

Cabin Club
Steakhouse

Cabin Fever

There's probably a few bikers around who would be surprised to find that the bar where they downed drinks and deep-fried fish more than a decade ago in the wilds of Westlake has become a paragon of upscale dining. But, taking in the present landscape of parking lots, ritzy shopping centers and new housing developments that have replaced the last vestiges of rural life, most would agree that converting what was Kelly's Ranch Tavern into the Cabin Club Steakhouse was more sure shot than crapshoot.

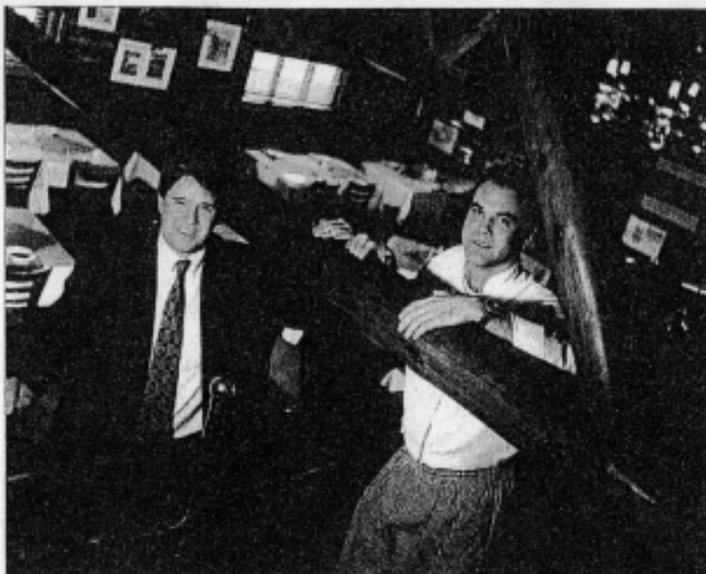
Kay Ameen recognized the area's boom potential as he golfed with good friend George Schindler at nearby Lakewood and Avon Oaks country clubs in 1990. The two joined up with Mike McDaniels and David Hale to purchase

medium rare in a cast-iron skillet, then topped with chunky Roquefort butter (\$22.95). It's been joined by other house specialties such as steak Christopher, twin medallions of filet mignon finished with a clever arrangement of sautéed jumbo shrimp and asparagus spears and topped with béarnaise sauce (\$21.95).

Schindler calls the Cabin Club strip steak the restaurant's "calling card." Trimmed of all fat except for what naturally marbles the meat, it's broiled at 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit, which seals in beef's juices. (The strip steak comes in three cuts: standard, \$19.95; owner's, \$24.95; and double, \$29.95.)

All entrees include salad and starch. For those not in the mood for red meat, the menu offers a number of seafood and chicken options, including citrus pepper-corn salmon (\$19.95).

The wine list, which might better be



Forty-two years' worth of grease and old paint had to be stripped from the interior logs of a former biker bar to transform it into the Cabin Club Steakhouse in 1990. Today, general manager David Kaminski (left) and kitchen manager Danny Ezell keep the restaurant — which will get a minor face-lift this spring — running smoothly.

the run-down — and by that time abandoned — log-cabinlike structure and turn it into a restaurant.

"We intentionally left the outside in the condition it was in, because we wanted it to look like just a hole in wall,"

called the wine book, offers numerous bottle and glass selections. Paging through, it's obvious why the tome received *Wine Spectator* magazine's Award of Excellence in 1995 and 1996.

Desserts don't disappoint, either. Chocolate mousse arrives in a sundae glass layered between whipped cream and crushed Oreo cookies (\$3.95), while a generous portion of pumpkin ice cream is served piled high with whipped cream (\$3.25).

For years, the partners have wrestled with the idea of expanding their restaurant, which seats a modest 52 (not including the bar). They've since opened two larger eateries, Salmon Dave's in Rocky River and Blue Point Grille in the Warehouse District downtown. But their success with the Cabin Club as it is (this year it will do more than \$2 million in business, Schindler reports) has made them

explains Schindler, now operating partner. "We spent the dollars on the inside instead."

From the start, menu plans centered around steak. "Our whole strategy from day one was to offer the same kind of fare that you get at the big-dollar downtown steakhouses, but at a more reasonable price and in a much more casual setting," Schindler says.

Raspberry barbecued shrimp, one of the restaurant's first appetizers, still appears on the menu, served chargrilled on a skewer with bacon and water chestnuts (\$8.50). It now shares space with spicy, succulent blackened scallops (\$7.95) and ten-

der mushroom caps stuffed with Maryland blue crabmeat and topped with a delicate Hollandaise sauce (\$8.95).

Another menu original and perennial favorite is the blackened bleu ribeye, a ribeye rolled in Cajun spices, seared

loath to alter a thing.

"We want to keep the charm of the place," Schindler says, "so we're planning to go through a remodeling in the spring. We'll just shut down for a week and retool and start over." Loyal customers, he assures, won't even notice the subtle changes.

"We decided that since all this new development has come along, that maybe it's time to gussy [the restaurant] up a little, make it fit into the landscape and into the modern look of the buildings around us."

— SARAH K. RIEHL

Cabin Club Steakhouse, 30651 Detroit Road, Westlake, (440) 899-7111. Hours: Mon-Thu 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m., Fri-Sat 11 a.m.-11:30 p.m., Sun 4-10:30 p.m.