



THE WATERFRONT HOTEL BAR

DARIN MISLAN OVERSEES THE HISTORIC LOCALE IN FELLS POINT

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX

If you're going to write an ongoing series of feature articles on historic Maryland and Washington, DC bars and taverns, you absolutely cannot leave off The Waterfront Hotel Bar in Baltimore's Fells Point neighborhood. The iconic property dates back to 1771 and, over the decades, has been everything from a tavern that housed Civil War troops to the main bar

and restaurant set for NBC's 1990s crime drama, "Homicide: Life on the Street."

Ann Giles, wife of Fells Point settler Edward Fell, leased the site to Thomas Long, who had the original structure built. His brother, Robert, had erected the first brick home in Baltimore city at 812 S. Ann Street. It was a private residence for much of the 19th century until it was indeed converted into a hotel and tavern to house Union soldiers

Darin Mislan
Proprietor
The Waterfront Hotel Bar



during the Civil War.

James Dembowski, a member of the Maryland Legislature, bought the building in 1948 as a hotel and tavern. The structure was discontinued as a hotel in 1955, but remains in use as a tavern to this day and charmingly keeps “hotel” in its name. The Atlas Restaurant Group now owns it with partner Darin Mislan serving as proprietor.

During a recent interview with the Beverage Journal, he said, “I have owned and operated businesses in Fells Point on Thames Street since the ‘90s. I was involved with renovating and re-opening The Admiral’s Cup in 2010. I operated it with other partners until Atlas acquired it in 2019 [he continued to serve as The Cup’s General Man-

ager]. In 2021, [CEO Alex Smith] offered to partner with me and other people at The Waterfront.”

Mislan and his colleagues quickly put their stamp on the business. They leased the property next door, and that’s allowed them to build a beautiful courtyard for outdoor dining. In addition, The Waterfront Hotel

Bar now offers live music on its second floor seven nights a week.

Mislan remarked, “Last year at The Waterfront, we saw exponential growth even going into the winter months when things are usually dropping off. With our renovations, we’ve built a premier music venue. There’s beautiful staging and an excellent

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sound system on the second floor. We're bringing in national bands, and seeing growth even in the dead of winter."

Mention "the dead of winter" around The Waterfront, and you might get a staffer or a customer tell you stories about the ghosts of the property. You can't have a structure as old as this with this much history attached to it without some sightings of the supernatural. Legends linger to this day, and Mislan is a believer.

"A couple of weeks ago, I saw something!" he stated. "It was early in the morning, and I was meeting with a city inspector. I was the only one in the building. I was in the main bar, and I saw who I thought was the cleaner walk into the kitchen. I even said, 'Good morning.' But I soon realized, I was the only one in there at the time!"

He continued, "We need to get the most

legitimate ghost-hunting organization in here, because you can definitely feel it! We kept hearing about all of these ghost stories. So Alex and Eric Smith, the two partners of Atlas Restaurant Group, used an EVP reader, also known as a ghost reader, to investigate. We asked the ghost what his name was, and we clearly heard on the reader 'Samuel.' We were just joking around. But the long-time staff here told us, 'Yeah, there's been a ghost here, and he is known as 'Samuel!'"

Storytelling has been at the heart of The Waterfront Hotel Bar for decades. Indeed, when three of the detective characters – Meldrick Lewis (Clark Johnson), John Munch (Richard Belzer), and Tim Bayliss (Kyle Secor) -- on the NBC series "Homicide" wanted to open a bar, the producers looked no further than right across the street from the Station House set (now the upscale Saga-

more Pendry Hotel) to The Waterfront. The bar became a fixture of the show until it ended its run in 1999, with a reunion movie one year later.

Mislan still welcomes fans of the show to this day. "Towards the end of last summer," he said, "I had two guys come in. It was early, and we weren't open yet. But they tried the door, and I unlocked it. They told me they were retired police detectives from Detroit, and they were huge fans of the show. They were on vacation with their wives in D.C. And while their wives were shopping, they made a trip to Baltimore just to see the Waterfront and the Pendry."

Mislan wasn't an original viewer of the show. So, he still chuckles at the memory of moving to Baltimore in the 1990s and moving into a home on S. Wolf Street near Thames Street because it was "so close to a

police station. I felt safe.” It wasn’t long before he realized that those cops mulling about were extras in police uniforms and the squad cars were property of the series!

But Mislán quickly became immersed in the eating and drinking scene of Charm City and Fells Point, in particular. He fell in love with the community and became a business owner. He is especially proud of his affiliation with Atlas. “The Admiral’s Cup was the first property acquired by the group with the concept not starting with them,” he noted. “The relationship has been fantastic. Besides all of the infrastructure – the marketing, the accounting – the people have been really supportive. We’ve developed a very diverse and inclusive atmosphere at both the Admiral’s Cup and The Waterfront. And obviously there is an economy of scale that is certainly advantageous in these times.”

So what’s the secret of Mislán’s success? He was quick to answer: “My work life and my social life blend. I actually feel like I’m out having fun while I’m working. I work all of the time, and I love it! If you’re going to do this, you have to be here. You have to be present. You have to commit to the grind of the restaurant and bar business. It’s not glamorous all of the time. In fact, the glamorous times are few and far between. But you have to love it, and I do.” ■



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