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Tenant Has Talent

Chef-owners are in it for the lifestyle and dream of restaurant ownership, not the money



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Monroe**

IT'S FUN TO SEE SOMEONE IN THE restaurant industry pursuing their dream on their own terms. Cameron Cecchini, co-owner of Tenant on Bryant Avenue in South Minneapolis, admitted to me the first time I dined there that he and his business partner weren't going to get rich here, but he was enjoying cooking the food he wants to prepare in his own restaurant.

Cecchini and Grisha Hammes took over the lease on the space that was the highly esteemed Piccolo from their former employer, Doug Flicker. The name, Tenant, is a play off the fact that they're now tenants, but it has a deeper meaning for the team as well.

When I look at Tenant and the people involved, I see a lot of joy and they also seem to be making a reasonable living. Tenant serves a six-course set menu, where reservations are made online with a credit card. If someone fails to show up for their reservation, their credit card is charged for the food cost. This is great because it keeps a controlled food cost and eliminates waste. The key to the success over the first four months they've been open are the two owners, Cecchini and Hammes, along with their two cohorts, Alex Dayton and Reid Evenson. All are delightful individuals, which makes the restaurant a great place to spend two hours. The two times we were



there, Hammes greeted everyone by name and escorted them to their seats. As the four took turns delivering each course, they took the time to explain the ingredients and technique with an enthusiasm only the creator of the dish could muster.

What I loved about Tenant is that it combines special occasion dining with neighborhood dining. We could say it is a neighborhood Travail, and very much a product of the owners. The food is tremendous and they have done a great job at making the restaurant simple with one item on the menu changing every week.

Revenue

It is often hard to determine a restaurant's revenue during its first year. However, Tenant might make it a little easier than most since there's a fixed cost for food—\$50. But my guess is most diners add either a wine pairing for \$25 or a couple of glasses of wine. Another difference is that when a gratuity is added, it doesn't go to a server. So my guess is that the check average is \$80.

During the week, they're getting two seatings at the eight-seat bar and one seating in the 12-seat dining room, where they usually seat about 10. On



the weekends, they are doing a second seating in the dining room. So if my \$80 guess is right, that brings their numbers to around \$624,000 of revenue per year (30 seatings at \$80, times five days a week, times 52 weeks for the year). This puts the revenue on the light side, which tends to be a problem when you have a restaurant with limited seating. The menu is priced right for Minnesota, and appeals to various demographic categories. It is difficult to determine revenue this early but the

\$600,000 range seems to be about right. For two young chef-owners, plus their two employees, I think this provides a good living.

Rating: 2.5 out of 4 stars

Food Cost

The chefs know how much food they need to order to have on hand because the reservations are made online in advance through an increasingly popular software system called Resy. So if you go by the cost of canceling a reservation at \$15, that would translate to 30 percent food costs. But it appears to me that they are looking at a food cost of about 27 to 28 percent, which is exactly where you should be, particularly with fine dining.

The recipes aren't heavy protein, which keeps costs down. They also have an herb garden right outside their door.

Rating: 4 out of 4 stars

Labor Cost

The labor model at Tenant is unique. The four chefs are all worker bees—they work hard and all take part in the preparation,

serving and cleanup. This makes for a flexible labor model, which is reminiscent of the model used by some family-owned restaurants.

Rating: 4 out of 4 stars

Return on Investment and Capital Improvements

The décor is perfect for the size and the type of cuisine. It's minimalist: white walls, a cool faded blue Tenant sign and long, shallow wooden shelves that serve as both storage for wine glasses and wall art. An old record player console in the lobby provides music to cook by, covering baby boomers' to millennials' tastes.

If they spent, say, \$100,000—which in my opinion is money well spent—the ROI is where it needs to be. They self-funded, an admirable feat.

Rating: 3.5 out of 4 stars

Overall Rating: 3 out of 4 stars

Tenant is a great addition to our restaurant scene. I would like to see more restaurants with this unique approach.

When I asked the owners what their future plans are, they told me they are satisfied at this point because they are enjoying owning their own restaurant. Customers will be getting fine dining and certainly some of the best customer service ever, considering they pride themselves in knowing their customers by name. These chefs are very talented and very smart when it comes to business, which is not always the case in small, neighborhood restaurants. They have figured out labor costs, food costs, and the only thing they have left to do is to continue driving revenue. I want them to succeed, but I also want them to always have a spot at the counter for me. [FSN](#)

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