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## Dazzle Restaurant and Lounge



930 Lincoln St., 303-839-5100, [www.dazzlejazz.com](http://www.dazzlejazz.com)

**Must-try New Dishes** *Lingonberry and Brie grilled cheese*

**Old Favorites** *Ragonetti macaroni and four cheeses, crab-stuffed mushrooms, grilled avocado*

### Then

In late summer 1998, almost a year after it opened, 5280 critic Greg Moody ventured into Dazzle Restaurant and Lounge for the first time. Despite its nondescript, industrial facade, Moody found Dazzle's nouvelle comfort food and jazz shows enticing, and the restaurant's decor reminded him of a 1930s chromed steam liner. He was pleasantly surprised with the vibrant gathering spot, which he quickly deemed one of the city's best-kept secrets.

### Now

Tucked into one of Dazzle's half-moon-

shaped booths, my friend and I were in deep conversation when our server appeared with our drinks. Then, after a quick introduction, Bridgette whipped cocktail shakers up and down, from her waist to her shoulders. With an exaggerated flick of her wrist, Bridgette poured my sweet-and-sour grapefruit juice and vodka salty dog (\$4-\$8) into a salt-rimmed martini glass and my friend's vermouth-y Boodles martini (\$4-\$8) over three speared olives. Before even tasting the cocktails, I already loved them.

The libations that evening were tasty, in a surprisingly straightforward, simple way.

**RAZZLE DAZZLE** Happy hour translates to expertly shaken cocktails and \$5 dishes such as the grilled avocado, lingonberry and Brie grilled cheese sandwich, and Ragonetti macaroni and four cheeses.

The food we ordered to accompany our drinks was in the same comfortable vein. Bridgette had encouraged us to try the Ragonetti mac and four cheeses, a menu favorite, and the crab-stuffed mushrooms and Cuban sliders, she added, were her top picks. Because it was happy hour, and most of restaurant's dishes cost only \$5, we ordered them all.

The generous servings practically took over our table, but after a few bites we wished the portions could have been smaller and the flavors a little more refined. The mac and cheese—rigatoni doused in a sauce of smoked cheddar, Gouda, fontina, and Parmesan—and the button mushrooms stacked with crab and breadcrumbs were both overly buttery and heavy. And the Cubans, piled with thick slices of pork tenderloin, melted Swiss, and sweet coleslaw, were not the savory, layered blend of ham, cured pork, Swiss, pickles, and mustard we craved when we picked them off the menu.

On other nights, and even during lunches, Dazzle's dishes were similarly off the mark. But the restaurant's inviting service, well-executed cocktails, and engaging entertainment options tempered our disappointment with the food. On a Monday night, when a friend and I stopped in for a full dinner, our chicken curry (\$13), a lackluster hodgepodge of bell peppers, broccoli, red grapes, and slightly dry and burned chicken cubes, was forgotten thanks to the bluesy saxophones and brassy trumpets of the Colorado Jazz Workshop and the energy of the sold-out crowd. At a Friday lunch, surrounded by needle workers participating in a community knit-a-thon and local musicians taking advantage of the open stage, we enjoyed our French-inspired lingonberry and Brie grilled cheese (\$5) and Dazzle's four-course lunch deal (\$9.25, including soup, salad, sandwich, dessert, and drink). The eats were merely adequate, but we'd come for the mood and to feel the pulse of the city.

Despite the inconsistent food, it's Dazzle's contagious, positive vibe that packs the restaurant's slightly worn dining rooms each night. Plus, the lounge's well-priced happy hour and lunch make a visit worth penciling in every so often. After all, Bridgette's cocktail shaking isn't something you can order off just any menu.

—KAZIA JANKOWSKI