

Reilly Craft Pizza & Drink

If the notion of eating in a former funeral home gives you the willies, you might want to say a Hail Mary and get over it. The menu at Reilly Craft Pizza & Drink is impressive. And so is the ambience.

NORA BURBA TRULSSON

Dine at downtown Tucson's Reilly Craft Pizza & Drink, and you'll be tucking into the creamy polenta with wild mushrooms, a speck-and-egg pizza made with a tender-crispy crust, or maybe the citrus-spiked ricotta gnocchi. You'll admire the setting — a historic building with the original floors, tall ceilings and arched windows.

But if you suddenly want to burst into an elegy, there's a good reason. For more than 80 years, the building was the Reilly Funeral Home, the last stop on the way to kingdom come for many a Tucson citizen.

"We get people coming in here telling us they went to their grandmother's or uncle's funeral here," says general manager Courtney Fenton. "It's part of the history here, but we see this as a beautiful, old building and a great space."

The building's history starts in the

1890s, when Ohio native John Reilly came to Arizona to seek his fortune; he eventually fell into undertaking. The next decade, he was successful enough to build his own funeral home in downtown Tucson, hiring local architect Henry Jaastad to design a two-story brick building with the mortuary on the first level. Upstairs were living quarters where Reilly and his wife, Cecilia, raised a large family. Some 20 years later, Reilly asked another well-known Tucson architect, Roy Place, to jazz up the building's exterior to its present Pueblo Deco look, embellished with zigzags and ziggurats. After Reilly's death in 1946, his family ran the business until it closed in the early 1990s.

In 2006, real-estate investor Steve Fenton bought the building, envisioning saving its architectural history and repurposing it for ... something. His three

children came up with the something: a restaurant that drew upon the family's Italian culinary roots.

With Tyler Fenton as chef, Courtney as manager and Zach doing the book-keeping, the family opened the restaurant in 2012 after extensive renovations that included reinforcing the main building and converting the upstairs living quarters to offices. The Fentons made tables out of old doors and gears used to lift caskets from the basement showroom, and transformed the hearse garage and driveway into a beer garden. Most recently, they revamped the basement's rock-walled casket showroom into a cocktail lounge, aptly dubbing it the Tough Luck Club.

Against the historic background, Tyler has worked his culinary skills, seeking out local farmers and purveyors for ingre-

dients, and even scoring foraged wild mushrooms from the forests atop the Santa Catalina Mountains. The lunch menu includes salumeria and roasted-vegetable sandwiches served on house-made bread; the dessert menu features a chocolate budino as well as a tres leches tiramisu.

The historic ambience, the food and the downtown locale keep Reilly Craft packed with University of Arizona students, downtown workers and residents. Still, there are those who might feel an otherworldly vibe as they have a cold one and a Yukon Gold-potato pizza.

"We're a popular stop on ghost tours," Courtney says. "We let people think what they want to think."



TUCSON Reilly Craft Pizza & Drink, 101 E. Pennington Street, 520-882-5550, www.reilypizza.com