

Service and Labor Costs: The service is extraordinary, which is necessary for an early-stage restaurant. I believe fewer servers can achieve the same service level with larger stations. While the multi-server approach to each table is admirable, it's a cost that can be cut back for profitability. The 22 servers the restaurant has (and nine to 11 servers per shift) are just too costly. The restaurant is new, and it is better to over serve than under serve; I believe they will effectively cut back on their labor costs.

Rating: The quality of the staff is definitely a 4. The feasibility of the present economics of the staffing is 1.5, and the overall economics of service is 2.5.

Food Costs: Kaysen says food costs are around 30 percent. The menu uses reasonably priced products and should be able to achieve something in the low 30 percent range if waste is held under control. I would assume early on these costs are running closer to 40 percent. I saw food items sitting out for the night, which may or may not be used. Portions are not overly large so there is not a lot of waste off the table, but it's hard to gauge waste in the back of the house. The desserts should have more varied pricing so high-end desserts cost more and low-end desserts less.

Cocktails are priced right for the North Loop. Good profitability should be maintained, even though they are using some higher-priced ingredients. Cocktails match the food and wine-by-the-glass will boost the profitability.

Rating: 3. There's room to improve; but for a new restaurant, it's pretty darn good.

Long-Term Success: Given everything above and with the talent and public's following already, I think long-term success rates a 3. The one thing missing is more flexible seating. I tried to get a reservation for six on a weeknight and was told there are only two tables that seat six. That may be an issue, particularly when people want to show guests one of the best dining experiences in the Twin Cities.

The overall success rating is 3.5. If Kaysen keeps doing what he is doing, there is no reason Spoon and Stable won't outlast 95 percent of the restaurants in Minneapolis. We just hope he doesn't get bored with our Minnesota nice and go some place a little edgier. [FSN](#)

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