

Krog Bar: Bar none

As Rathbun's empire expands, Krog Bar's simplicity continues to thrill

BY BESHA RODELL – Creative Loafing

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As chef Kevin Rathbun's empire expands, with Kevin Rathbun Steak set to open in a few weeks, I thought it was time to revisit the simplest of Rathbun's concepts, Krog Bar. Opened in the Stoveworks complex in September 2005, Krog Bar foreshadowed a wine bar explosion in Atlanta, with new outposts of the Grape popping up in every nook of the city, along with a plethora of independent wine-driven establishments. And as these wine bars proliferate, Krog Bar continues to be a solid favorite, attracting a nightly crowd that enjoys one of the most congenial and relaxed atmospheres in town, even when the place is packed to the rafters.

Krog Bar looks like an oversized garage from outside, but part of the allure is the almost magical trick of taking a tin shed in the middle of a parking lot and imbuing it with enough charm to evoke its own little world. Once you wind around the sloping ramp, you find yourself transported. Dark wood and stylish light fixtures, as well as the deck – with its loungy seating – have a hip, urban and European feel.

The wine list, heavy on Spanish and Italian varietals, is a wonderful thing to peruse and explore, with quirky finds such as a Txakolina from Spain that fizzes almost imperceptibly on the tongue. As a place to come and sip wine for hours, Krog Bar is the public equivalent of a friend's comfortable vacation home.

If people come to Krog Bar for the wine and the atmosphere, they become devotees because of the food. There's no oven or stove here, and each dish is a small statement of purity. Meats and cheeses of exceptional quality are just the beginning. A plate of puckery white anchovies is so full of flavor, your saliva glands might not be able to handle it. But do try – even if you think you don't like anchovies, these might change your mind. The Ortiz tuna will remind those of us who have overloaded on "sashimi grade" just how wonderful the canned stuff can be. Krog Bar's small plate of tuna, along with piquillo peppers and a tart sherry vinaigrette, is impossible to resist, especially with the good, crusty bread provided on the side.

The dark, musky chicken liver pate is just the thing to complement a glass of one of the bar's fantastic Riojas. Or order a glass of sparkling wine and the yellowtail carpaccio, which serves as a delicate vehicle for the vinegary flavors of Spain that garnish it.

Have fun with the selection of finger sandwiches, the best of which are nutty little triangles of apple and goat cheese with almond butter. Or order a plate of artichoke hearts, with a flavor that is almost tropical thanks to a mint and lime dressing.

Service in the tiny shed is some of the best in town, and it is a gift so great to find competence and humor in the waitstaff of a casual restaurant that I often find myself wanting to hug them in a show of gratitude. On a recent evening, my waitress, Kelly, claimed her brain wasn't quite working when she momentarily forgot the name of the wine I had ordered. Her brain at half-mast was 10 times more efficient than the best efforts of many waiters I've encountered in this city.

Kevin Rathbun may have built Krog Bar simply as a refuge for himself. He pops in multiple times a night, sometimes just sitting in the back of the space, perhaps taking a break from the large, busy kitchen across the way at his namesake restaurant. I can empathize – I've

often found myself at Krog Bar under the guise of work but really just needing a respite from the pressure and formality of a full-scale restaurant.

On most evenings, the question for me is not where I want to eat but where I need to eat for work. So much so that when I'm confronted with a choice based on my own desires, I am often at a loss. But Krog Bar is often what I'm left with when I have the choice. I love the freedom from the constraints of a formulated menu, and the option of sitting and eating and drinking at my own pace. I love the bold flavors that defy tampering and are presented in all their naked glory. I am utterly grateful for a staff that is smart and efficient. It may just be a tin shed in the middle of a parking lot, but Krog Bar is to me the height of civilized dining.

Krog Bar

3 stars. 112 Krog St., Suite 27. 404-524-1618. www.krogbar.com. Mon.-Sat., 4:30 p.m.-late. Major credit cards. Wine served. Lot and valet parking.