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Nosh Wine Lounge: Striving to provide consistent, excellent service



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by **Erica Viola**

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Omaha is a city with more than its share of bars and dining establishments. There's something to accommodate every taste and every personality. Lately, it seems that a new restaurant rises up on every corner, from the ashes of another. For **Lila Anderson**, owner and operator of **Nosh Restaurant and Wine Lounge**, making it work long-term is a combination of sumptuous food, excellent wines and a stylish, relaxing atmosphere. More than just a wine bar, Nosh offers a full menu, monthly wine tastings, a wine club and private parties.

Lila's background is an unexpected one for a woman who now runs one of the most popular high-class bars in Omaha. "This is my first attempt at a restaurant business," she explains. After having worked as a director at TD Ameritrade in Texas, Lila decided to move her family back to Omaha. "Before leaving my corporate job, I really never would have thought too much about the restaurant business. After coming back to Omaha though, I asked myself, 'do I want to do something different?'"

The idea for Nosh came when Lila spent an evening with friends. "We went out one day to one of my favorite bars for happy hour and that's what gave me the idea. I thought, 'I want a bar like this!'"

Her friends encouraged her to follow her impromptu dream, "and that planted the seed," she says. Lila opened Nosh in February of 2011 and the business has been growing steadily, both in what they offer and in popularity.

Lila's role at Nosh is that of owner, manager and helper. "I pretty much do it all; when we started I had to step into a variety of roles," she remembers. "When I didn't know something, I was fortunately able to bring in people that did. Now I run the operation but let my staff do all the details."

It works to the restaurant's advantage, though, if she doesn't know all of what's going on; "I've been able to learn that these past four years."

Some afternoons, before the bartender and evening staff arrive, you can find Lila chatting with clients, pouring drinks and waiting tables. Aided by her general manager, she also does all of the party planning, and works with Jordan on handling some of the ordering and retail end of the business.

At first, Nosh started out as a wine bar with a limited menu. Because they are located in the Capitol district at 10th and Dodge, however, the restaurant began to attract attention from concert-goers, attendees of special events, downtown residents and hotel guests. From the demands of this traffic grew a full menu and the need for added kitchen staff. "One of the main challenges is getting the right staff in here," reflects Lila, "getting in people who know what they're doing. There are a lot of restaurants in Omaha; you need to find people that are committed to you."

Jordan Gallner, General Manager of Nosh, has something in common with Lila – this is his first foray into the restaurant business. Previously, he owned and operated a lawn care service. "I had to learn very quickly!" he laughs. "I've always been very interested in the restaurant and hospitality industries. It was something I knew I wanted to do, but I just never got my foot in the door."

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One night, Jordan was sitting at the bar and a friend working behind the bar asked him to function as a bar back. Within six months of his spur-of-the-moment hiring, he was helping out and within a year and a half he became general manager.

Nosh is a big step away from both of their backgrounds, “but it works, and it works well,” says Lila. “Our staff likes the flexibility and the opportunity for creativity I give them in the kitchen.”

Lila oversees the menu, but is happy to let her staff come up with new dishes and ideas.

“I think Nosh is a great concept,” enthuses Jordan, “and I’d love to see it expand.”

The dedication of the staff at Nosh is helping that dream come true. Hard work and a devotion to the clientele are key. While recovering from a serious motorcycle accident, Jordan, walking with a cane, slipped behind the busy bar and began making cocktails for thirsty patrons.

Décor is an essential part of the atmosphere at Nosh. Lila wanted it to be “comforting, relaxing and a little bit upscale. I think people are tired of bars in Omaha that just throw a bunch of furniture in there and open their doors. They don’t seem to take time for any other details. I wanted to create an environment where people could feel comfortable relaxing and staying a long time.”

In fact, she says, she’s had people come in for lunch and stay until six in the evening. Jordan says “We strive to be customer friendly, make sure everyone’s having a great time. We also want to know if there’s something we could be doing better. In my book, there’s no bad criticism.”

Striving to provide consistent excellent service to clients who wish to relax for a few hours is paying off for Nosh. Comfortable plush leather chairs and sofas compliment stylish tables and elegant light fixtures. The lighting is subtle and soothing, and the well-stocked bar is lined with stools. “Our clientele is really a mix,” says Lila. “We do late-night happy hour on Friday and Saturday nights, which brings in a younger crowd. Often, our demographic during the week is older; thirty-somethings and up. I used to think that it would be more women, but we get a lot of men coming in wanting a quiet evening and a nice glass of wine with a good dinner.”

Adds Jordan, “Meeting new people and talking to new people is my favorite aspect of Nosh. We get people from all over the world in here. It’s all about being a people person.

Special events are another thing that gives Nosh an edge over other Omaha restaurants and bars. Lila organizes special events including a monthly wine tasting, which are free to members of the wine club. The wine club is an exclusive deal, open to the public, which includes two bottles of wine each month, discounts to other Nosh-sponsored events and a complimentary glass of wine on your birthday.

The restaurant also supports local musicians. Lila dedicates Wednesday evenings to live music from 6-9 PM where you can enjoy local artists as well as an occasional young artist on tour. Nosh is also a popular destination for private events. There are at least two a month, says Lila, and the space can accommodate 50 – 100 people. It’s an ideal spot for work functions, bachelorette parties, bridal showers and birthday parties.

A recent special event that received rave reviews from all dinner guests was Nosh’s quarterly wine dinner. The evening began with relaxed chatting and a fizzy citrus cocktail. Lila and Jordan made the rounds, organizing, planning and stopping to welcome and talk with the diners. The dinner was French-themed and it did not disappoint; while each dish was attractively arranged and served, it was also just filling enough and perfectly paired with a carefully selected wine. Nosh is sensitive to the dietary needs of diners, as well; two delicious dishes were quickly made kosher and vegetarian without the slightest disruption in service.

Although wine is their specialty, the bar also makes some great cocktails with the direction of Bar Manager **Sean Bokelman**. Sean specializes in craft cocktails that bring a new twist to the menu. He likes to feature a new drink each month using some unique products and spirits that introduce the customer to something they might not have tried before. The customers enjoy trying something new and look forward to what he might offer next month. Sean also likes to keep the beer list current with some of the latest local offerings as well as the popular seasonal beers.

Thanks to its drink selection, service and delectable food menu, Nosh Wine Lounge is rapidly establishing itself as Omaha’s premier wine bar. It’s a chill-out spot with class; it’s a place to relax at lunch or after a tiring work day. At Nosh Wine Lounge, you can be sure of friendly service, a comfortable and attractive atmosphere and a dining experience that will keep you coming back for more.

Nosh Restaurant and Wine Lounge, 1006 Dodge Street. 402-614-2121. Open at 11 a.m. daily.



Erica Viola

Erica Viola lives in Omaha, Nebraska. She likes to write and wear hats. Her interests include betta fish, ramen noodles and Victorian British literature. She is adept at cooking eggs, making greeting cards and training cats. Erica Viola has a BFA in Creative Writing from UNO.

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