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Grand Catch brings the Coastal Maine seafood experience to St. Paul's Grand Avenue



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THE SAME CREATIVE MINDS behind World Street Kitchen and Milkjam, brothers Saed and Sameh Wadi, are the owners of Grand Catch. While World Street Kitchen and Milkjam are located in Uptown at 27th and Lyndale, this venture is in a strip center right at the entranceway to McAlister College. The neighboring retail area has several other restaurants plus specialty shops. It is also close to St. Thomas and St. Kate's, so it's a nice hangout for families visiting, but maybe a little pricey for students.

There is no mistaking this is a seafood restaurant—meaning mostly shellfish. They have a good fish sandwich and catch of the day, but the real centerpiece of the menu is the boil, which priced at market means it's not cheap. There are rotating shellfish options, such as lobster, shrimp and crab and diners can choose one or a mix of shellfish. The diner is in control of the experience: you can choose your shellfish, sauce, heat level and add-ons, such as corn and red potatoes. The Chinese Shrimp Toast is a winner, as well as several vegetable preparations. Dessert is their Milkjam ice cream—without the long line at the Minneapolis location.

The restaurant has 40 seats in the main dining room, seven seats at the bar and 16 high-tops with some booths in the bar area. There's a large



enclosed patio in the back and a few tables out front. So when looking at the economics, I would say this restaurant rings in at 80 seats.

The bars serves a full range of liquor, but there's not a true focus on tap beers, common in St. Paul, especially near colleges. My first impression was that it's a smaller version of the Smack Shack in the North Loop in Minneapolis, but it's not. It has its own unique neighborhood approach and style.

I talked with Saed Wadi, an iconic restaurant owner in the Twin Cities who, along with his brother Sameh and partner, Kim Lee, are the proprietors. He had a lot of interesting things to say. First off, they were looking to create a concept that was unique. It tied into a Cajun seafood spot that a friend of his had started in Brooklyn Center years ago where he also has a Cajun deli. Another friend of theirs had the space that now houses Grand Catch, so they

basically were able to walk into the space, but they had to gut the kitchen. About half of the kitchen is custom made. They also built a commissary on the second floor, which makes it more difficult to track the investment in Grand Catch. Wadi said the check average was not as high as I thought it was. It's \$30, because there are a lot of people coming in just for snacks and not the full boil. Their first year they were open for lunch and dinner, then later in started brunch. After the first year, they closed for lunch and are now just open for dinner.

I couldn't get a commitment from him on the revenue, but I do feel like they are pretty pleased with where they are at revenue-wise. They got a lot of positive press their first year, and now are focused on profitability. Food costs are a concern, particularly if they're serving crawfish—and they're doing 300-400 pounds of crawfish—

which can bring the food cost way up to around 45 percent for those weeks. Secondly, he said they've also focused on service, so service costs run probably a little high. That all being said, let's now look at the various components.

Revenue

This model is not a high revenue restaurant. My estimation is it does somewhere between \$1.3 million and \$1.7 million. I thought originally the check average was \$40 to \$45, but as I said above, I was informed that it is actually closer to \$30. I think that may be a little low. They are only open for dinner and brunch on Sunday. If they could get a full turn every day and probably two turns on weekends, I would guesstimate the volume is about \$1.5 million.

Additionally, while I was waiting one time, a driver from DoorDash was also waiting. She said they do quite a bit of DoorDash deliveries for the restaurant. The order she was picking up was \$63, but she said usually the orders are a little less. We took our leftovers from the boil and it travels well. So they do have an opportunity, particularly in a neighborhood with the college kids to get

a lot more delivery to add to the bottom line.

Rating: 2.5 out of 4 stars.

Labor

They are not overly staffed, but from talking to Wadi, they have run high on service costs, but again it's to keep customers coming in to new-stage restaurants. The owners took turns at the front of the house seating people. Everyone took turns running food and so it's a very flexible service style. I would think that they've been able to maintain their labor pretty well. I think it is probably pretty high intensive in the back of the house just because of the kind of food they're doing and just more complications for doing seafood. They could have some work left to do to become more efficient.

Rating: 2.5 out of 4 stars.

Food Cost


The kind of protein that they're doing equals a high food cost. As I stated, certain kinds of shellfish raise those costs. They've kept the prices up pretty well with the different revenue sources, but I believe food costs will be an ongoing issue. But they are experienced restaurateurs and

can stay on top of it. That being said, I would estimate food cost runs in the neighborhood of about 38 percent.

Rating: 2 out of 4 stars.

Return on Investment

They've done a nice job of keeping costs down, while having an attractive space. The eye-catching blue façade is a great billboard. I would guesstimate that all in, it's probably \$700,000 of cost to do this. However, by putting in the commissary upstairs and doing the structural work required, they probably spent maybe \$1.5 million on the whole project. I have to believe they've gotten a pretty good deal on rent. It's not a high rent spot in looking at the other locations around there, probably a \$20 per-square-foot type of rent. Their overall return is probably pretty good.

Rating: 3 out of 4 stars. 

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